

11/2003

NISHAAN

NAGARA

**The Nanakshahi
Samvat**

**In Honour of
The Turban**

**The Sikh Pioneers
of California**

**Towards Corporate Maturity
of The Sikh People**

I will learn Punjabi

ੴ ਅੰਕੁੜੁ ਸ੍ਰੀ ਗੁਰੂ
ਕਾਖੀ ਗੁਰੂ
ਚੜ੍ਹਦੀ ਜੀ ਚੜ੍ਹਦੀ
ਨਾਨਕ



Cover: In competition at a turban-tying contest in New Delhi is young Angad Singh.

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The Reach of NISHAAN

With this issue, the *Nishaan*, a premier journal of the Sikhs, is well into the fourth-year of *sewa* and unfailing march from readership strength to strength. Widely read in India and abroad, particularly in Britain, the U.S.A. and Canada where the Sikh diaspora has made its mark, the *Nishaan* has established its identity and credentials. As we go through the last many volumes, we find that virtually no aspect of Sikh life, history, religion, culture, military valour, art and other related issues has remained untouched. In its spread and reach, the *Nishaan*, produced in an elegant format and richly illustrated, has set high standards, making a sectarian journal cosmopolitan enough to attract international readership. And with its three bound volumes of multiple issues each, the *Nishaan* productions have become collector's items. It may be no exaggeration to say that the Journal has become, in its own way, a miniature encyclopaedia of Sikhism. Considering, therefore, the period of its existence, this is no small achievement.

It was, again, an act of faith that *The Nagaara Trust*, in launching this ambitious project, found quite the appropriate name for the Journal. The *Nishaan*, as we know is a multiple symbol in our scriptures, and the *Nishaan Sahib* flag is an emblem of Sikh identity. Thus, the concept was concretised, the letter given flesh, so to speak. To that extent, the Journal has, to our mind, vindicated itself. The ideals embodied in the scriptures and in the Saffron flag have thus been duly kept in sight. The selection of articles, as we take an overview of the contents in successive issues, is governed by a well-pondered policy, which brings me to an early editorial and so to the *raison d'être* of the Journal. Also, it spells out in some detail the projected agenda and

journey, the issues that confront the Khalsa Commonwealth in the 21st Century. In effect, it may be asserted that we have maintained the truth of our promise.

In that *primal* editorial, an attempt was made to isolate the nuclear issues and with that end in view, the *Nishaan* has continued to be radical and modernist in its outlook, without, in any manner jettisoning or compromising the basic tenets of Sikhism. The response from our readers has, thus, been very encouraging. We have succeeded in commissioning articles from eminent Sikh and non-Sikh scholars and these pieces have permitted us to maintain our standards. As I put it then, "we would ideally like the *Nishaan* to become a forum for fruitful discussion on almost all the issues we have inherited from history and all the issues that the assault of reality presents today. And this is only possible when we allow what the Russian linguistic thinker, M.M. Bakhtin, calls the "dialogical imagination" to colour our discourse. That is to say, opinions and views and thoughts of everchanging hues would find hospitality in these pages.

To our way of thinking, then, the basic religious-humanistic concerns of all mankind should eventually converge in the mandate and message of the *Nishaan*.

It is not possible within the space available here to give the reader anything like a comprehensive picture of the articles that carried a wealth of thought and argument on the problematics of Sikhism. Still, a few major themes are being isolated to confirm the promise of our being.

Our primary concern has been to deal with the major aspects of *gurbani* as enshrined in our scriptures.

For all else – our tenets and edicts, our ethics and metaphysics, our theological beliefs and debates stem from that primal source. Our scriptures, the *Adi Granth* and the Tenth Guru's *bani*, feed our sensibilities, keep us on course, show us the path to be followed and, in sum, define the Sikh existence and identity. Accordingly, some of the most insightful Sikh scholars of our times figure in our quarterly. These include, among others, Bhai Kahn Singh of Nabha, Bhai Sahib Ardaman Singh of Bagrian, Bhai Vir Singh, Professor Puran Singh, Kapur Singh, Dr. Jaswant Singh Neki, Dr. Kartar Singh Duggal, Dr. Dharam Singh, Dr. Sher Singh, Dr. Kharak Singh, Professor Harbans Singh, Dr. Harnam Singh Shan.

As the ten Sikh Gurus have, since the inception of Sikhism over 500 years ago, continued to inspire the community with their exemplary lives of purity and sacrifice, several well-researched articles on their supreme vision, values and humanist concerns have appeared in the *Nishaan*, adding fresh insights to our knowledge in the light of modern theories of theology. Some recent biographies have corrected some conventional beliefs, and the achievements of the Gurus have been thus seen in the light of changed perspectives. In other words, some of these scholars have moved away from hagiography, and applied modern criteria of historiography. And such articles have helped form a more scientific basis of cognition. Our last issue (*Nishaan* I/2003) carried a comprehensive report on a workshop and conference at the Hofstra University, New York held on 13-14 September 2002: the subject was "Sikhism and Critical Theory", which very appropriately involved some of the leading Sikh and foreign scholars of repute. As reported, it was emphasised that the modern Sikh scholarship had to be updated and trained in the new theories of critical thought. "There is" it was suggested, "growing recognition that discourse on the Sikh experience should be made more mainstream, creating greater dialogue with the community, rather than staying within the margins of academia." The idea, then, is to study Sikh scriptures, Sikh world view, Sikh way of life in the context of linguistics, of interdisciplinary dialogues etc.

On Sikh art and related issues, India's leading art critics Dr Mulk Raj Anand and Dr B.N. Goswamy shed light on its sources and style. And since Sikh life is not complete without a view of the historic gurdwaras, we have carried several illustrated articles in this connection.

The *Nishaan*, holding its promise, has thus published authoritative articles by eminent Sikh and non-Sikh scholars on a spectra of things that constitute our religious heritage and culture - from Sikh musicology as worked out in the scriptures, Sikh art and literature, historic gurdwaras and the five *Takhts*. And no narrative would be complete without a detailed account of the Sikh warriors and the saga of their achievements both in war and peace. Thus illustrated and exhaustive articles on some eminent Sikh commanders of the Indian Army, Air Force and Navy adorn our pages. Similarly, the conquest of Mount Everest by a Sikh naval officer and his team, and a planting of the Sikh flag on those supreme heights, the exploits of a Sikh lady doctor who, as a member of an Indian Expedition to the Antarctica, do us proud. And today, in that wilderness of ice and icebergs, the *Nishaan Sahib* flutters in those remote parts of the finistera. All these stories illustrate the energies of the Sikh spirit in labour and worship.

Of course, we haven't forgotten to commission articles on Sikh polity and Akali factional infighting and the resultant loss of power and image. Sadly, the Akali governments have, time and again, betrayed the mandate and the trust reposed in them. Stories of corruption and venality in high places have tarnished the name of the community grievously and we see, as yet, no signs of recovery, repentance or regeneration. The continuing Akali feuds remain tormentingly there to roil the Sikh corporate consciousness.

That, in sum, is the story of the *Nishaan's* passage during the last 4 years and today, it can well claim to be the premier Sikh Journal whose credentials are well established in India and the world over. ❀

NANAKSHAHI SAMVAT

The Distinctive Era

Adoption of the revised Nanakshahi Calendar by the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbhandak Committee (SGPC) is indeed a historic decision. It marks the end of a bitter controversy that at one time threatened to divide the Sikh community permanently. Although purely a technical issue, efforts were made to give it a communal twist during the decade long debate by those with whom fishing in troubled waters is a favourite sport. However, wiser councils have prevailed and the Sikh community has welcomed this decision. Even those who were vehemently opposed to the reforms, have accepted it with a remarkable spirit of reconciliation.

Sikhs have passed through an era of accumulating controversies. One could hope that the decision on the Calendar is the beginning of a new era of problem-solving in which the SGPC can, with tact and dedication and taking the entire community into confidence, continue to perform its role as mini parliament of the Sikhs.

The Nanakshahi Calendar is purely an internal religious matter of the Sikhs. Sikhs want to celebrate their *gurburbs* on the actual dates determined by accredited historians and not on widely shifting dates devised to please the moon god. Sikhs also respect the sacred relationship between months and seasons sanctified by the Gurus in their hymns. No reasonable person could object to this. No other community is affected. Its criticism and reference to the imaginary Hindu-Sikh divide is no more than political jargon. In fact it is an occasion for the protagonists of Bikrami Samvat to think of introducing the long overdue reforms in the Samvat itself.

About Calendars

Calendars are indispensable for measuring time and recording of history and practically all of them were introduced to perpetuate the memory of some important event. For example, the Christian world replaced the earlier Julian Calendar with the Christian Calendar to mark the birth of Jesus Christ. The *Bikrami* and *Saka Samvat* originated in India, somewhat earlier. Muslims adopted the *Higari*

Calendar from the year that Prophet Mohammed had to quit the holy city of Mecca. Similarly, the two Sikh Calendars, viz., the *Nanakshahi Samvat* and the *Khalsa Samvat* began with the birth of Guru Nanak Dev and the creation of the Khalsa, respectively. The oldest Calendar, however, is the Hebrew Calendar, which, according to tradition, was supposed to have started with the Creation at a moment 3,760 years and 3 months before the beginning of the Christian era.

The Calendars currently in vogue fall under three categories—solar, lunar and sidereal. While the ones followed in the West, mostly by Christians, are solar, the Muslim Calendar is lunar. The Indian Calendars are luni-solar or sidereal. Since the sun, the moon and the heavenly bodies follow their own cycles independent of one another, the length of the year varies in each case. The solar year measures 365 days, 5 hours, 48 minutes and 46 seconds. The lunar year, as in *Higari* Calendar, is shorter than the solar year by about 11 days, so that in a cycle of 33 solar years, the former yields an additional year. In a lunar year, the position of months relative to seasons, constantly changes. As a result, the holy month of *Ramzan*, during which Muslims observe fast, may fall at the height of hot summer or in the middle of severe cold winter. The *Bikrami Samvat* is sidereal and slightly longer than a solar year by a few minutes. It is obvious that any Calendar, which deviates from the exact length of the solar cycle, will alter its relationship with seasons over a period of time.

The earlier Christian Calendar which was expressed as AD (*Anno Domini* or the 'year of the Lord') and BC (Before Christ) did not follow the solar year accurately. As a result, an error of 10 days had accumulated by 1582 AD. This was corrected by a decree of Pope Gregory XIII, so that 5th October was declared as 15th October, to bring it in line with solar year, in all the Roman Catholic countries. Great Britain and USA, introduced the correction as late as 1752, by which time the error had gained another day. So, they skipped 11 days. Since then all the western countries and practically

the entire world community with the exception of the Muslim countries and India, have adopted this system, which is now called the Common Era (CE). In India and the Muslim world too, it is used side by side with the indigenous - Calendars. In this system, the deviation from the solar year can be no more than one day in 3,300 years and provision has been made for this correction.

Nanakshahi Samvat

The advent of a prophet marks the beginning of a new and distinctive era in the history of human civilisation. So it did with Guru Nanak with whose arrival, in the words of Bhai Gurdas, the "mist vanished and the world was illumined, just as with the rising of the Sun, the stars hide and darkness disappears." A *samvat* was introduced in his name which exactly followed the *Bikrami* samvat (BK) in vogue at that time, except that in counting, the years started from the year in which the Guru was born. It, therefore, inherited all its weaknesses, some of which are:

- ❖ It is a sidereal year and completes its cycle in 365 days 6 hrs, 9 minutes and 9.8 seconds, which is longer than the solar or tropical year by about 20 minutes and 24.5 seconds. As a result its months are getting out of step with seasons which are caused by the position of the Sun relative to the earth. As a result *Baisakhi*, and for that matter, all *Sankrants* are sliding at the rate of one day in 70.56 years. The *Baisakhi* which fall on 27th March in 1469, the year of Guru Nanak's birth and on 29th March in 1699, the year of the creation of the Khalsa, has now shifted to 14th April in 2003. This slide, unless corrected, will continue so that *Baisakhi* will pass into May in the next millennium, and October after 13 millennia, leaving no relationship between months and seasons as described in *Gurbani*. This is certainly not a happy prospect for Sikhs.
- ❖ *Gurpurbs* are linked with lunar *tithis*, leading to wide variations and are never celebrated on actual dates. As a result, it is difficult to notify Sikh holidays in time in countries abroad. In this system, it has been observed that Guru Gobind Singh's birthday in some years comes twice in a CE Calendar year and not at all in others. In 1999, when Sikhs celebrated the tercentenary of the Khalsa, this *gurpurb* did not figure on the calendar.

It was these two major shortcomings that prompted the move for reforms.

The Nanakshahi Calendar Remembering Akal Purakh

"Sikhism is a complete and distinct religion, like all other original and revealed religions of the world", reaffirms Dr. Harnam Singh 'Shaan'.

It is *Ahl-al Maqam*, having its own spiritual and political capital, Amritsar. It is *Ahl-al-Kitab* possessing its own holy book, Guru Granth Sahib. It is *Ah-al-Milla* being a true religion revealed by Guru Nanak and having its own fellowship of faith—*Sangat* and *Panth*. It is *Ahl-i-Kalam* having firm faith in the doctrine of the *Shabad*, (word) *Shabad Guru*. It is *Ahl-al-Zahan* having its own language and script (*Punjabi Gurmukhi*). It is *Ahl-al-Nishaan* having its own banner, the *Kesari Nishaan* with a *Khanda*. It is *Ahl-al-Shahad*, cherishing a long and unique line of great martyrdoms; and it is *Ahl-al-Shamshir* possessing the *kirpan* as an inseparable symbol of power, sovereignty and dynamism.

The Gurus, through the *Gurbani* and other edicts had denounced and decried the practices of 'sacred days', 'Masya', 'Puranmashi', Dasami, 'Tehrwan' etc. But the overpowering historical forces of the 18th and 19th centuries had brought back these prohibited practices in the Sikh community which, out of sheer courtesy and social tolerance and Guru-given magnanimity, allowed these practices to continue. Now that this tolerance and indifference is being exploited and every argument is being used to deny the Sikhs their distinct entity, it has become imperative to define the Sikh social practices and observances more clearly. In light of the above it is a significant and laudable step that a definitive and independent calendar has been given to the *Panth*, and ought to be welcomed. No doubt some days and dates which are inimical to the Sikh way of life are yet not purged. But given the hostile socio-political environment through which the *Panth* is passing, the Nanakshahi calendar is perhaps the best possible beginning point. It is hoped that Sikhs would liberate themselves and no special sanctity will be give to the *sankrants* and *masyas* and *puranmashis*, and these days will be observed as any other normal day which the Sikhs spend remembering Akal Purakh and receiving his Grace (*Mehar*).

The main features of the Nanakshahi Calendar

- a) Nanakshahi Calendar follows a solar tropical year which is equal to 365.2422 days.
- b) It begins on the 1st of Chet and ends with Phagun following the sequence adopted by Guru Nanak and Guru Arjun Dev in their *Baramaha* hymns.
- c) Distribution of days over the months has been simplified, so that the first five months (*Chet* to *Sawan*) have 31 days each and the last seven (*Bhadon* to *Phagun*) 30 days each, except in a leap year, when *Phagun* is also of 31 days. Thus *Baisakhi* will always fall on the 14th April in the CE Calendar which also follows tropical year of the same length. Likewise, the dates of *Sankrants* of other months will also be on fixed dates and will not change from year to year.
- d) Actual original dates of *gurpurbs* have been determined by historians and now *gurpurbs* will be celebrated on fixed dates, regardless of lunar *tithes*.
- e) The day in Nanakshahi Calendar starts at midnight unlike the *Bikrami Samvat*, in which it begins at sunrise.
- f) Calculations for sunrise, etc., have been made with Sri Amritsar as the centre based on its longitude and latitude.
- g) Guru Nanak's birthday has traditionally been celebrated on *Katik puranmashi*, although there is ample evidence that the Guru was born in Baisakh. Respecting the popular sentiment an exception has been made in this case, so that this will continue to be celebrated as before, until the Panth is ready to reverse the decision. *Hola Mahalla* and *Band-i-Chhod divas* are the other two exceptions.

The Concerted Struggle

A concerted struggle had to be launched to introduce this vital reform. It was a Canada-based Sikh, Prof. Pal Singh Purewal, who studied the problem and brought it to the notice of the *Panth*. However, it was the Institute of Sikh Studies at Chandigarh, that took up cause and spearheaded the move. The author of this note, as Secretary of the Institute called a large public meeting on the 14th November 1995 in Chandigarh, which was attended by representatives of all major organisations of the *Panth* including the SGPC, the DSGMC, Chief Khalsa Diwan, Damdami Taksal, Kendri Singh Sabha, Universities, Khalsa Colleges, Gurdwara Committees, etc. in which the inherent weakness in the Nanakshahi Calendar and the proposed

reforms were explained. The meetings unanimously decided to introduce the reforms and then appointed a committee of historians and scholars, with the author of this note as Convenor, to examine all available data to determine correct dates of the *gurpurbs*. This committee submitted a unanimous report which is reflected in the Calendar adopted.

As is to be expected in any progressive reform, the move did not have smooth sailing. A number of steps had to be taken to educate the masses until on the 18th March 1998 the General House of the SGPC adopted the calendar, and announced that it would be implemented in 1999, the Khalsa Tercentenary year. About two lakh copies of the calendar were printed and distributed.

That was, however, not the end of the story. Opposition from the Sant Samaj mounted. The then Jathedar of Sri Akal Takht, Singh Sahib Giani Puran Singh, also did not approve of the reform and stayed its implementation. Those who showed keenness to adopt the Calendar, including Bibi Jagir Kaur, the then SGPC President, had to face his wrath, and the Nanakshahi Calendar was put in cold storage for nearly four years. Those, however, who had understood the merit of the Calendar reform, did not relent, and persevered. Pressure from Sikh diaspora continued to grow. The present Jathedar of Sri Akal Takht again took up the matter and appointed a committee to examine the draft. This led to the courageous decision to introduce the new Calendar with effect from Baisakhi 2003.

The SGPC endorsed the decision on 29th March 2003.

While we rejoice over the victory, it is *inter alia* fair to remember the following facts:

- ❖ It was Sardar Pal Singh Purewal who highlighted the need for the new Nanakshahi calendar, and provided the technical input to finalise it.
- ❖ It was the Institute of Sikh Studies, Chandigarh, who spearheaded the campaign for its introduction.
- ❖ It was Sardar Gurcharan Singh Tohra who piloted the draft and got it approved in the General House of the SGPC.
- ❖ It was the pressure from Sikhs abroad that helped significantly.
- ❖ It was the bold decision of the Singh Sahib Giani Joginder Singh Vedanti that clinched the issue and Prof. Kirpal Singh Badungar who eventually effected its implementation. ❀

Dr. Kharak Singh

The Nanakshahi Calendar

of Historical and Religious Importance

Lunar calendars have a month of 29 or 30 days and a year of 354 days. Solar calendars have a month of 30 or 31 days and a year of 365 days. The difference of 11 days is made up by the lunar calendar after every three years by adding an additional month of 30 days to the prevailing lunar calendar. Removing this anomaly presents the piquant situation practically. For example, Guru Gobind Singhji's Prakash Gurburab sometimes occurs twice in one solar year and sometimes not even once in a solar year.

The Bikarmi solar year is longer by 20 minutes compared to tropical solar year (also called year of the seasons. A tropical year is the length of time that the earth takes to make one revolution around the sun between successive spring equinoxes) because it does not take into account the precession. This difference results in an increase of one day after 70-71 years. In Bikarmi samat 57th Baisakhi was on March 13-14 and in Samat 2056 (common ear 1999), Baisakhi on April 14. If no correction is applied to the calendar after 1,100 years Baisakhi will be in May and after 13,000 years in October!

Since the Bikrami and Nanakshahi calendars were synonymous, it was necessary to separate the Nanakshahi calendar to standardise it and fix dates of Sikh historical and religious importance. The Sikh diaspora spread all over the world felt the need to discard the lunar calendar dates and accept the solar calendar dates.

The Nanakshahi calendar amended under the patronage of Sri Akal Takht Sahib is based on scientific facts and is in accordance with Gurbani.

The fear of various sects that "Masya" and "Punya" dates have been changed is baseless. There have been allegations that the Nanakshahi calendar is a copy of the Christian calendar. This is again not correct. The commonly used calendar called the common era CE is based on a tropical year. Since the Nanakshahi calendar also has the same base, the date of two calendars with respect to each other are fixed. However, the Nanakshahi calendar is even nearer to nature. The common era calendar has arbitrary days of the month 30 or 31 alternatively, but the Nanakshahi calendar has 31 days in long summer months from the spring equinox to the autumn equinox and 30 days for the winter months. At equinox the length of the day and the night is equal all over the world. The sunrise and the sunset are calculated according to the longitude and latitude of Amritsar. The fraction of time, nearly 6 hours, left out of calculations in a tropical year is adjusted every fourth year by adding a leap day. In the Nanakshahi calendar this correction will be applied in the month of "Phagan", which will have 31 days in a leap year.

A suggestion had been made that the corrected Nanakshahi calendar should be implemented retrospectively from the beginning of the Nanakshahi Samvat. But according to the calendar rules, an amendment is made from the date of implementation, otherwise it creates unnecessary complications. For example in 1699, the year of the creation of Khalsa, Baisakhi was on March 29. Now Baisakhi is on April 14. In the year 1582 Pope Gregory applied a correction of 10 days to the prevalent Julian calendar. The announcement was made on September 3 and the next day the date was September 13, not September 4. Much later this correction was applied to the Bikrami solar calendar, but not retrospectively.

The present Nanakshahi calendar is not perfect, but the best possible, produced after marathon meetings of historians, scholars, intellectuals and religious leaders.

Towards Corporate Maturity of The Sikh People:

Thoughts on contemporary Gurdwara Management Politics

Some recent events have unfolded the rot brought about by sordid politics that has entered into our gurdwaras. The high drama enacted on the eve of recent SGPC elections has raised some serious questions. The Congress government of Punjab ordered the arrest of some SGPC members for alleged criminal offences. That must have made every sensitive Sikh think, "If these members are really criminal, what must really be happening in the management affairs of our gurdwaras? And if they are not so, then a avowedly 'secular' government has willfully and surreptitiously interfered with the religious affairs of our community." Those who are knowledgeable vouch to the veracity of both these presumptions. One is forced to ask, "Firstly, what is the safeguard against such governmental interference in our religious affairs? Secondly, what can be done to prevent criminal elements from getting into management committees of our holy shrines?"

Over the last few years, the appointment and dismissal of the incumbents of the high office of the Jathedar of Akal Takhat has provided evidence of how the shameful factional politics of our avowedly 'religious' Akali Dal has itself tarnished the dignity of our holy institutions.

More recently, the violence that erupted in the sacred precincts of Harmandir Sahib over allowing ladies to perform *kirtan* and *sewa* in that shrine has made the community the laughing stock of the entire world. The Jathedar of Takht Sri Keshgarh Sahib being dismissed, in reality over this issue (though avowedly for offences for which he had never been formally charged, and never been allowed to state his defence) has been seen as yet another dismal act.

As a result of prolonged intense struggle studded with martyrdom by hundreds of devotees, the Gurdwara Reform Movement of the 1920s culminated in the enactment of the Sikh Gurdwaras Act 1925. Under this Act, a Board, Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee, was constituted to place into the hands of the Sikh community management of the historical shrines located in the Province of Punjab. As envisaged in the Act, this Committee was to be elected exclusively by the Sikh electorate and the *mahants* who had made the gurdwaras their heritable property, were ejected from those shrines. The entire Panth lauded it a great victory.

Even Mahatma Gandhi was tempted to appropriate its fruit by declaring that "the first battle for India's freedom had been won" even though that Movement had nothing to do with Gandhi's political struggle.

Very often, it is not possible to foresee the long-term effects of an event. What, at that time, appeared to be a salutary achievement, over three quarters of a century since, has proven to be a real curse for the community. However, even then, when the Act was passed, there were some sensible people who could foresee what was going to happen in the future and had serious misgivings about the so-much celebrated outcome of the movement. Principal Niranjan Singh of the Sikh National College, Lahore (and younger brother of Master Tara Singh who was one of the top leaders of that Movement) warned the community by saying, "You have, no doubt, been able to rid your Gurdwaras of these corrupt *mahants*, but the ones whom you now shall install, you shall not find easy to dislodge". At that time, it was considered a blasphemous statement. Today it seems more than true.

Another implication of this Act had been envisaged by the Secretary of the Government of Punjab who was responsible for drafting the bill. He is reported to have told the British Governor of the Punjab, "This Act shall ensure that the Sikhs give no more trouble to your government. As a consequences of this Act, they shall only be fighting among themselves." How true these predictions have proved to be!

On the model of the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee (SGPC), a similar Committee came to be established for the Gurdwaras of Delhi (DGPC). Both the SGPC and DGPC have, by now, come to be committees of mismanagement rather than of management of gurdwaras. Corruption, nepotism, and even more serious crimes have gnawed into their very fabric. The situation calls for heeding the Guru's warning

Tharshit jag bharisht hoe doobta iv jag (SGGS. 662)

ਥਰਸ਼ਿਟ ਜਗ ਬਹਿਸ਼ਿਟ ਹੋਏ ਦੂਬਤਾ ਇਵ ਜਗ । (ਧਨਮੀ ਮ:੧)

When the holy places are desecrated, the world simply sinks.

It is time for the Sikh people to review how the above-named Committees have brought rot into our holy shrines and look for remedial measures. Unfortunately, instead of

taking this approach, those who have learnt to get elected to these bodies, and also perfected their modes of drawing personal benefits from them, have now shown eagerness to bring together the gurdwaras of entire India under a unitary Act, namely, the All-India Gurdwaras Act. A draft of such a bill has already been prepared and political pressures are afoot to see that it gets enacted.

Now is the time, therefore, to review how such rot has come to engulf our Gurdwara Committees and propose suitable remedial measures not only to stem this rot but also to ensure clean management of our holy places for the future.

Misunderstanding the Miri-Piri Doctrine

The doctrine of *miri-piri* has been misunderstood by many scholars who hold that in Sikhism, *miri* (material power) and *piri* (spiritual power) go together, but do not specify the gradient of their mutual relationship nor even their hierarchical position. That the *Harmandir Sahib* came to be established much before *Akal Takht Sahib* clearly indicates that *piri* not only has precedence over *miri*, the direction of control shall always flow from *piri* to *miri*. That even the *Akal Takht Sahib*, and in fact all the five Takhts, are presided over by Guru Granth Sahib signifies clearly that *miri* must always submit itself to the commandments of *piri*. What has come to happen, however, is that *miri* has started not only exploiting *piri*, but also disgracing it. One only has to be reminded of how our reckless politicians have contrived not only to capture the Gurdwara Management Committees, but also thereby, to appoint the highest religious dignitaries to their high office only on political considerations, and even to dismiss some of them without transparent justification and in a most unbecoming way. On the other hand corrupt politicians have sought, for the same reason, to protect some really culpable offenders in order to reward them for their loyalty to them. This is the one major way how rot has set in the gurdwara affairs.

Electoral system as a bugbear

The Gurdwara Committees have come into being through the so called democratic electoral system. Such a system, even in politics, has been a failure — by virtue of which, a scrupulously honest person like Dr. Manmohan Singh could lose in the elections, while one like Phoolan Devi, a life-long dacoit, could be returned elected. Through the elections of this type, only such people can get elected who want to be (not deserve to be) elected, and who have the support of the majority of voters. It has been clearly seen that spirituality endowed people shun elections. By and large, it is the

politically ambitious individuals who choose to contest these elections. Secondly, spiritually endowed persons are rare in any community. Individuals who only nominally belong to the religious community, but hardly or scantily observe the tenets of their faith constitute the majority. Hence, only nominally religious persons contest elections and can get elected. As a consequence, they have failed to preserve the sanctity of our gurdwaras and only brought degeneration therein.

Further, it is political parties that have come to enter the arena of 'elections' of our gurdwaras. That is why all the vices of our political system — corruption, nepotism and many other forms of criminality — have come to beset our gurdwara affairs. Our gurdwaras have become dens of despicable factional politics. No wonder, they have ceased to inspire people. Again, the kind of role model that has been presented by most of the elected members of the Gurdwara Committees has, by and large, created a sense of disgust among the devotees.

It is now being increasingly felt that elections for offices in Gurdwara management have eaten into the community's spiritual life. If people use Gurdwara elections as stepping-stone for political elections, or those responsible for corruption in politics happen to meddle in Gurdwara elections, corruption is likely to seep into affairs of Gurdwara management too. Such a trend has already become visible. As a result thereof, our Gurdwaras have ceased to inspire the real seekers and devotees.

The method of 'election by majority vote' has never been a part of our tradition. It has never been practiced during the times of our Gurus. Had elections been in vogue, Sri Lehna ji would never have succeeded Guru Nanak to become Guru Angad. Nobody would have even proposed the name of Guru Tegh Bahadur. According to our tradition the spiritually elite were chosen to lead our religious community. The *Panj Piare*, the Guru's 'Beloved Five' were not elected, but selected after they had passed the severest test of self-sacrifice.

In no other known religious community are religious leaders or managers chosen by election: Members of the SGPC, strictly speaking, are not religious leaders, but are looked upon as such, being members of the 'highest religious body of the Sikhs'. The presence of political vices in them has, unfortunately, led to welling up of disgust in the faith and form itself. The consequences have become alarmingly visible in the rash of cropped beards of our youth, as also of the tremendous mushrooming of pseudo-spiritual 'Babas'.

As a result apprehensions have been expressed from many sensitive quarters about the serviceability of the Gurdwara Act, and the institution of elections as provided by it. Why must the community depend on the Government

to enable it to choose its Gurdwara Committees? Is it not mature enough to devise its own independent system shorn of governmental supervision and political interference? It is time now for the community to prove that it can manage its own affairs relating to its places of worship independently, and amicably.

The disgust that has sprung up for the electoral process in the Gurdwaras is becoming increasingly vocal. It has been consciously and emphatically expressed more recently in many forums. As a result, anxiety among the vested interests is also mounting. However, the only solace they have so far is that no alternative process has yet been suggested by anyone that may replace elections and prove to be better workable. It has, therefore, become imperative for the Sikh community to propose some alternative method through which honest, capable and faithful managers of their Gurdwaras be chosen.

It has become necessary that someone should put forth some concrete proposal before the community in order to generate serious debate that may improve upon and finalise the proposal through comprehensive foresight of its thinkers. It is with this end in thought that the following proposal is humbly sought to be put forth.

A Proposed System to Replace Elections

Any attempt to replace elections ought to ensure that individuals of superior ethical and intellectual fibre and devoted commitment to the welfare of the Panth come to constitute the Gurdwara Committees. The method proposed should free the gurdwaras from the clutches of vulgar political ambition. A method to supervise and oversee the affairs of the Committee is incorporated in the proposed system. And, finally, there is provision for removing a member who acts contrary to Panthic interest.

Qualifications for members of the Gurdwara Committees

Since the religious affairs of a community need be managed by the spiritually elite and not by nominal adherents of a faith, the first requirement should be to lay down appropriate qualifications for members to be appointed to the Gurdwara management. These are proposed as follows:

Essential Qualifications

The nominee should be an Amritdhari, rehatwan, nitnemi Sikh over 25 years of age who commands respect in the community for uprightness and honesty and who has rendered some visible service towards the welfare of the Panth.

Preferential Qualifications:

- i. Formal education in the Sikh lore: qualified from a Sikh training centre or a university course in Sikh learning.
- ii. Secular education - at least Higher Secondary, but the higher the better.
- iii. Formal training in management and administrative skills.
- iv. Experience of service in the management of Gurdwaras.
- v. Experience in management/administration in secular affairs.

Nomination of members:

There shall be no formal constituencies for nomination of members. A suitable member residing anywhere may be nominated.

Nominations shall be invited by the Jathedar of Sri Akal Takht from the following:

- i. Head Granthis of Darbar Sahib Amritsar, Anandpur Sahib, Damdama Sahib (Talwandi Sabo), Patna Sahib, Hazur Sahib (Nander).
- ii. Principals of Sikh educational institutions.
- iii. Sikh judges, Vice Chancellors, and outstanding scholars.
- iv. Management Committees of scheduled historic Gurdwaras:

These gurdwaras shall be categorized according to number of visitors/ budget into five categories A, B, C, D, E in descending order. Nominations would be invited from them as per the following scheme:

- | | |
|---|---------------------|
| a) Type A Gurdwara | upto 5 nominations. |
| b) Type B Gurdwara | upto 4 nominations |
| c) Type C Gurdwara | upto 3 nominations |
| d) Type D Gurdwara | upto 2 nominations |
| e) Type E Gurdwara | only 1 nomination |
| v. All non-historic Gurdwaras: one nomination each. | |

All the nominations shall be made in the form of an affidavit by the proposer as well as the seconder.

Composite list of nominations shall be prepared at Sri Akal Takht by removing repetition of names. A screening committee consisting of Jathedars of Takhts - preferably all five, but not less than three - shall scrutinise the list for eligibility.

The scrutinised list shall be published for public information. Should anyone have any objection against any particular nominee, the reasons for it shall be submitted in the form of an affidavit.

Those on the final list of nominees shall be approached by the screening committee to serve on the SGPC or DGPC as the case may be. After receiving consent of the nominees, the consenting nominees shall constitute the respective GMC

provided they give an undertaking that they shall have no relationship with any political party.

It may be appreciated that the Committee shall not have a fixed number of members. This number shall vary according to how many suitable nominees are proposed and agree to serve on the Committee.

The Gurdwara Management Committee

The house constituted by the process outlined above shall constitute the lower house of the Gurdwara Management Committee. It shall carry out all the functions that the present SGPC/DGPC are carrying out. However, all its decisions shall be required to be ratified by the upper house.

This lower house shall prepare a list of 5-10 nominations for the office of the President. These nominees shall select, by consensus, the best deserving out of themselves for occupying this office.

The President shall nominate the team of requisite office bearers. His list shall have to be ratified by the Upper House.

The Upper House

The following shall constitute the Upper House:

1. Jathedar Akal Takht (Chairman)
2. Jathedars of four other Takhts.
3. Head Granthis of Harmandir Sahib, Amritsar, Anandpur Sahib, and Damdama Sahib (T. S.)
4. A representative each of the Sewapanthi, Nirmala and Namdhari Orders,
5. Four Amritdhari Sikh scholars of repute to be nominated by the foregoing members together.

Decisions at the Upper as well as the Lower house shall be arrived at by general consensus through the traditional procedure of *gurmatta*.

Jathedars of Takhts

Essential Qualifications:

- i. Teaching experience in a Gurmat teaching Institute - minimum three years.
- ii. Experience as Granthi/Ragi/Kathakar/Pracharak in a premier historic Gurdwara (category A or B) or a Prachar Mission - minimum 3 years.
- iii. Ability to expound Sri Guru Granth Sahib and Sri Dasam Granth Sahib.
- iv. Detailed knowledge of Sikh History and an intimate acquaintance with the current problems of the Panth.
- v. Some outstanding contribution made to Sikh affairs, literature and/or community welfare.

Preferential Qualifications

- i. Formal secular education graduate, preferably postgraduate in social/ behavioral sciences.
- ii. Service in the armed forces.
- iii. Knowledge of one or more of the following languages: Sanskrit, Braj Bhasha, Farsi, Sindhi.
- iv. Knowledge of other religious traditions
- v. Knowledge about the sects of Sikhism

Selection of Jathedars of Takhts

Names to be proposed and seconded in an affidavit form by any member of the GMC for any vacancy of a Jathedar of a Takht/ Takhts. A list of 'short-listed' ten GMC members shall scrutinise these names. The present Jathedars along with the 'short-listed' ten shall by consensus arrive at a consensus decision about the new incumbent(s).

The most senior one among the Jathedars of these Takhts in terms of period of seva shall be Jathedar of Sri Akal Takht Sahib. Should there be a tie in the duration of service, seniority in age shall be the next determining criterion.

Secretariat and funding

The two Houses - Upper and Lower - shall have independent secretariats and budgetary provisions. A special fund shall be created out of which the Jathedars of the Takhts shall be automatically entitled to draw their emoluments.

Dismissal/Impeachment

While a member of the Lower House offending the honour of the Panth or dignity of the house, may be removed from membership through prescribed procedure, the Jathedar of Takhts could only be impeached. Procedure for both these shall be prescribed.

Trial run for testing practicability

What has been proposed above is the barest outline of a workable alternative to the present disserviceable electoral system. This proposal has been made to dispel the erroneous belief of many that there is hardly a substitute for the present electoral system. There is still the possibility of some even better system being proposed. What is required at this juncture is to let such proposals come forth and then to evolve of them a final system worthy of promulgation. Till then, a trial run of that system, on a small scale, may be made to test its practicability. Should it succeed, then the Panth would set its efforts to get rid of the Gurdwara Management Acts. The culmination of this effort to manage their holy places on their own shall prove to be a great step towards corporate maturity of the Sikh people. ❀

Dr. Jaswant Singh Neki

Dr. Jaswant Singh Neki is a versatile man who has attained multifaceted achievements.

In the Professional Field, he is a psychiatrist of international repute. He was Professor and Chairman Department of Psychiatry at the All India Institute of Medical Sciences, New Delhi (1968-1978), and then Director of Postgraduate Institute of Medical Education and Research, Chandigarh (1978-1981). In between, he was visiting Professor at Monash University, Melbourne, Australia (1973).

After relinquishing charge at the PGI Chandigarh, he was invited by the World Health Headquarters at Geneva, to serve with them as a whole time Consultant, where he was for about five years (1981-1986). He also had a short stint as a Consultant with the United Nations Development Programme (1990).

He has been honoured by many national and international organisations. He was nominated as Hon. Secretary (1985-1986), and Vice President (1970-1971) of the World Federation of Mental Health. The World Psychiatric Association nominated him an Honorary Member. He is also Hon. Fellow of the Australian & New Zealand College of Psychiatrists and of the American Psychiatric Association. He was Foundation Fellow of the Royal College of Psychiatrists at London.

He was awarded the Senior Commonwealth Medical Fellowship (1969) and Leverhulme Trust Fellowship (1973). He is a Fellow of National Advanced Studies Institute, Bangalore, as also of the National Academy of Medical Sciences.

He received the Kohli Memorial Award for being the *Best Professional of the Year* (1989).

In the field of Literature, he is considered as one of the outstanding of modern Punjabi poets and men of letters. He received several awards for his contribution to literature, which include the Sahitya Akademi Award, Asan Memorial Award, Shiromani Sahitkar Award, Sarvotam Sahitkar Award, Bhai Vir Singh Award, and Kartar Singh Dhaliwal Award.

He has been a Member of the Jury (for Punjabi) for the Jnan Peeth Award, and a Member of the Advisory Committee (for Punjabi) of the Sahitya Akademi Award. During 1980-81, he was President of the Sahitya Akademi, Chandigarh.

Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar conferred on him the honorary degree of Ph.D for his outstanding contribution to Punjabi literature.

In the Field of Theology and Religion, he is considered an authentic theologian of the Sikh Faith. His work *Ardas*, the liturgical Sikh prayer, has been described as 'an all-time classic'. Another work of his, *Vihva Ardas* (the Universal Prayer) has been considered an outstanding landmark of comparative religion.

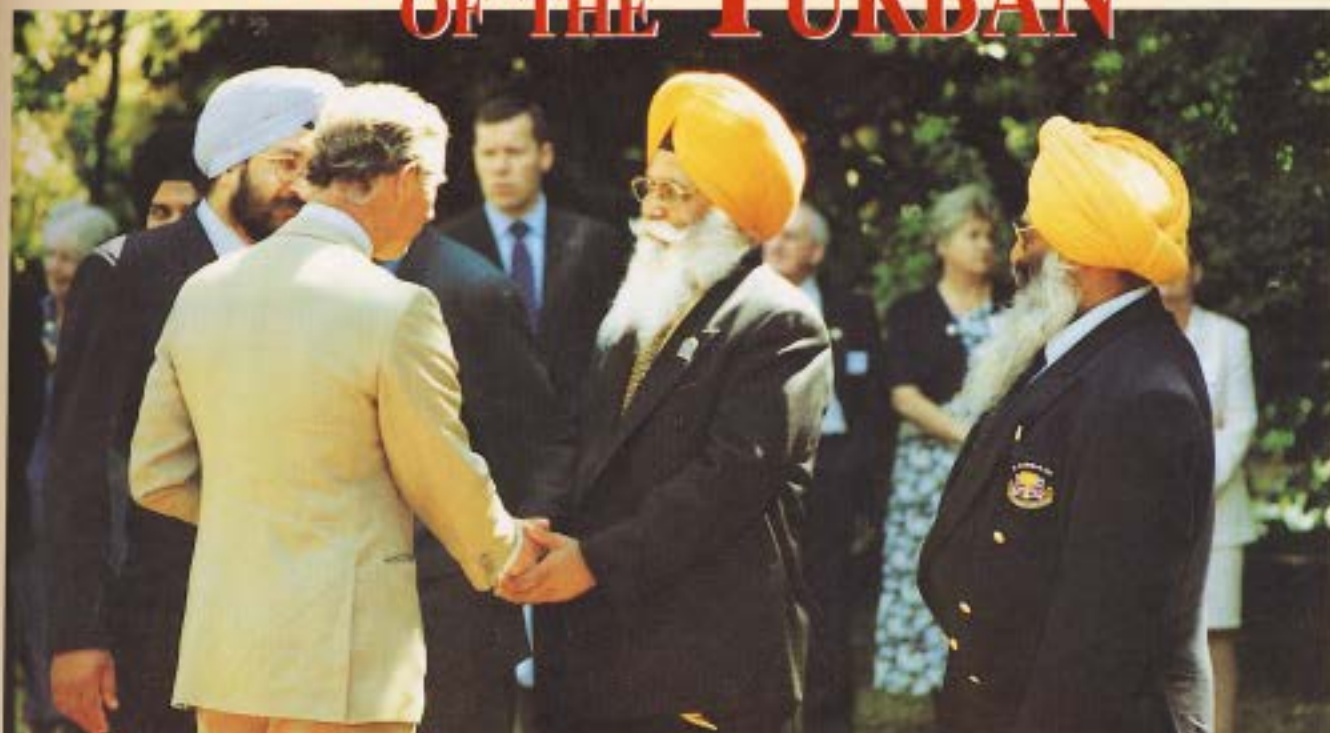
He has won significant international recognition as a theologian. He was officially invited to participate in the Parliament of World Religions at Chicago, 1993; the UNESCO Conference on Religion and World Peace, Grenada, 1998, World Thanksgiving Conference, Dallas, 1999, and UNESCO Catalunya Interfaith Dialogue on Mysticism, Barcelona 2001.

He has been a member of the *Dharam Prachar Committee* of the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee (1996-1999). The *Order of the Khalsa Award* was conferred on him during the Tercentenary Celebrations on the Baisakhi Day, 1999, at Anandpur Sahib. Robe of Honour has been conferred on him at the Sikh Educational Conferences in 1978, 1993, and 2002.

Dr. Jaswant Singh Neki has been biographed in the International WHO's WHO of intellectuals (International Biographical Centre, Cambridge), 20th Century Distinguished WHO's WHO (American Biographical Institute), WHO's WHO in Religion (Bruxelles), WHO's WHO in Indian Literature (Sahitya Akademi), he has been nominated for the Twentieth Century Award of Achievement (IBC, Cambridge) and Gold Record of Achievement (ABI).



IN HONOUR OF THE TURBAN



ITS PRISTINE VALUE IN SIKHISM

In this issue of the *Nisshaan*, devoted for a substantial part to vitality of the turban in Sikh life and society, different writers have sought to discuss its evolution in history as well as its **constitutive** character. For, whereas, it has been shown to be a symbol of power, of lineage, or dignity in other communities, its spiritual significance in Sikhism sets it apart, not only as a **nishaan** or mark of Sikh identity, but also as an organic, ineluctable preserver of the **Keshas**, a male Sikh's crown of glory. Take the turban away, and the glory is gone instantly, leaving behind a disheveled figure and a forsaken self. And if, therefore, some scholars have raised odes to the turban in the fullness of their faith, it only shows how the turban, otherwise a piece of 5-6 yards of muslin, becomes in the moment of its sartorial baptism, an expanding metaphor for the essences of Sikhism.

Thus, to defend its honour Sikhs have, as our historians tell us, made prodigious sacrifices. For instance, the saga of Baba Kharak Singh's trials and tribulations, of physical ordeals of suffering for over a period of 5 years in a state of incarceration during the British Raj stands out in its awesome grandeur to vindicate the turban's centrality in

Sikh life. Only a man of such mettle in whom fortitude has touched spiritual heights could have defended it, for in such men we find a steely resolve to preserve their dignity. They are direct descendants of that crown which the Tenth Sikh Guru placed on their heads and, thus, consecrated a piece of apparel. If, for example, a handsome Sikh, with a pleasing figure somehow doesn't care about tying his turban in a proper manner or, in other words, has a very casual attitude toward it, it would certainly diminish his personality. For, the wearing of the turban is connected with the **imago** which, in the Jungian sense, means an idealised image created in the eyes of the world.

In short, the **Sardar Sahib** image receives a body-blow and one loses that respect which he, as a member of the Sikh Commonwealth, has earned in the eyes of others if the turban doesn't become an integral part of his personality. A God-given, religious thing according to the celebrated Christian thinker, Nicholas Berdyaev, this would amount to a repudiation of his glorious heritage. The turban in Sikh view is something inviolate, something that will not suffer any abridgement or erosion. ☛

Darshan Singh Maini

Picture above: HRH Prince Charles, the Prince of Wales, meeting elders of the Sikh Community at Thetford in England.

The Turban As A Sikh Form And Symbol

The Sikhs are certainly the world's "most visible" community, easily recognisable by their bearded faces and headgear, the *dastar* or turban, which also serves them to provide deference against undesirable acts and behaviour and keeps them on the correct path. Living in India amongst the much vaster Hindu and Muslim populations, the Sikhs have generally acted as a distinctly neutral factor, to play the part of reconciling the other communities when they happen to fall out on religious and other matters. There have been several historic examples of these: during the 1946 communal riots in Bengal, when the entire atmosphere was poisoned with communal virus, the Sikhs of Calcutta played a vital part, helping and aiding the stricken of both sides and bringing about peace among the blood-crazed opponents. This was greatly appreciated not only by the then politicians of India, but also by international observers.

According to the Sikh philosophy of "a physically complete man", the human being must preserve all the hair on his head and face as an essential part of his nature. Just as the skull is protective of the brain, the hair, as an inseparable part of the skull, ensures the *elan vital* of a human being. The "Complete Man" is conceived in Sikh scriptures as "a man with hair and turban on his head": *sābat-sūrat dastar sirrā*: complete man with hair, beard and turban on his head'. The hymn of Guru Arjan in *Rag Maru, Sohile* (*Adi Guru Granth*, p. 1084), also gives the philosophy of the Sikh Gurus. The man who is conceived to be physically and spiritually the image of God, is conceived in Sikh theology as a complete man as created by God, with his hair intact.

The hair of the head is naturally connected with the comb and turban in the Sikh discipline. The comb as one of the *Ks* (*kangha*) signifies that the hair must be kept clean and healthy, like other parts of the body. Matted or dishevelled hair is not permitted, as this is a sign of lethargy, uncleanness, indifference to social responsibility and betrays a cynical attitude towards life. Going out bareheaded in the streets is akin to the Sikh being undressed. To keep hair clean by washing it regularly is also a part of the Sikh Code of Conduct.

The Sikh male's hair must be neatly tied in a tress knot on the apex of the head, with a *kanga* tucked in, and a turban tied around. The turban of the Sikh is thus an inseparable part of his religious and cultural personality.

All the Sikh Gurus kept their hair and beard, and all the Sikh Gurus and apostles wore turbans. The earliest painting of Guru Nanak, which Ram Rai inherited from his father Gur Har Rai is preserved in Dehra Dun as a relic. It shows Guru Nanak wearing the Pathan-type turban, which was worn by

the Punjabis of the time. This type of turban, with little modification, continued to be worn by the first five Gurus. It was a little smaller in size, and worn more gracefully than the common Pathan did, in the manner of the Sufi saints. From the time of Guru Hargobind, the Rajput-style became more common and was patronised even by the Mughal rulers. Out of this style, the Sikh warriors who also carried a quoin



At Sambhal, in western Uttar Pradesh.....

on their heads, developed variations which are seen in the paintings of the period. The Sikh nobility of Ranjit Singh's *darbar* developed a distinct style of their own, out of which have emerged the many modern styles, fundamentally resembling one another.

A question often asked is whether the turban is really so important to the Sikhs of the Khalsa? "After all, it is not one of the five *Ks*". The turban may not appear in any text as one of the five *Ks*, but it is certainly declared frequently (and with emphasis) as an essential addition to the male uniform, in

the Sikh scriptures. The turban is the crown of apparel for the Khalsa and regarded as absolutely essential for all adult males who are its adherents. Their visible identity is expressed by the turban as much as by any of the five Ks.

The turban is regarded as desirable for a number of reasons. Firstly, it is hygienic. Caps and hats are much more difficult to keep clean than the regular washing of cotton fabric. Secondly, the turban is comfortable to wear, both in hot and cold climates. In times of heat, the layers conserve coolness of the head, while the turban certainly provides much protection in the cold. Thirdly, it provides great



— at Birmingham, in the United Kingdom.

protection for the head. Fourthly, it is relatively inexpensive and with a little practice, is simple to tie on the head. Firmly anchored on the head, the wind does not blow it off. Certainly, the turban is practical when the wearer is carrying out work requiring sanctity and cleanliness.

But these may be regarded by some as mere reasons why the turban is a suitable headgear, not sufficient to justify this as mandatory and many people (in India as well as in the rest of the world) manage quite satisfactorily without turbans. But then other people do not retain their hair uncut and this

Mankind's headgear

The "New Encyclopaedia Britannica" describes the turban (*imamah* in Arabic, *dulband* in Persian) as being of Oriental origin and consisting of a long scarf, tied around the head. The early Persians wore their turbans wound around a conical cap while the Turks adopted the turban after the capture of Constantinople in 1453, "when the Sultan adopted the style of the Prophet Muhammad by surrounding his cap with a large amount of white muslin wound around and around".

Since then, the turban has been worn by men of the Muslim faith but "now almost entirely by the Sikhs, as after the early 19th Century, as it was no longer obligatory for the Muslims".

In fact, the turban had much earlier, in the 14th century, been adopted by the Europeans when men wrapped their hoods around their heads, in turban fashion. "The turban varied in shape, colour and size, depending on one's position in society - the larger the turban, the higher the status".

is the key issue. The Khalsa Sikhs are required to retain their hair by religious faith and this fact places them in an inescapably different position. For them (at least for the adult males) the turban is a neat and tidy means of covering the hair. There is no other satisfactory form of covering the head's hair. One need only imagine uncovered and long hair to realise how very superior the turban is to other headgears as a means of containing hair tied on the head in a topknot. One's hair could, in theory, be allowed to hang loose, but would be quite impractical: there are too many tasks which male members of the Khalsa are required to perform and it would be virtually impossible if the hair is not bound.

The turban is, therefore, of vital importance in the preservation of the male member of the Khalsa, significantly adding to the dignity of his appearance. Women are not normally required to wear one, though sectarian opinion does indeed require full-scale turbans for female members of the Khalsa as well. All orthodox Sikhs are, however, firm on the subject of turbans for male members of the Khalsa.

And indeed, this goes much further than the argument based on only appearance. For the orthodox Sikh, wearing of a turban is an essential part of being a Sikh. Because he is a member of the Khalsa and adult male Sikhs must wear turbans. For generations, the turban has been mandatory for the male Khalsa, and if he is to stand up as an adherent, he must do so as the wearer of a turban. ☸

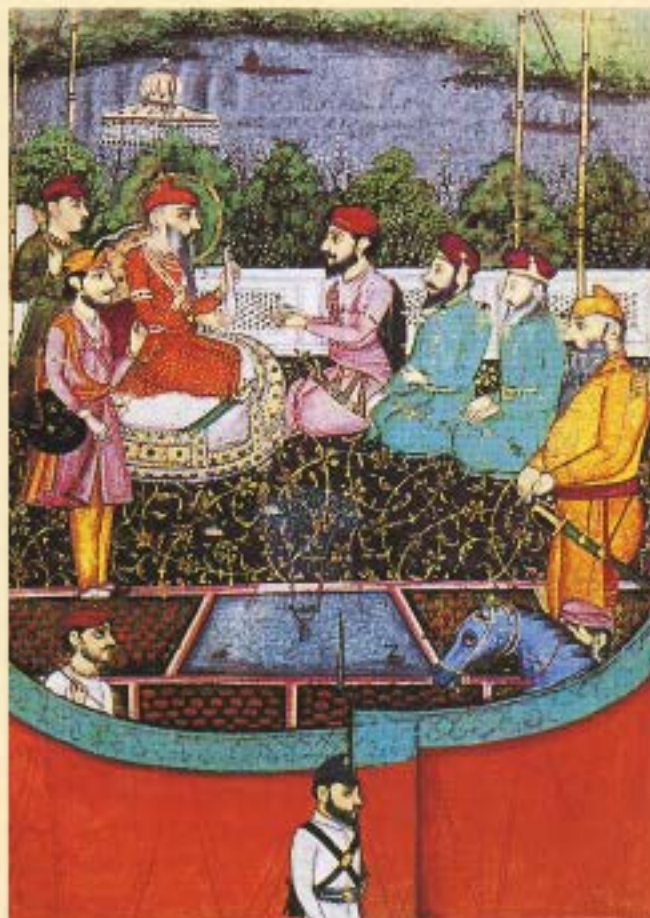
A Salute to the Turban

Emperor Aurangzeb, that fanatic and bigoted Mughal ruler, had decreed the turban was symbolic of royalty and that only the ruling class (which then happened to be Muslim) could wear it. It was also proclaimed that the turbaned man must receive due respect from the non-turban-wearing persons. By doing so, he wanted to degrade his non-Muslim subjects. According to him, Muslims were rulers by birth. Therefore, only they deserved the right to wear the crown — the turban.

Guru Gobind Singh created the *Khalsa Panth* on *Baisakhi* day of 1699. At that time, the *Khalsa* was instructed to wear turbans as adherence of keeping his hair. Thus, the turban became an important religious symbol for the Sikhs, who have had to face many trials and tribulations to preserve the honour of this religious symbol, and have never allowed this to be slighted or insulted by anybody. The Sikhs abroad have particularly had to face many hardships even till recent times to win back their right to wear the turban. For this, they have had to agitate and suffer trials, but the Guru's Sikhs never compromised and offered any sacrifice for their right to adorn turbans. Here are a few instances to make the position clear. If the Sikhs can make supreme sacrifices for getting back the right of wearing turbans, how deeply, then, are they obliged to keep natural, unshorn hair?

The writer of these lines visited the Imperial War Museum in London some years back. There, he saw a painting showing Sikh soldiers fighting alongside the British against the "enemies of the Empire". The British soldiers had steel helmets to protect themselves against bullets and bombs, whereas the Sikh soldiers continued to wear their turbans. Had these Sikhs refused to wear the steel helmets, or were these not provided to them? He was told that the British high command had warned the Sikh soldiers that bullets and bombs could prove fatal if they faced there and thus, the Sikhs soldiers were advised to wear steel helmets for personal

safety. It was stressed that the Sikhs refusal to wear steel helmets had already resulted in heavy casualties among them, and that the Government did not have enough funds for pensions to the families of the deceased. In reply, the Sikh soldiers gave in writing to their British officers that they unanimously agreed to forgo any pension if they got head-injury, but they would not agree, under any circumstances, to wear helmets on their turbans.



Maharaja Ranjit Singh in his Darbar.

In the city of Wolverhampton, England a Sikh student, Kulwinder Singh, was expelled from his school in 1977 on the grounds that he wore a turban, along with the school uniform. The school authorities felt that his turban did not "go well with the uniform." The student submitted before the headmaster that he had worn the complete school uniform, and in addition, had also followed the command of his Guru, "who is much higher than the headmaster", and thus had worn the turban to protect his unshorn hair. The headmaster did not accept any argument and expelled the student on charge of wearing "incomplete uniform." Kulwinder Singh quietly left the class, wrote details of his expulsion on a cardboard, tied it on his chest, and stood at the school-gate with his satchel hanging on one of his shoulders. The school ended, but he continued standing

there. Passer-bys looked curiously at him, asked him the reason for his *satyagrah* and found his explanation satisfactory. The matter was reported to the Government. Next day a senior official of the Education Department came to Kulwinder Singh who had braved the cold throughout the night without giving up his agitation. The official listened to the views of the student, and accepted Kulwinder Singh's right to keep his hair and wear the turban; instructed the school authorities to re-admit the student and allow him to wear turban along with the uniform. This episode was highly publicised throughout the United Kingdom.



(Top) Capt. Mohan Singh Kohli, who led the record-creating successful ascent of Mt. Everest in 1965.

(Above) Sikh soldier of the Indian Army, the world's largest, professional and all-volunteer service.

(Top) The Sheriff of Bombay
(Middle) Sikhs of Kabul in Afghanistan
(Above) The President's Body Guard.

The Los Angeles Times of 23 December 1992 published a detailed report on Guru Sant Singh Khalsa, an American who had received Sikh baptism. He argued rationally that no one should be discriminated against on the basis of religion in a democratic and liberal country such as the United States of America. Clark Allen Harris, who was renamed Guru Sant Singh Khalsa said that he wanted to serve his country by joining the armed forces, and that his new faith made him stronger than before to fulfil that wish. "History stands witness that no other community is as brave as the Sikhs and the entire world calls them soldiers by birth". He said that to his country, his religion should prove helpful rather than a hindrance. He rejected the report that in case of enemy using poisonous gas, the turban and beard would hinder the proper wearing of gas mask. Guru Sant Singh argued that there should have been masks to suit every one. The Government further put forward an argument that it was difficult to run with a mask on the turban. Kiran Bir Singh Grewal, a Sikh Sergeant, challenged the Army: he did scores of sit-ups and ran a 2-mile race with his mask tied to his turban, came first among 5000 others from the U.S. Army and was declared the fastest runner. During the race, neither his mask nor his turban fell.

When the U.S. defence authorities realised that facts had gone against them, they approached Clark's father who told them that, at first he too was in disagreement with his son over adopting the new faith, but when he found that this had brought about many good changes in him, he also felt most happy in his son's happiness. "History of the Sikhs was resplendent with acts of bravery, and from this heritage, his son could become a better soldier". Further, he said that their main concern should be that their country recruited dedicated soldiers, whether or not they kept beard and turban. On the basis of these arguments, ultimately Guru Sant Singh won his case, and was allowed to join the Army and following him, many more Sikhs, with their hair and beards intact, got recruitment in the police and army in the USA and Canada.

Kulwinder Singh and other Sikhs had to struggle to get the right to keep their hair and wear turbans while performing normal duties in society in alien lands. However, the first President of the Shrimoni Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee and well-known freedom fighter, Baba Khara Singh, had also to wage a long struggle to win the right to wear his black turban in India. The British Indian Government arrested him and sent him to a jail in Dera Ghazi Khan. During those black days, all Sikhs used to wear black turbans in protest against the tragic happenings at Nanakana Sahib: the black turban had become a common uniform for the Sikhs who were united under this black banner. It was on this issue that he started his agitation from the jail cell itself. The Government had already yielded to Baba Khara Singh in January 1922 during the agitation for the restoration of the keys to Harimandir Sahib. Unable to resist for long the persistent Sikh demand, they had therefore handed over

Baba Sadhu, husband of Bibi Vigo and son-in-law of Guru Hargobind, wrote of the hair and turban as follows:

*I am sacrifice unto the Guru's turban
Unto turban which leads to Almighty's feet.
I am sacrifice unto Guru's hair
Unto hair and the true tenets.
I am sacrifice unto Guru's forehead
Forehead dyed in the hue of Hair.*

*Thy moustaches are beautiful and charming
They enthrall the Sikhs in the sangat
Sacrifice I am unto Guru's face
The face radiant with God's love.
Sacrifice I am unto Guru's beard
The beard wherein dwells God.
Sacrifice I'm unto the Guru
Sacrifice I'm unto the Guru.*

control to the Sikhs, a victory of the community and of Baba Khara Singh's valour. Mahatma Gandhi had sent a telegram to Baba Khara Singh: "Sikhs have won the first battle in the war of independence. Congratulations". The Government, keen on washing off such a slur, was adamant on preventing Baba Khara Singh from wearing a black turban, and in a high-handed act, his turban was forcibly removed. Baba Khara Singh decried this indecent and unbecoming behaviour and declared that he would take off all clothes except his under-wear. All other political prisoners followed him, and gave up the use of clothes except the *kachhehra* (underwear). The Government began torturing Baba Khara Singh. When this also proved futile, many tempting offers were made to him, which could not move him. This agitation continued in the jail for five-and-a-half years. Baba Khara Singh spent five cold winters and five hot summers wearing only the underwear, and remained steadfast and committed to his stand that he would wear clothes in the jail only if he was allowed to wear a black turban. At last, the Punjab Legislative Assembly in 1927 passed a resolution in favour of Baba Khara Singh and ultimately the Government had to release him. Thus, the freedom fighter and grand Sikh walked out of the jail wearing his black turban. The nation rejoiced in the second victory of this supreme patriot, a victory won after arduous struggle that went on for 66 months: the right of the Sikhs to wear turbans of any colour. History records with pride this unique agitation won by Baba Khara Singh. A prominent road in central New Delhi has since been named after him to honour and perpetuate his memory.

The Report from England

An Act was promulgated in England in 1972-73 which directed that everybody riding a motor-cycle or scooter must wear a crash helmet on the head to ensure safety, which certainly became a problem for the Sikh riders, who stopped

riding two-wheelers, but refused to wear helmets. Finally, an agitation started. Sydney Bidwill, a Member of Parliament from the Southall Constituency pleaded the Sikh case in the British Parliament. The writer of these lines also happened to be in England those days, and everybody was busy collecting facts for use by Sydney Bidwill. Consequently, the British Parliament witnessed long discussions on the question of turbans (from January till October 1976). Several white members of Parliament surprised the entire nation by taking up cudgels in support of the Sikhs by stressing the religious, social and moral importance of the turban for Sikhs and went on to stating that any reference to Sikh history revealed this fact. Bidwill asked a turbaned Sikh working in the car park outside Parliament as to what he would do if asked to work with a steel helmet on his head, he very coolly answered that he would give up the job. "This shows that Sikhs hold their religious symbols very seriously ... they are very hard-working and have left on British society a very strong impression with their numerous qualities. They are very loyal, obedient to law and dedicated to their jobs. We can feel proud of them. If we impart justice to such people, the coming English generations will appreciate our liberal and tolerant behaviour—otherwise we shall be labelled mean and bigoted".

Sir Winston Churchill once stated in Parliament, while talking of the Sikh's *kesi*, turban and morality, that it was "a matter of deep regret that consequent to contemporary cynicism, people had been toying with many precious social and religious values, but those who want to retain and maintain them with due respect should receive our

appreciation as well as help. The Sikhs need our help for such a cause. We should help them willingly. He who is familiar with Sikh history knows the Sikhs' relationship with England, the high degree of their achievements, and must help them with full strength. The Sikhs should be exempted from wearing steel helmets because it hurts their religious feelings". Churchill went on to state: "the English people have been under obligation of the Sikhs for a long time. I know that during this very century when we were in trouble and needed their help, they came to our rescue. It is because of their timely help that we are living today with dignity, honour and freedom. In both the World Wars they fought for us and sacrificed their lives, with turbans as their uniforms. At that time we did not insist that they must wear steel helmets because we knew that they would not agree to this and we would so be deprived of their help. At that time because of our own critical position, we did not compel them to wear steel helmets, we should now earn their appreciation by respecting their religious feelings and symbols and therefore happily exempt them from the obligation of wearing steel helmets".

Taking the argument ahead, another member of Parliament, Mr Mobre, spoke with passion about the Sikhs. He stated that "the Sikhs are a wonderful people. I cannot refrain myself from sharing with the House an example of the Sikhs discipline, loyalty and commitment to duty: In World War I, the Sikh Regiment went to Gallipoli (in the Dardeneles) on 4 July 1915. The 14th (KGO) Sikhs comprised 10 officers and 700 men. By the evening, after the offensive only 2 officers and 70 men remained alive. Just think, for



Epitome of dignity, outside the Royal Albert Hall in London...



... the young generation in the West Midlands of England.

whom were they fighting? For themselves? No! They were fighting for us, or, we can say they were fighting to fulfil their commitment. Their Gurus and their religion have taught them to behave and act in this fashion. Therefore, we must pay due respect to their hair and turban which are their religious symbols. This is also our moral obligation".

At last, the Sikhs in England were allowed to ride motorcycle and scooters with the turban on their heads. The relevant act was amended and this had a very favourable impact on the Sikhs living in other countries. Sikhs in almost every country of the world have the legal sanction to maintain their *kesh* and wear turban while on duty, driving two-wheeler vehicles and participating in formal, social, religious and cultural functions.

*He who has no religion, no faith
He is not human, the fact remains.
He who does not love his community
Loyal he is not to his domain*

The Social Praxis

The turban has an important place in Sikh culture, society and daily life. Its significance can be gauged from its use in idioms. When the parents tell their children, "Don't get my turban trampled under another's feet" "Keep the honour of my turban", "Do not let the turban be pulled off", it is clear that the turban has a central place in society. In the past "Exchanging turbans" meant cementing friendship or relationship. Maharaja Ranjit Singh and Scindia Rao Holkar Maratha exchanged turbans and became close friends, nay brothers. On the other hand, placing the turban on someone's feet is the worst of humiliations, symbolising total surrender. However, if one put a turban on someone's head, it implies an honour. The turban, has immense symbolic value. This can also be gauged from Nand Lal Narpuri's song which depicts the social and political awareness of the Sikhs. The opening words of the song are, "O Jat, take care of your turban". During the struggle for India's freedom, this song would echo on every stage and in every home. The wording of this song made every Punjabi aware that taking care of one's turban implied protecting honour of the nation. There was another song by Shahid Bhagat Singh: "O, my mother, dye my robes in saffron". Both these songs inspired the Punjabis, and challenged the British colonists. The turban, united all, and helped receive the lost honour of the country. The Sikhs played a vital role in this pious struggle. Thus, respecting of the turban inspired what other organised movements had failed to do.

All these aspects point towards the honour and the glory of the turban. At times of birth, marriage and death, the turban has a prominent place in ceremonies connected with such occasions, because the turban "is our honour, our grandeur, a symbol of our responsible life". An Iranian poet, Sheikh Saadi, considered the turban a symbol of morality and

character and gave it due respect in his verses. A Sikh cannot live without his turban. That is why a child in Sikh families is taught to honour the turban from early childhood. The ceremony of *dastar bandhi* (when the child first starts wearing the turban) is performed with much respect. Several references in the *rahit namas* emphasise the importance of keeping the turban clean and with honour.

*"Getting up early morning, tie the turban
Thereafter keep it on for the whole day".*

The Mughal emperors considered the turban a symbol of royalty and wanted to share this only with their co-religionists. The Mughal rule ceased and with this, ceased the turbans on their heads. Of course, Muslim families of higher status continued to wear turbans. *Maulvis*, *Qazis* and

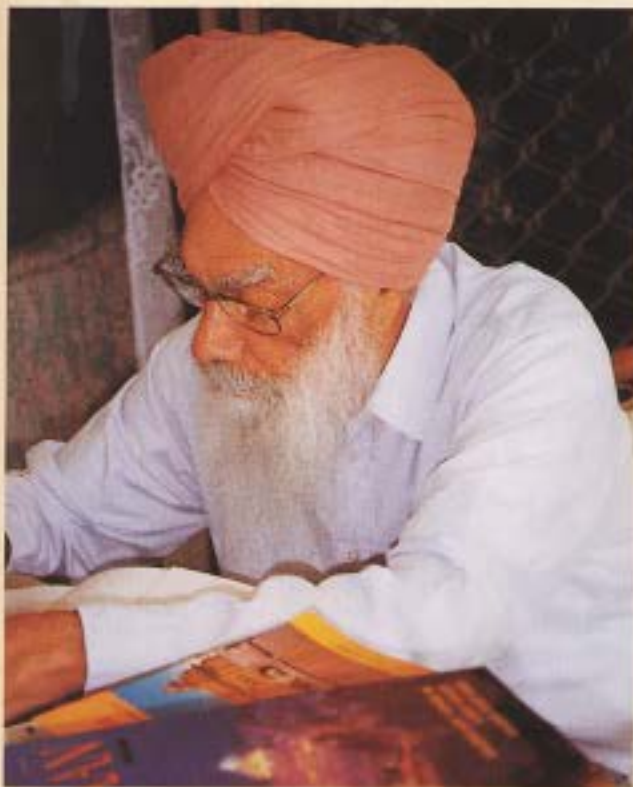


A young Sikh scout at a function in London.

other religious leaders still do not move around without turbans. Whenever participating in religious meetings or functions, they wear turbans. Most Muslims in the Arab and African countries cover their heads with a scarf if they do not tie a turban. Besides, Muslims generally cover their heads during any religious or other pious ceremonies. On Eid or other auspicious occasions, no Muslim can perform namaz when bare-headed. The Muslims are known all over the world to cover their heads with different kinds of caps apart from the turban. In marriages whether in a Hindu, Muslim or a Sikh family, it is customary for the groom, his father, uncles, and brothers to wear turbans, since this is considered

good omen. The Hindus who do not wear turbans in normal life, do observe wearing of the turban at the time of the death of their elders, at which time, it is symbolic of increased responsibility to the one given a turban to wear.

Most philosophers, professors, researchers and scientists in India of the early 20th century generally wore turbans. The doctor covers his head while performing an operation. The judge sitting in court looks an epitome of justice only if he has his head covered. The ranks and status of military and police officers are distinguished by the kind of headgear they wear. In many regions of India, people of status continue to cover their heads with turbans. The Rajputs of Rajasthan consider wearing the turban an honour. Residents of Haryana and U.P. are also fond of wearing turbans. Those in Kashmir, Himachal, Arunachal and Manipur use special caps to cover

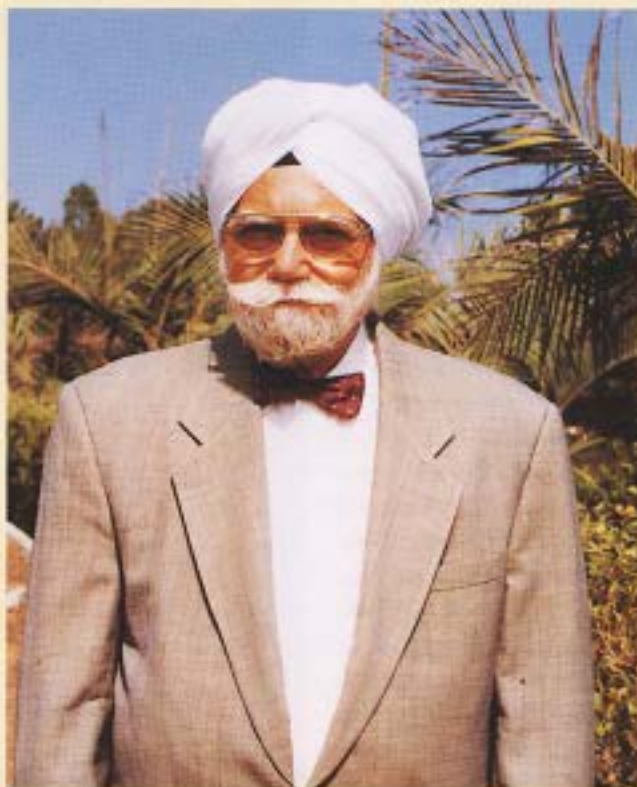


Justice Choor Singh of the Supreme Court, Singapore now retired and writing the history of Sikhs in the Island Republic.

their heads. The orthodox Jews and Zoroastrians cover their heads with a distinctive kind of cloth. Not only this, the priest, bishop and other Christian religious leaders follow the example of the Pope and cover their heads as they give a lecture or discourse at a religious function.

We find that almost all major languages and cultures of the world have words and phrases that refer to the turban. If it is turban in English, it is *taband* in French, *turbande* in German, Italian, Spanish and Portuguese. There is another word *kulband* for it in the Dutch language. In Romanian and Persian, it is *tulipan* and *surband* respectively. In Malaya, it is

called *sarban* which is worn by *Hajis*, *Qazis* and other noble people. People consider this very pious, and the wearer is believed to be blessed with divine power. Linguists and social scientists have, on the basis of their research, recorded that in ancient Egyptian culture, the turban was considered a royal, decorative head-dress. They called it *payar*. The word *pagri* which is used for *dastaar* or turban in India might have been derived from the Egyptian *payar*. If we analyse the history of ancient Middle Asia, the turban was a symbol of divinity and implied that the wearer of turban was a prophet, or a godly and pious person and was given due respect. Prophet Mohammad used to wear the turban, and also dealt in turbans. In Arab countries, the turban is considered a crown of the community. Of course, the Arabs of today do not tie turbans in the style their ancestors did, but do keep their



Dr. Amarjit Singh Marwah, famous dentist of Malibu and Hollywood in California.

heads properly covered. There is also some prediction that the Arab society will remain high so long as the Arabs continue to keep their heads covered. It is perhaps under the influence of this prediction that when any Arabian member of the royalty is buried, his relatives place his turban alongside him.

All this makes it obvious that the covering of one's head was considered proper not only for the Sikhs or people in India at large, but for people all over the world, especially those enjoying high position and power in society. ❧

Extracts from the writings of Sarup Singh Alag

My Turban, My Crown

In the mid-eighties, an international seminar was held on the Sikh faith in Detroit, USA. The speakers were invited by the President of the gurdwara to address the Sangat on Sunday. After the morning *kirtan*, this writer and other speakers gave lectures for seven to ten minutes as planned by the management. The Sangat was emotionally charged when one of the speakers (European-American having adopted the Sikh faith) described his experience of adopting the faith. The key part of his lecture may be summarised as follows:

"Sikhs receive their turbans as their inheritance and get them as their right. Some Sikhs, therefore, do not know the value of the turban; they may just throw it around without a second thought. I was in search of a turban and found one. I picked it up, cleaned it and tied it on my head with great honour. For me, it is not a mere length of cloth, which I wrap on my head to cover my hair. I respect it as a crown granted to me by my 'father', Guru Gobind Singh. I was not born to Sikh parents. Therefore, I did not receive this turban free as my heritage. I had to pay the price for it. My friends left me when they saw me with a turban on my head. I had to sacrifice my relations. Even my mother and brother deserted me because they did not accept me with my turban. Now you can understand how much I value it".

"A king puts a crown on his head as an insignia of being the ruler of the country. Another person with a stronger force may take over his country and also his crown from him. However, nobody can take the crown away from me, because it was gifted to me by my father, Guru Gobind Singh. The Guru paid more than the full price of this crown by sacrificing his whole family, his father, mother and all his four children. In this way, he earned this crown

for his Sikhs. Later, the Khalsa Panth had to give up their homes and live for three generations in the jungles. Many Sikhs underwent unbearable tortures, but did not barter their turban".

"Today, when I wrap my turban upon my head, every hair on my body feels grateful to the Guru and utters, *Father, thank you. You paid the price of this holy crown by the blood of your family and innumerable devotees. No king or tyrant can take it away from me. Only ignorant or ungrateful Sikhs may themselves throw it away. They forget that along with the turban, they also lose their right to be respected and addressed as Sardar Ji, the son of Guru Gobind Singh*".

It will not be out of place, if I restate here the feelings of another Englishman, Cliff R.Huthins, who also had adopted the Sikh faith. When someone asked him why he had to wear long hair to practise the Sikh philosophy of life, he answered, "Is it not enough that people call me the son of Guru Gobind Singh just because I wear the five *kakaars*?"

The writer visited India in 1999 to participate in the *Gurmat chetna lehr* inaugurated by the Jathedar of the *Akal Takht* for educating Sikh

youth regarding their heritage. He narrated the message of the above lecture to the Sikh Youth. In every Group there were some Sikh youth without turbans. After listening to this, some of them would stand up and make a promise: "From now onward I am going to keep my hair and tie my turban and so enjoy the self esteem, being the son of Guru Gobind Singh".

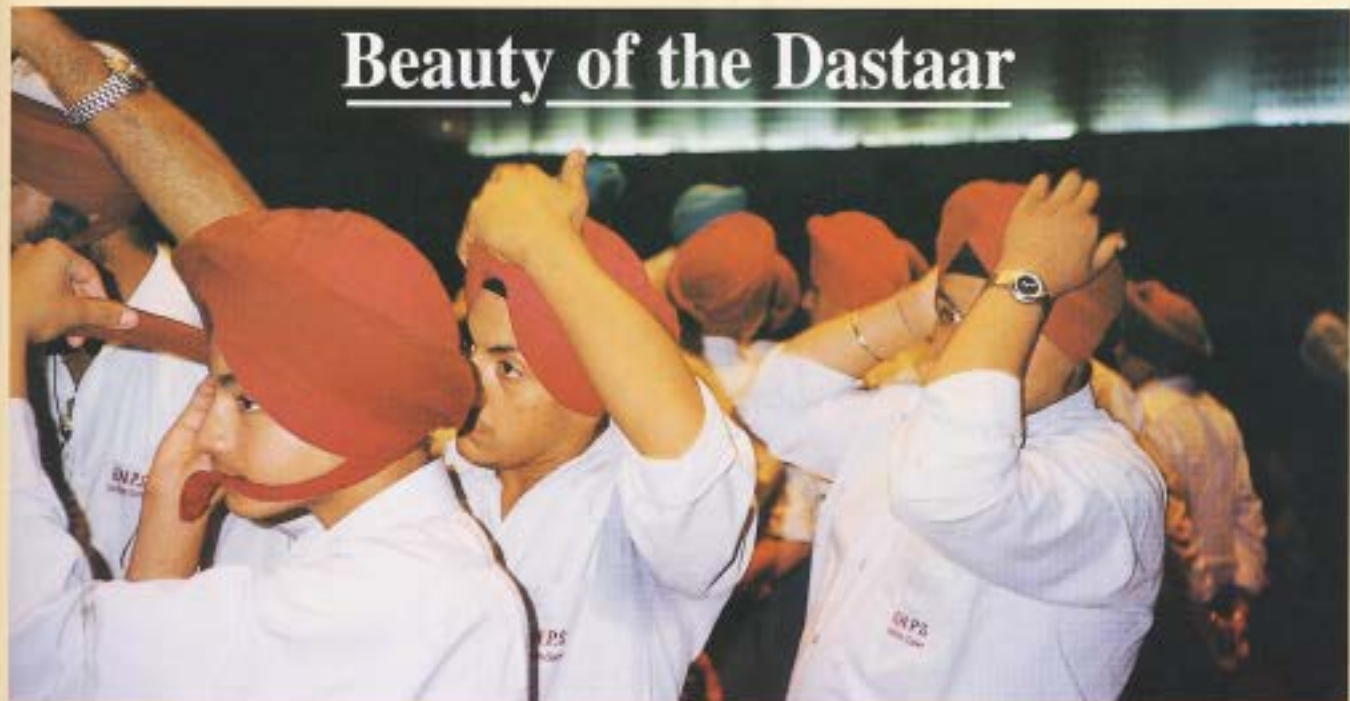
Dr. Gurbakhsh Singh

(From: The Book "Teaching Sikh Heritage to The Young: Lessons Learnt")



An American Sikh, distinctive and confident.

Beauty of the Dastaar



Turban tying contest at a school in New Delhi.

This most exquisite head-dress for man in the 17th and 18th centuries, the hand-tied *dastaar*, *pugree*, or turban, was banned by the Mughal Emperors for the commoner, but has always identified the Sikh from near and afar. The Sikh does not hide in the masses, but stands up — and must be counted!

The turban or *pugree* is made from fine cotton muslin, and usually comes in about one metre width. A visit to a *pugree* shop reveals a multitude of colours. Bright ones for the young at heart! The standard black, maroon, army green, navy blue and steel grey for the matured persons! White and saffron for the religious people!

The simpler version of the *pugree* involves approximately five metres long cloth but those who prefer the fuller look, may buy eight metres of cloth, tear this into half which makes a four metre by two metre turban to work with. The Sikh child begins to learn the art of turban-tying before his teens, and may take him a few months to master the procedure and develop his own personal style and so, a work of art.

The *pugree* is sometimes starched lightly, especially if it is to be worn again without retying, otherwise one works with the soft, unstarched cloth. The first step is the “punee” where two people hold and then stretch the cloth diagonally. The cloth is then folded while the *pugree* is kept stretched along the diagonal. Both people fold (by rolling) with their right hands, keeping the left side stretched. After the folding, the turban cloth is gathered. Before tying the

dastaar, the wearer may wrap a colourful “fiftie” around his head. The front portion of the “fiftie” will be visible on the forehead and adds even more character to the *pugree*.

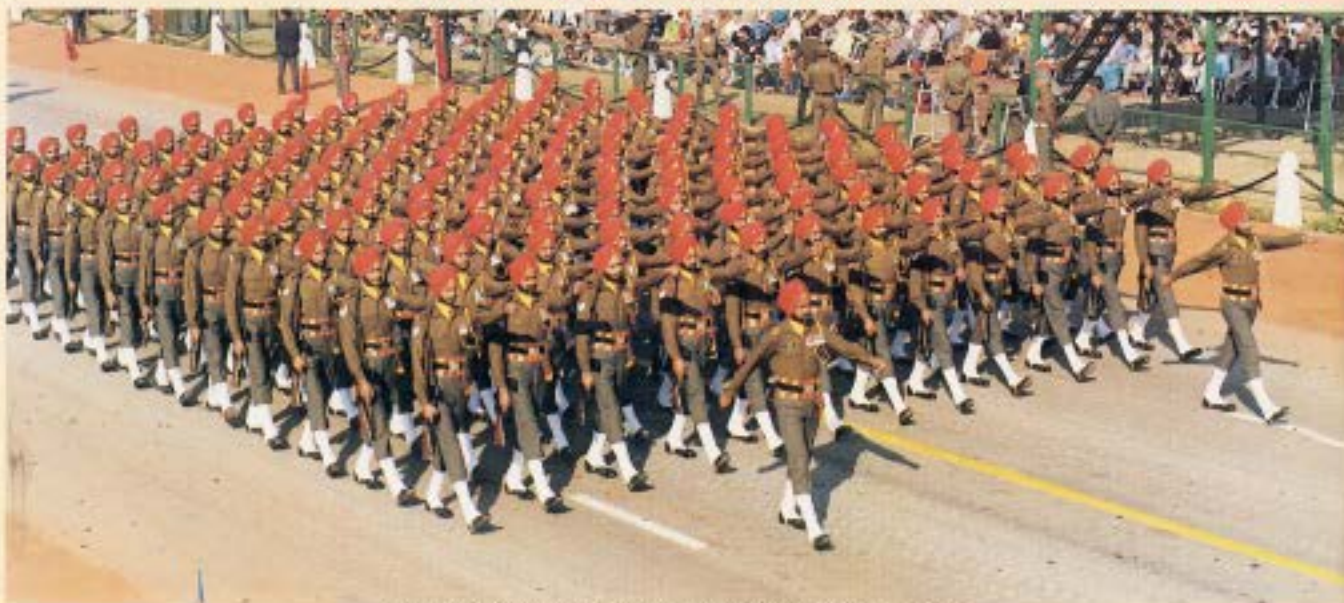
The tying of the turban is not to be done casually, if one wants to look smart! Every Sikh boy has spent hours in front of the mirror perfecting the technique. Many American Sikh women wear beautiful turbans with their distinct styles. One end of the turban is held in the mouth, while one gradually wraps the cloth around the head. The angle at which each turn is made, the pinching of the cloth on the forehead, the opening and closing of the folds of the cloth, all add subtle touches which lend each turban its own unique look.

Once the entire length is almost used up, the last part is tucked in the front, taking great care to smooth any wrinkles from this last fold. The end that was clenched in the teeth is now released, and pulled to the back of the head. The first fold is now pulled through and opened so that the entire head can be covered. The back end is then pulled back and tucked in.

Tying of the turban is a physical ritual for Sikh men and for women who choose to wear a turban. It is akin to a ballet, with precise movements of the hands, shoulders and fingers. The cloth is the medium of this art. Once perfected, it only takes a couple of minutes to tie the turban, but how it completely transforms the way the wearer looks! ☺

[From: *Style of the Lion: The Sikhs*
by Jasprit Singh & Teresa Singh]

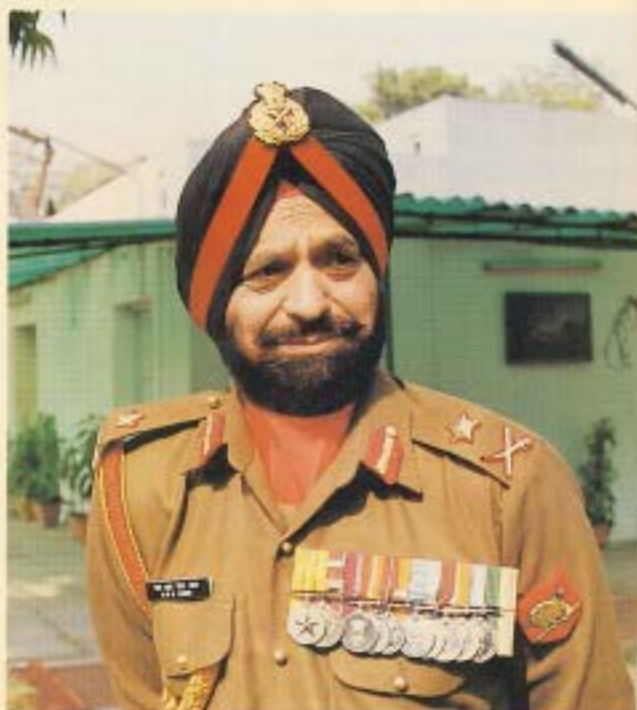
The Distinction



The Sikh Regiment on parade, down Rajpath in New Delhi.



Air Officer Commanding of the world's highest air base, at Leh in Ladakh.



General Officer Commanding of the Delhi Area.

The distinctive appearance of a Sikh is exemplified by his beard and turban, a celebration of his individualism, standing out as he does amongst the masses, always easy to seek and identify. This is a matter of deep psychological significance, instilling in the Sikh the confidence to stand out in a crowd. The turban, which normally is of fine muslin cloth, can vary in length, and its



Pilots and observers of an Indian Navy anti-submarine warfare squadron at Cochin.



Turban uniforms worn by Sikh troops of the Raj in the 19th and early 20th centuries.



JCO and Risaldar of the 1st Armoured Division.



colour and shape as tied are entirely a matter of personal choice. Only in the armed services or police forces does the colour denote an establishment: in the Army, the cavalry and armoured corps wear black, infantry rifle green, special forces and para-commandos maroon, gunners (artillery) dark blue, army aviators grey and so on. The Air Force again wear dark blue, the Navy white turbans while the police forces have various shades of khaki.

Amongst the politicians, the Akalis sport blue, the Congress white, the Nihangs yellow or black, while the vast majority wear what they feel like - the *kesari* (saffron) being worn as a mark of religious respect or as a strong statement, as did the agitated masses in the Punjab and elsewhere during the mid-1980s. 🇮🇳

The Turban on STAMPS

September 11, 2001 made history: half a century after the Second World War, the world once again focussed on problems engulfing the East, South Asia, Europe, America, the Arab States and even Africa. India suddenly found itself deeply concerned with the events in America. Indians were pulled into the centre stage of a crime master minded at the other end of the globe. Balbir Singh Sodhi, an owner of a petrol pump in Arizona, was suddenly felled by a vicious bullet one autumn afternoon, fired by a stranger. The reason was the turban that Sodhi was wearing to cover his unshorn hair. A part of his natural dress, the turban cost Sodhi his life. Sodhi was a Sikh and the headwear worn by Sikhs is also worn by a large number of Indians, frontiers men of Iran, Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan and many other communities across the world. Frank Rourke who shot Sodhi found him a look alike of Osama Bin Laden and his followers. The turban worn by Sodhi is also worn by the Taliban, who have become the most 'wanted' men in the world. In the perception of Americans, any one with that headwear was a 'dead duck'. The turban never travelled to America but had been worn by British royalty shown in Mauritius R2 stamp on the Queen Mother with princess Margaret in a turban with a 'kalgi' at "Trooping the Colour".

The turban is prominent on Indian stamps from the time the princely States (the Indian Feudatory States) started printing stamps. One of the first postage stamps with a portrait sporting a turban is that of Sirmoor State, with the bust of Raja Sir Shamsher Parkash (1892) of 3 pies (SG-3) and of Maharaja Sardul Singh (1899) of Kishangarh of 2 annas (SG-15). In Dr.D.K.Karve's portrait (15p stamp of 18 April 1958) we have the type of soft turban worn in Russia, Nigeria, Egypt, Pakistan, Morocco, Dubai and all the countries where world attention has been focused since September 11. Had Frank Rourke glanced at some of these stamps sometime, he would not have aimed his gun against



the innocent Balbir Singh Sodhi.

Headwear has been an integral part of man's dress since 4000 B.C. and in the East, the preferred headwear has been the turban. The varied ways a turban is worn can be seen on the stamps of India. Osama's turban style is worn across the country especially in rural India and by a number of peoples of the world. It is a loose piece of muslin cloth generally white in colour, covering the head without being pretentious. The simplicity with which it is worn, added with its significance, lends to its popularity. Osama's son Hamza was shown wearing a small black turban in an image flashed across the world by Al Jazeera TV, standing near an American helicopter downed by the Taliban. A similar turban is worn by Sayyid Hasan Shriazi under the title of R.I.Iran in a set of portrait stamps issued by Iran, and Baba Kharak Singh (60p 1965) and by the Sultan of



Shirhr shown in an Aden stamp, 1942 (3/4a, 1942, SG2). The turban worn by Karve of Maharashtra is worn in India by personalities as diverse as the Tamilian poet Subramania Bharti, Swami Vivekanand the spiritualist from Kolkatta, Lala Lajpatrai the revolutionary from Punjab, M.N.Kishore from U.P., Jassa Singh Ahluwalia the Sikh commander, Durgadas Rathod and significantly, the tribal leader Birsa Munda from Bihar, on a 60 p

Stamp Collector Seeks To Go Global With Special Category Of Stamps

Stamp collecting is the passion of a senior, now retired IAS officer, Chander Dev Singh. He has the distinction of establishing a new category in international philately – *Headwear* – a study of different cultures through the study of hats, turbans, crowns and tribal adornments etc., through the medium of a small piece of paper – the postage stamp.

While C.D.Singh has made stamp-collecting history, the category of *Headwear* needs to be further developed and globally exposed through the medium of international exhibitions and competitions. So far C.D.Singh has organised a unique exhibition in his hometown of Mumbai, at the Prince of Wales Museum, where he displayed about a thousand stamps divided into distinct categories, and entered a National Philatelic competition at Nasik, winning a prestigious large silver medal as a first time entry. His unique work has been recognised in the American Journal of Thematic Philately.

The stamps took a lifetime to collect, and about a year to prepare for exhibition. The history of various forms of headwear had to be gathered from diverse sources such as stamp catalogues, books of social history, dress, court dresses, military uniforms and the study of world cultures. Often a single word or line of valuable information would emerge after days and weeks of dedicated research. For example the Indian stamp on Trimurti, bearing the Trinity of Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva, has distinct crowns worn by the gods. Once one looks at the jewels, snakes and adornments of this stamp, the ordinary becomes extraordinary. But C.D.Singh is not one to rest on his laurels. He continues to expand his unique collection, buying or swapping with fellow collectors and writing to international collectors for a single rare stamp to embellish his collection.

Stamps have to be handled delicately. Removing the paper and gum from letters for example, is a painstaking process. They have to be preserved in stamp mounts and displayed in frames for exhibitions. A collector gives the stamps the same care and value as a beautiful woman would give to her jewels!

C.D.Singh started collecting stamps as a little boy, and carefully placed his first stamps in an album given by his grandfather. He



entered his first stamp collection for competition while still at school. Little did he or anyone else know that one day, a young boy's collection would become a world class collection.

Being a Sikh, C.D.Singh is acutely aware of the significance of the turban and various forms of headwear. Sikhs wear the turban over unshorn hair as an integral part of their religion. The shooting of a Sikh, Balbir Singh Sodhi, in Arizona after 9 September, was a case of mistaken identity. An American zealot, Frank O'Rourke, could not tell the difference between Sodhi's turban and the notorious Osama bin Laden's turban. He mistook Sodhi for a Muslim militant and shot him dead.

C.D.Singh says, "Had he seen some of the stamps on headwear, he would have at once known the difference between Sikhs and the others, who wear turbans. Perhaps then this tragedy could have been averted". The study of headwear is a scholarly study. While exhibiting for competitive philately, one gets scores for the expertise and knowledge one brings to bear on a subject, and the rarity of exhibits.

Many of the people of the world use turbans to cover their head, such as the Middle East, Iran or even Israel, England and many African and Muslim countries. A covering for the head denotes rank, profession and cultural divisions. There are stamps of king's headwear such as crowns worn by the Nepalese king, with streaming Bird of Paradise plumes. There are freedom fighters with various forms of patriotic 'Gandhi' caps. There are tribal chieftains and American Indian headdresses, with eagle feathers. Farmers, hunters and actor's all wear distinct hats depicted on stamps.

So far, the collection is limited to male headwear. The collection expands both one's knowledge and vision. It is both a lesson in history and geography. One learns not only of the differences and uniqueness of cultures, but also of their similarities.

Stamp collecting, it can be said, has been embellished by the efforts of C.D.Singh, and the establishment of *HEADWEAR* as a distinct category in the field of philately will surely lead to greater interest in world cultures.

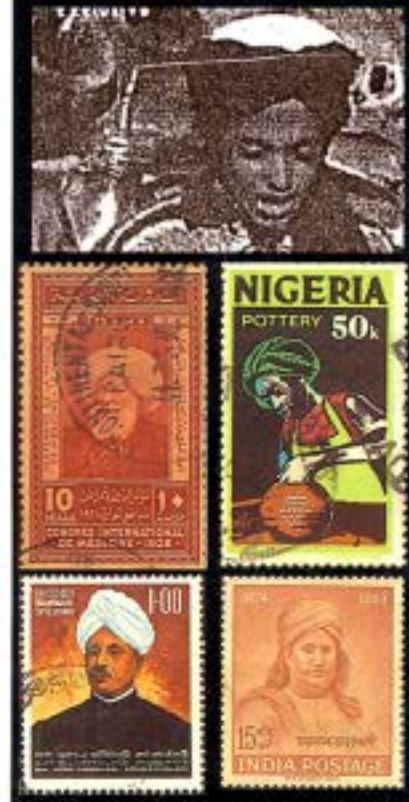
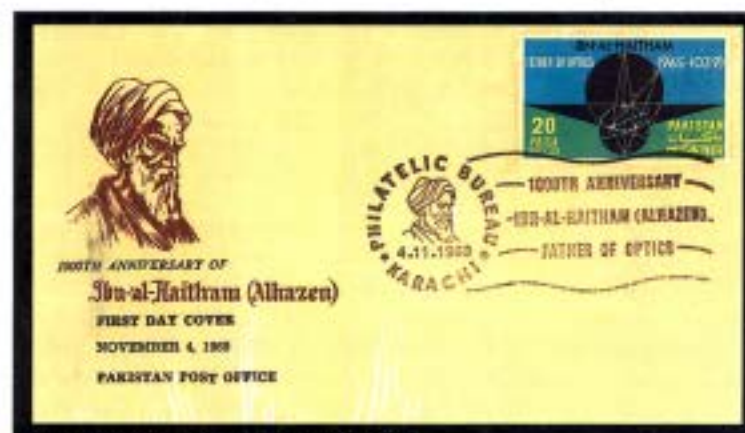
stamp of 15 November 1998, showing a bundle of cloth on his head. V.S. Pathik of Guwahati, with his simple style of turban on Re. 1 stamp (29 April 1992, could pass off as a man from the borders of Afghanistan, or an Arab state.

The 100p stamp of Liban printed for the Centenaire de l' Association Al Makassed shows a bearded portrait with a turban worn horizontally across the head, akin to the Afghan turbans and in the style of today's North Western Sikhs. This turban is depicted in the 1998 stamp of Bhai Khanaiyaji giving water to the wounded Mughal and Sikh soldiers, thus serving suffering humanity whatever the dress or headdress they wore.



The turban is a symbol of the East and of cultures the world over. No where is this more aptly shown than on the stamps of the world. America knows few cultures akin to those who cover their head with muslin or silk. Today's cultures are becoming dress-less. It was so in Greece and in Ajanta India. Small wonder that the first part of dress to go is the headwear!

Stamps of Afghan kings do not show the rulers with turbans. The reason is not far to seek. The rulers were getting completely Westernised. The stamps printed after the fall of King Zahir Khan



show the revolutionaries and citizens participating in the birth of a new nation. The revolutionaries wear loose turbans with a part of the turban some loosely hanging. Such a turban is wore by Ibn-al-Haitham on a cover of Pakistan of 4 November 1969 and on a stamp honouring him printed by Qatar, of 35 Dirhams. The same style is sported by an Egyptian doctor in a 10 M stamp of the International Congress of Medicine. Two Afghans in 'salwar kameez' with a flag, in a 7 AFS stamp (1978) and a 32 AFS stamp (1982) are wearing stylised turbans with depth in the centre, which turban style are also worn by Salaudin (Qatar), H.S.Longowal of 100p and Ganga Ram of 25 p (India), Mohd. Abdul Latif of Pakistan, Rs. 1 with a turban top extending out, and Arunachalam of Ceylon in a Rs. 1 stamp.

If Rourke had seen the photographs of Ashrag Ahmedzai, the



UN special adviser and Shahboz Ahmedzai and tribal leader Bacha Khan with their tribal turbans in the papers, he would surely have fired a magazine of cartridges at the likes of the Nigerian potter wearing a loose turban on a 50k stamp, or Dayanand Saraswati on the 15p stamp. Lala Hardayal who founded the Ghadar party shown on the cover of the 60p stamp of 18 March 1987 with his loose robes would definitely be seen as a follower of Osama, and could have ended at the other side of an American gun!

The 1980 Afghan stamp (2AFS) of the revolution which says it all in the turbans worn by the citizens, has the title *Len Reforms Democratiques Des Terres Ont Extirpe Le Feodalisme*. In it one can see the turban style of VS Srinivas Sastri, slightly pleated turban worn on the head like VSai and the turban of the Maharaja of Barwani State. That such a small piece of paper as a stamp could convey information on the country of its origin, culture, religion, sect and the name of the person and other information which could save lives, can only be imagined! The culture of wearing turbans continues with the tribes of Afghanistan, the Arabs, the Rajputs—and of course, the Sikhs—and this is also to be seen on their stamps. ☺

Chander Dev Singh

C.D.Singh seeks to take the glory of the Indian culture through the medium of stamps. This undertaking is both time-consuming and expensive. He seeks assistance to make this very simple yet sophisticated means for uniting peoples and promoting universal understanding and peace through the medium of stamps. He may be reached at +91-22-2202-5952, 25 "Yashodhan", Dinsha Wacha Road, Mumbai 400021, India.

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Baisakhi celebrations at the Guru Tegh Bahadur Gurdwara in Norwalk, Connecticut, USA on 20 April, 2003 vibrated with a new energy. The children of this one-year old school presented the sangat with a magnificent Baisakhi programme. Their voices resonated as they sang the Divine Bani. The look on their faces was a joy to behold, their commitment to their faith was food for the soul. The play they performed is presented below, so you too can share the joy of their Baisakhi celebration.

BAISAKHI

The Play



Voice: Baisakhi is here and Sikhs around the world gather to celebrate. Today, we would like to share with the sangat what we have learnt about Baisakhi.

Voice: The year was 1699. Our Guru, Guru Gobind Rai sent out a call: "Come my fellow-Sikhs and celebrate Baisakhi with me at Anandpur Sahib."

Voice: Punjab was on the move ... Guruji had called. Every able Sikh answered the call.

Voice: Baisakhi morning at Anandpur Sahib was a majestic scene. The sangat waited with baited breath to hear Guruji speak.

Voice: With kirpan in hand, Guruji emerged from his tent and declared: "I need a Sikh's head. Is there anyone here who will give me his head?"

Voice: The sangat went silent. Everyone looked at each other in confusion. The joy on their faces, their excitement had suddenly disappeared.

Voice: Guruji thundered again: "Is there no Sikh who will give me his head?"

Voice: From the sangat rose Daya Ram, a khatri from Lahore. "My head is yours, my Guru," he said with humility.

Voice: Guruji took Daya Ram inside the tent and returned with his bloodstained kirpan. The sangat was horrified. But before they could recover from the shock, Guruji turned to them and roared once again: "Is there another Sikh who will give me his head? I need another head."

Voice: By this time, the sangat began to leave. Some ran away scared and some ran to Guruji's mother to complain.

Voice: But Guruji's call was answered and Dharam Das, a jat from Delhi, came forward to present Guruji his head. Three more times Guruji's voice thundered in the air, and three more times the bravest of the braves answered his call:

- Mohkam Chand, a washerman from Dwarka

had been immortalized by Guruji, after giving themselves to him, and killing their egos with Guruji's Divine Kirpan.

Voice: Guruji then started to prepare the Amrit. He poured water into the iron bowl and began stirring it with the Khanda - while reciting the five Banis of Nitnem - Japji Sahib, Jaap Sahib, Survaiye Sahib, Chopai Sahib and Anand Sahib. The Amrit was now ready.

Voice: Guruji said, "I am the son of the Immortal God. It is by His Order that I have been born and established this form of Amrit. They who accept it shall henceforth be known as The Khalsas."

Voice: Guruji then gave each of the Panj Pyares five palmfuls of Amrit to drink and sprinkled Amrit five



- Himmat Chand, a cook from Jagan Nath Puri, and
- Sahib Chand, a barber from Bidar

Voice: The sangat was shaken. Strange were the events that were taking place. No one could have imagined that such an incredible thing would happen on this day in 1699. And not a soul could predict what would happen next.

Voice: A short while later, Guruji emerged from the tent a bewildered hush came over the sangat. Behind Guruji were His Beloved Five: Daya Ram, Dharam Das, Mohkam Chand, Himmat Chand and Sahib Chand - all dressed in splendid new chogaas, glowing with pride. They were not dead; rather they



times onto their eyes and hair. Each time Guruji proclaimed. "Waheguru ji ka Khalsa! Waheguru ji kee Fateh!"

Voice: Guruji said, "From this day on, my Sikhs will be known as Singhs (lions) and Kauris - (princesses) and will fear no one." He bestowed on them the title of The Khalsa - a highly explosive personality whose 'Light of Life' radiates glory, justice and love. Thus, the nation of The Khalsa was born.

Voice: Along with this title came the Five Royal "K's."

Voice: Kesh, Kanga, Kara, Kirpan, Kacchera.

Voice: Professor Puran Singh writes about Kesh:
 Kesh, O flowing Kesh
 My Guru has touched my Kesh
 My Guru has blessed my Kesh
 In my Kesh is the fragrance of His touch
 How can I bear to part with you.
 There are people who say Kesh is troublesome
 But more troublesome is a life of no inspiration.
 My Guru is my life
 My Guru is my inspiration.
 I wear my Kesh with pride
 For I am my Guru's Sikh.

Voice: Kanga
 A gift from my Guru
 To keep my Kesh clean.



But I think it is more than that –
 It is a constant reminder, that I must also keep my
 thoughts clean.
 Kanga - a small comb
 Yet it has the power
 To keep me on track.
 I cannot run to the mountain-top
 And meditate with matted hair.
 I am my Guru's Sikh
 I commit to following "The Way."

Voice: Kara
 When this hand rises to strike the weak
 It is the Kara that reminds me - I'm here to protect
 the weak.

When this hand rises to pick up a drink
 It is the Kara that reminds me - to give up that drink.
 When this hand rises to puff up smoke
 It is the Kara that reminds me - to rise above the
 smoke.
 When this hand rises to pick up a razor
 It is the Kara that reminds me - shed the fashion of
 the razor.
 Did my Guru intend
 The Kara to have such power
 Or is it just a fluke
 Perhaps a figment of my imagination.
 There are no flukes; there are no coincidences
 I believe in a Divine plan.
 I submit before my Guru
 And wear the Kara with pride.

Voice: Kirpan
 It is the sword of love
 Given by my Guru.
 A Guru who in his love
 Saw no difference between humanbeings
 And fused all of us in one creed of devotion, service
 and sacrifice.
 Kirpan is a gift
 A gift from my Guru.
 It is a sword of "kirpa"
 It is a sword of mercy.
 When all other means have failed
 A Khalsa picks up the sword
 Not out of anger or to seek revenge
 But to uphold honour.
 But before a Sikh can think of using
 "The Kirpan of the Khalsa"
 The qualities of a saint
 Must be there within.
 He must remain true
 To the vision of the Guru.
 The Khalsa is a *sant-siphai*
 Not a mercenary.

Voice: Kacchera
 The elegant Kacchera that
 we wear every day is the same
 as worn by Guruji and his disciples.
 Clad in it, we are one with him.
 It reminds me
 That living in this world
 I must be chaste.
 This is a gift of love
 This is a gift of caring.

My Guru cares

And wants me to lead a life with honour.

Voice: Guruji spoke: "Wherever there is tyranny, my Khalsa will rise to protect the weak and to honour humanity."

Voice: The sangat was in awe at what were they witnessing. There were exclamations of wonder, and sighs of regret on all sides. They were sorry they did not offer Guruji their heads.

Voice: But that was not all.

Voice: Guruji then turned towards His Beloved Five - his Panj Pyares and asked them to bestow on him the sacred Amrit. The Master became a disciple - an event unparalleled in history. From that day forth, Guru Gobind Rai became Guru Gobind Singh.

Voice: Guruji promised "The Khalsa" that whenever they called upon him, he would agree to their proposal. This was the establishment of a democratic Khalsa.



Voice: Guruji gives the definition of his beloved Khalsa:
"One who constantly keeps in mind,
Intent upon Ever Awake Living Light of Consciousness
And never swerves from the thought of One God;
And one who is adorned with full faith in Him
And is wholly steeped in the Love of the Lord,
And even by mistake never puts faith in fasting;
Or in worship of tombs, or crematoriums,
Caring not for pilgrimages, alms, charities,
penance's or austerities;
Or anything else but devotion to the One God;
And in whose heart and soul the Divine Light
Shines forth as the full moon
That one is known as Khalsa, purest of the pure."

Voice: History says that within the next few days 80,000 men and women took Amrit.

Voice: Gulam-ul-din, the Persian historian sent a letter to Aurangzeb, describing what happened on that day in 1699. He writes of the Guru's address to his people:

"Let all embrace one creed and obliterate differences of religion. Let the four Hindu castes which have different rules for their guidance abandon them all, adopt the one form of adoration, and become one humanity. Let no one deem themselves superior to another. Let none pay heed to the Ganges and other places of pilgrimage, but believe in Guru Nanak and the other Sikh Gurus. Let the four castes receive my Amrit, eat out of one dish, and feel no disgust or contempt for one another."

Voice: Bhai Vir Singh ji in *Kalgi da Chamatakar* writes Guruji's definition of The Khalsa:

ਹਰ ਇਕ ਸਿਖ ਖਾਲਸਾ ਹੈ, ਖਾਲਸਾ ਕੁਲੂ ਹੈ। ਖਾਲਸਾ ਫੇਰ ਹਰੇਕ ਸਿਖ ਦੇ ਦਿਮਾਗ ਵਿਚ ਇਕ ਉੱਚਾ 'ਆਦਰਸ਼' ਹੈ ਸਭ ਕੁਝ ਉਸ ਖਾਲਸੇ ਦਾ ਹੈ। ਇਕ ਖਾਲਸਾ ਆਪਣਾ ਸਭ ਕੁਝ ਸਾਰੇ ਖਾਲਸੇ ਦਾ ਜਾਣਦਾ ਹੈ। ਏਹ ਜੁੜੇ ਹਨ ਮੇਰੇ ਵਿਚ ਮੇਰੇ ਹੋਕੇ, ਇਹ ਜੁੜੇ ਹਨ ਅਪੇ ਵਿਚ ਮੇਰੇ ਹੋਕੇ, ਏਹ ਜਥੇਬੰਦ ਨਹੀਂ ਹੋਏ, ਭਰਾ ਹੋਏ ਹਨ, ਪਰਵਾਰ ਬਣੇ ਹਨ। ਇਨ੍ਹਾਂ ਦਾ ਲੰਗਰ ਇਕ ਹੈ, ਧਰਮ ਇਸ਼ਟ ਇਕ ਹੈ, ਆਸਾ ਇਕ ਹੈ, ਇਨ੍ਹਾਂ ਦਾ ਲਿਬਾਸ ਥੀ ਇਕ

ਹੋਇਆ ਹੈ, ਸੁਰਤ ਇਕ ਨਮੂਨੇ ਤੇ ਕੀਤੀ ਗਈ ਹੈ। ਇਨ੍ਹਾਂ ਦਾ ਨਾਮ ਇਕ ਹੈ ਸਿੱਖ। ਇਹ ਇਕ ਸਰੀਰ ਬਣਿਆ ਹੈ, ਜਿਸ ਦੇ ਇਹ ਸਾਰੇ ਅੰਗ ਹਨ। ਇਹ ਨਿਰੋਜਥੇਬੰਦ ਨਹੀਂ ਹਨ, ਇਕ 'ਇਕ ਅੰਗ' ਹੋਏ ਹਨ। ਇਹਨਾਂ ਦੀ ਜਥੇਬੰਦੀ 'ਇਕ ਅੰਗ-ਅੰਗੀ' ਹੋਣਾ ਹੈ। ਅੰਗ ਅੰਗ ਤੋਂ ਕਦੇ ਜੁਦਾ ਨਹੀਂ, ਸਿੱਖ ਸਿੱਖ ਤੋਂ ਕਦੇ ਜੁਦਾ ਨਹੀਂ।

Voice: Baisakhi is a celebration -
Of the birth of the Khalsa.
And a remembrance -
Of the "spiritual bond"
That exists between
A Sikh and his Guru.
Baisakhi is also a commitment
To follow the "true path"
Gifted to us by our Guru.

Celebrate the Spirit of The Khalsa



Popularly conceived as a harvest festival, Baisakhi is a special occasion for many communities, notably the Sikhs. Baisakhi celebrations are popular because its theme is universal and timeless. Guru Gobind Singh chose the day of Baisakhi in the year 1699 to create the 'Khalsa', community of the pure, with an unusual ceremony. This led to the establishment of an order based on the ideal of sacrifice for the cause of dharma and the rejection of all forms of slavery — physical, mental or spiritual.

The Guru's followers were a spiritual and social entity rather than a political force. The character and ethos that evolved in the Khalsa thereafter are relevant to our society even today, and can play a positive role if we only know them and realise them in our lives. Baisakhi thus goes beyond being only a harvest festival; it is a constant reminder of those lofty ideals created and propagated by the Guru.

The Khalsa were asked to maintain certain distinct physical characteristics to symbolise the dual nature of their personality — they were both warriors and sages. Like ascetics, their hair were not to be shorn as a pledge of dedication. A steel bracelet to denote the universality of God, a comb to keep the hair clean, underwear to denote chastity, and a steel dagger for defence were the other distinguishing marks of the Khalsa. Administering sweetened *amrit* (nectar) to his five disciples and to himself, the Guru declared: "The Khalsa shall not only be warlike but also sweeten the lives of those he is chosen to serve." The warrior saints were ordained to believe in the oneness of God, shun meaningless rituals and superstitions, respect all women, and consider everyone equal.

The symbols and ideals were earmarked for the Khalsa for political, geophysical and spiritual upliftment of society today. Belief in the universality of God, propagated by Sikh

gurus, paves the way for religious and communal harmony without infringing on the rights of any particular religion. Social and economic equality is something worth sincerely striving and working for, especially in a country riddled with caste differences. There is urgent need for the uplift of less privileged sections of society. These are ideals the Guru impressed upon the Khalsa and are enshrined in their way of life.

The Guru held physical prowess to be as sacred as spiritual growth. He asked his followers to love their weapons, and excel in vigorous physical activities like horse riding, marksmanship and swordsmanship. They were to act as a bridge between Hindus and Muslims, and serve the poor without distinction of caste, creed or colour. To emphasise the importance of service, *deg*, the community kitchen, was to be as important as *teg*, the sword. Taking this cue, we should become more charitable and learn to share our resources, material and otherwise. The Guru asked his followers to call themselves 'Singh' (lions), and greet one another with the slogan *Waheguruji ka Khalsa, Waheguruji ki Fateh* (the Khalsa belongs to God, Victory be to God).

Baisakhi is therefore an occasion to remember anew the values of the Khalsa, and affirm our faith in them. Simultaneously, it is also a time of renewal, of moving ahead and letting go of the past, of mending fences and getting on with life. Harvest time is not just the culmination of months, sometimes even a year's hard work. It is the time of the year for festivities and spending, for progressing and evolving. The underlying message is to be in *Chardian Kallan*, ever in buoyant spirits. How important and relevant all these virtues are today is clear for all to see. ☛

Inder Raj Ahluwalia

Stanza XIX



ਅਸੰਖ ਨਾਵ ਅਸੰਖ ਥਾਵ॥
ਅਰੰਮ ਅਰੰਮ ਅਸੰਖ ਲੋਅ ॥
ਅਸੰਖ ਕਹਹਿ ਸਿਰਿ ਭਾਰੁ ਹੋਇ ॥
ਅਖਰੀ ਨਾਮੁ ਅਖਰੀ ਸਾਲਾਹ ॥
ਅਖਰੀ ਗਿਆਨੁ ਗੀਤ ਗੁਣ ਗਾਹ ॥
ਅਖਰੀ ਲਿਖਣੁ ਥੋਲਣੁ ਥਾਣਿ ॥
ਅਖਰਾ ਸਿਰਿ ਸੰਜੋਗੁ ਵਖਣਿ ॥
ਜਿਨਿ ਏਹਿ ਲਿਖੇ ਤਿਸੁ ਸਿਰਿ ਨਾਹਿ ॥
ਜਿਵ ਫੁਰਮਾਏ ਤਿਵ ਤਿਵ ਪਾਹਿ ॥
ਜੇਤਾ ਕੀਤਾ ਤੇਤਾ ਨਾਉ ॥
ਵਿਣੁ ਨਾਵੈ ਨਾਹੀ ਕੋ ਥਾਉ ॥
ਕੁਦਰਤਿ ਕਵਣ ਕਹਾ ਵੀਚਾਰੁ ॥
ਵਾਰਿਆ ਨ ਜਾਵਾ ਏਕ ਵਾਰ ॥
ਜੋ ਤੁਧੁ ਭਾਵੈ ਸਾਈ ਭਲੀ ਕਾਰ ॥
ਤੂ ਸਦਾ ਸਲਾਮਤਿ ਨਿਰੰਕਾਰ ॥੧੯॥



AKHAR the Imperishable

Words, they name You, You they praise.
 Numinous songs their voices raise
 And applaud Your virtues great.
 Words we speak and write and hymn.
 Words, on brows, our destinies print.
 God but writes, He suffers no writ.
 What He gives us that we pick.

- Jap(u), stanza 19

Akhār (Sanskrit, Akshar) literally means 'that which cannot be broken down', the imperishable. This term connotes at once God (because He is imperishable) and an alphabetic letter which also cannot be broken down. Our speech can be broken down into sentences, the sentences into words, the words into syllables and the syllables into letters; but letters cannot be broken down any further. Thus they constitute the minimum unit of language. They are designated as the phonemes of spoken language, and graphemes of the written. Metaphorically, however, the term *akhar* is often employed to signify Word or even language.

In the above verse, the Guru informs us of the ways in which words or letters (*akhar*) are serviceable in our spiritual endeavour:

Words, they name You, You they praise.
 Numinous songs their voices raise
 And applaud Your virtues great.
 Words we speak and write and hymn.

-SGGS P7

ਅਖਰੀ ਨਾਮੁ ਅਖਰੀ ਸਾਲਾਹੁ । ਅਖਰੀ ਗਿਆਨੁ ਗੀਤੁ ਗੁਣ ਗਾਹੁ ।
 ਅਖਰੀ ਲਿਖਨੁ ਬੋਲਨੁ ਬਾਣਿ । ਅਖਰਾ ਸਿਰਿ ਸੰਜੋਗੁ ਵਖਾਣਿ ।
 ਜਿਨਿ ਏਹਿ ਲਿਖੇ ਬਿਸੁ ਸਿਰਿ ਨਾਹਿ । ਜਿਵ ਭੁਰਮਾਏ ਤਿਵ ਤਿਵ ਪਾਹਿ ।
 (ਜਪੁ ਪਉੜੀ ੧੯)

These lines encapsulate, at once, the Guru's ideas of the Word Culture on the one hand, and of Poetics of Numinous Verse on the other.

The Word Culture

The culture of the Vedas was primarily an oral culture. The four Vedas were composed roughly over a thousand years, but were not written down until centuries later when the phonetic Devanagari alphabet was invented. Until then, memorisation was the only means to ensure the transmission of Vedic hymns. However, by the times of the

Gurus, scripts had already been evolved and writing was well in vogue. Yet, for the transmission of the holy texts, Sanskrit still continued to be the preferred language, and Devanagari, the preferred script. Knowledge of both had been almost exclusively the sanctuary of the Brahmin class and the laity was, by and large, bereft of these. The Gurus brought into vogue not only folk language, but also folk script in order to let everyone find access to the divine mystery. From the first Guru on, they committed their compositions in the written form² to preserve their God-inspired works. (When Guru Nanak paid a visit to the Ka'ba in Mecca, he was carrying with him the manuscript of his own compositions. It is said that a group of qazis and mullahs gathered around him and asked him, "Open the book [that you are carrying] and tell us [according to it] who is considered better, the Hindu or the Muslim?" In the words of Bhai Gurdas, "ਪੁਸਤਕ ਬੋਲ ਕਿਤਾਬ ਨੂੰ ਵਡਾ ਹਿੰਦੂ ਕਿ ਮੁਸਲਮਾਨੋਈ।" The manuscript, Guru Nanak duly handed over to his successor and this kind of transmission became a continual practice from one Guru to the next.)

In the Indian thought, *shruti* (that which is heard) is the revealed truth. Thus Word is God. In the Greek Pythagorean tradition, contemplation of mathematical laws is the doorway to revelation of God. That is to say, Number is God. Guru Nanak seems not only to give credence to 'Word is God' but also to 'Number is God' as he chose to start his work with a numeral - the number 1 - before the first word 'Oankar'. The Guru thus seems to reconcile the two major traditions noted above. However, his major emphasis continues on the verbal mode. His emphasis on *Shabd Surt Yoga*, in fact, spells his preference for the spiritual adventure in the oral-acoustic space. The merits of listening have been emphasised by him in no less than four stanzas of Jap(u)ji. The first level communication is the spoken word that provides contact with the resonant and meaningful world of sound. However, the Guru places *likhan* (writing) before

bolan (speaking) possibly because written communication preserves the word, which spoken communication cannot. However, both these modes are admissible in the realm of sacred verse.

Poetics of the sacred verse

The line 'ਅਮਰੀ ਗਿਆਨ ਗੀਤ ਗੁਣ ਗਾਧ' is not only exquisitely alliterative, it really provides in *sutric* form the poetics of sacred verse. Every word of it provides amazing insights.

Gyan connotes cognitive organization. Cognition takes place at three strategic levels. The *first* is the knowledge of the sensible world, the phenomena. The *second* is representation of the phenomena at the psychic level, their mental permutation and combination, and abstractions deduced from them. The *third* consists of intuitions about the nature of reality. The goal of this level is to pierce the veil of appearances, and experience the flux of numinal creativity - the mystic reality. At this level, the microcosm intuitively becomes aware of the macrocosm of which it is a part. It is this third level that Gurbani recognizes as real and ultimate knowledge.

Geet or song embodies aesthetic organization. Every song has two components, poetry and music. Poetry provides, in aesthetically virile symbols and metaphors, a description of the indescribable. It also voices supplications of quest as also the experience of the divine response to such supplications. Music provides non-literal symbolization of such an experience. Music is most completely itself and irreducibly symbolic. Unlike other cultural rubrics, it is not subject to decadence and has the capacity to directly penetrate the soul. All music is derived from the primordial sacred sound that transformed Being into Becoming. *Geet*, as a sacred genre, is not a mere ditty, it is a song of divine wisdom, a numinal hymn. It is sung while contemplating the divine. That is why Guru Nanak says ਗਾਵਹੁ ਗੀਤੁ ਨ ਬਿਰਹਤਾ ਨਾਨਕ ਬ੍ਰਹਮ ਬੀਚਾਰੈ। (ਵਹਰੀਸ ਮ: ੧)

*Do not sing love-ditties or songs of desperation,
Sing of contemplation on the Absolute.* - SGGS p.581

Guna does not refer here to the Sankhya trilogy of *Sattva*, *Rajas* and *Tamas* (The Sankhya trilogy is rooted in the Varanashrama system. *Sattva* is the quality of the Brahmin, *Rajas*, the quality of the Kshatriya and the Vaisha, and *Tamas*, the quality of Shudra and the outcaste). On the contrary, it refers to virtues of the Divine, the divine attributes. By chanting spiritedly of such attributes, one becomes one with the Master of those attributes. As the Guru says,

ਗੁਣ ਕਹਿ ਗੁਣੀ ਸਮਾਵਟਿਆ। (ਵਹਰੀਸ ਮ: ੩)
*Chanting His virtues, one is absorbed into
the Lord of virtues.* - SGGS p.110

Gah has a number of connotations. First of all it means 'to dive in order to fathom the depth or extent'. The numenal song dives deep into the virtues of the Lord, even if it cannot fully fathom His depth or extent. That must at least be its endeavour '*Gah*' also means 'the act of churning'. In the sacred lore, it symbolises repeating the Name of God. Perseverance with patience is prescribed for such churning of the Divine Name:

ਹਰਿ ਕਾ ਚਿਲੈਦਨਾ ਚਿਲੈਦਹੁ ਮੇਰੇ ਛਾਈ।
ਸਹਜਿ ਚਿਲੈਦਹੁ ਜੈਸੇ ਝਰੂ ਨ ਜਾਈ।

(ਆਸਾ ਕਬੀਰ ਜੀ ਦੀ)

*O my siblings (in faith), churn ye the Lord's churn.
Do so steadily lest the essence (butter) is lost.*

- SGGS p. 478

A third meaning of '*gah*' is to tread upon harvested corn in order to separate the corn from the chaff. Here it signifies treading in life in such a way that one pursues spiritual values (corn) desisting from worldly pursuits (chaff). It can be seen that all the three meanings are contextually relevant here.

Having said this, the Guru goes beyond the code of language to the code of destiny, which, according to popular belief, is inscribed on every brow.

Words, on brows, our destinies print. - Jap(u)ji, stanza 19.

The Guru, however, immediately reminds us of the one exception to this truism. God only writes but is not governed by any writ of destiny.

God but writes, He suffers no writ. - Ibid.

The parable of the raft

Any sacred text is a vehicle. It is to be followed, and not carried as a burden of learning. One is here reminded of the *Parable of the Raft*. A man is on a journey and comes to a vast stretch of water that he has to cross. On this side, the shore is full of dangers; on the other, it is quite safe. There is no bridge, and no boat plies between the two shores. So, he gathers some wood, straw, grass, twigs and leaves to make himself a raft. With it he crosses over to the other side. Safe on the other side, he thinks, 'How great a service this raft has rendered to me. With its aid I have crossed over to safety. It would be good if I carry this raft on my head wherever I go. And that, in fact, he did.'

Having narrated this parable, the Buddha asked his monks, 'was that man acting properly in carrying the raft on his head? Or, should he have beached it on the shore, or moored it and left it afloat, and then gone wherever he wanted to go?' The Buddha then went on to say, 'in the manner of the raft, O monks, I have taught you my doctrine. It is for crossing over and not for carrying.' (Majjhima Nikaya i. 134-135: Parable of the Raft.)

That is what the Guru also teaches and goes on to prescribe discreet use of the scriptures.

*Liberation is attained not by reading the Vedas,
Semitic scriptures, Smrities or Shastras.
If a Gurmukh chants but one akhar,
he shall spotless reputation acquire?*

- SGGS p. 747

ਬੇਦ ਕਠੇਬ ਸਿਮ੍ਰਿਤਿ ਸਭਿ ਸਾਸਤ ਇਨ ਪੜਿਆ ਮੁਕਤਿ ਨ ਹੋਈ।
ਏਕੁ ਅਖਰੁ ਜੋ ਗੁਰਮੁਖ ਜਾਪੈ ਰਿਸ ਕੀ ਨਿਰਮਲ ਸੋਈ।

(ਸੂਰੀ ਮ: ੫)

Akhar as Divine Word

In Gurbani, *akhar* also connotes the Divine Word - the Primordial Word that brought the Creation into existence and which continues to sustain it. Guru Nanak says in his important work, *Oankar*:

The Divine Word, Oankar, saves the world.

Oankar ferries the God-oriented across

Listen to, and contemplate, the Akhar, Onam,

This Akhar, Onam, is the essence of the three worlds.

- SGGS p. 930

ਓਅੰਕਾਰਿ ਸਬਦਿ ਦੁਪਧੇ। ਓਅੰਕਾਰਿ ਗੁਰਮੁਖਿ ਤਰੇ।

ਓਨਮ ਅਖਰੁ ਸੁਨਹੁ ਬੀਚਾਰੁ। ਓਨਮ ਅਖਰੁ ਵਿਲਾਸੁ ਸਾਰੁ।

(ਰਾਮਕਲੀ ਮ: ੧)

The Divine Word pervades the entire visible universe. Only God Almighty is beyond it.

The Akhar is seen in the entire visible universe.

Says Nanak, only the Supreme Lord

remains unaffected by it. - SGGS p.261.

ਦ੍ਰਿਸ਼ਟਿਮਾਨ ਅਖਰੁ ਹੈ ਜੇਭਾ। ਲਨਕ ਪਾਰਬ੍ਰਹਮ ਨਿਰਲੇਪਾ।

(ਬਾਵਨ ਅਖਰੀ ਮ: ੫)

Kabir brings out the distinction between *akhar* as a letter, and *akhar* as the Imperishable Lord.

One may bring together all the fifty-two akhars (letters),

Yet may not recognise the One Akhar,

(the Imperishable Lord) - SGGS p.343

ਬਾਵਨ ਅਖਰ ਜੋਰੇ ਆਨ। ਸਕਿਆ ਨ ਅਖਰੁ ਏਕੁ ਪਛਾਨ।

Mere learning, or being only a man of letters, carries one nowhere on the spiritual path. Even scholarship of scriptures does not help. It is the one Divine Word that can ferry one across the 'ocean of fear' and bestow everlasting bliss.

Akhar as Primordial Utterance

When the Guru says *akhri Naam*, he brings together the two meanings of *akhar* - the unbreakable 'letter' as well as the imperishable 'Naam'. *Akhar* also signifies the

Primordial Divine Utterance (*kuvaao*) that caused the Creation and continues to sustain it. The Guru says,

Wherever there is speech, there akhar is.

Where there is no speech, the mind rests on nothing,

The Lord is both in speech and in silence.

None knows Him as He really is. - SGGS p.340

ਜਹਾ ਬੋਲ ਤਹ ਅਛਰ ਆਵਾ। ਜਹ ਅਬੋਲ ਤਹ ਮਨੁ ਨ ਰਹਾਵਾ।

ਬੋਲ ਅਬੋਲ ਮਧਿ ਹੈ ਸੋਈ। ਜਸ ਚਿਹੁ ਹੈ ਤਸ ਲਖੈ ਨ ਕੋਈ।

(ਗਉੜੀ ਕਾਬੀਰ ਜੀ ਕੀ)

The emphasis is obviously not on learning of scriptures; instead, it is on praxis of the Holy Naam.

The mind wherein the one Akhar of the Lord dwells,

attains ultimate bliss - SGGS p.261

ਏਕ ਅਖਰੁ ਹਰਿ ਮਨਿ ਬਸਤ ਨਾਨਕ ਹੋਤ ਨਿਹਾਲ।

(ਗਉੜੀ ਮ: ੫)

A little learning is enough

Guru Nanak Dev cautions us that

Merely reading (of scriptures) only

generates vain argumentation. - SGGS p.1153

ਪੜਿਆ ਬਾਦੁ ਬਿਬਾਦੁ ਭਇਆ। (ਭੈਰਉ ਅਸਟ ਪਟੀਆ ਮ: ੧)

Guru Amar Das cautions the Pundit, the learned man thus:

O Pundit! reflect in your own mind

Why read so much and carry such big load?

- SGGS p.1261

ਪੰਡਿਤ ਇਸੁ ਮਨ ਕਾ ਕਰਹੁ ਬੀਚਾਰੁ।

ਅਵਰੁ ਕਿ ਬਹੁਤਾ ਪੜਹਿ ਚਿਤਿਵਰਿ ਭਾਰੁ।

(ਮਲਾਰ ਮ: ੩)

This caution is particularly pertinent because, as Kabir says,

To enable the mind to realize,

even a little learning is enough - SGGS p.340

ਮਨ ਸਮਝਾਵਨ ਕਾਰਨੇ ਕਛੁਅਕ ਪੜੀਐ ਗਿਆਨੁ।

(ਚਾਗ ਗਉੜੀ ਪੂਰਬੀ ਕਾਬੀਰ ਜੀ ਕੀ)

One is reminded here of Bulleh Shah, the famous Punjabi Sufi poet, who said

My friend! I need no more learning.

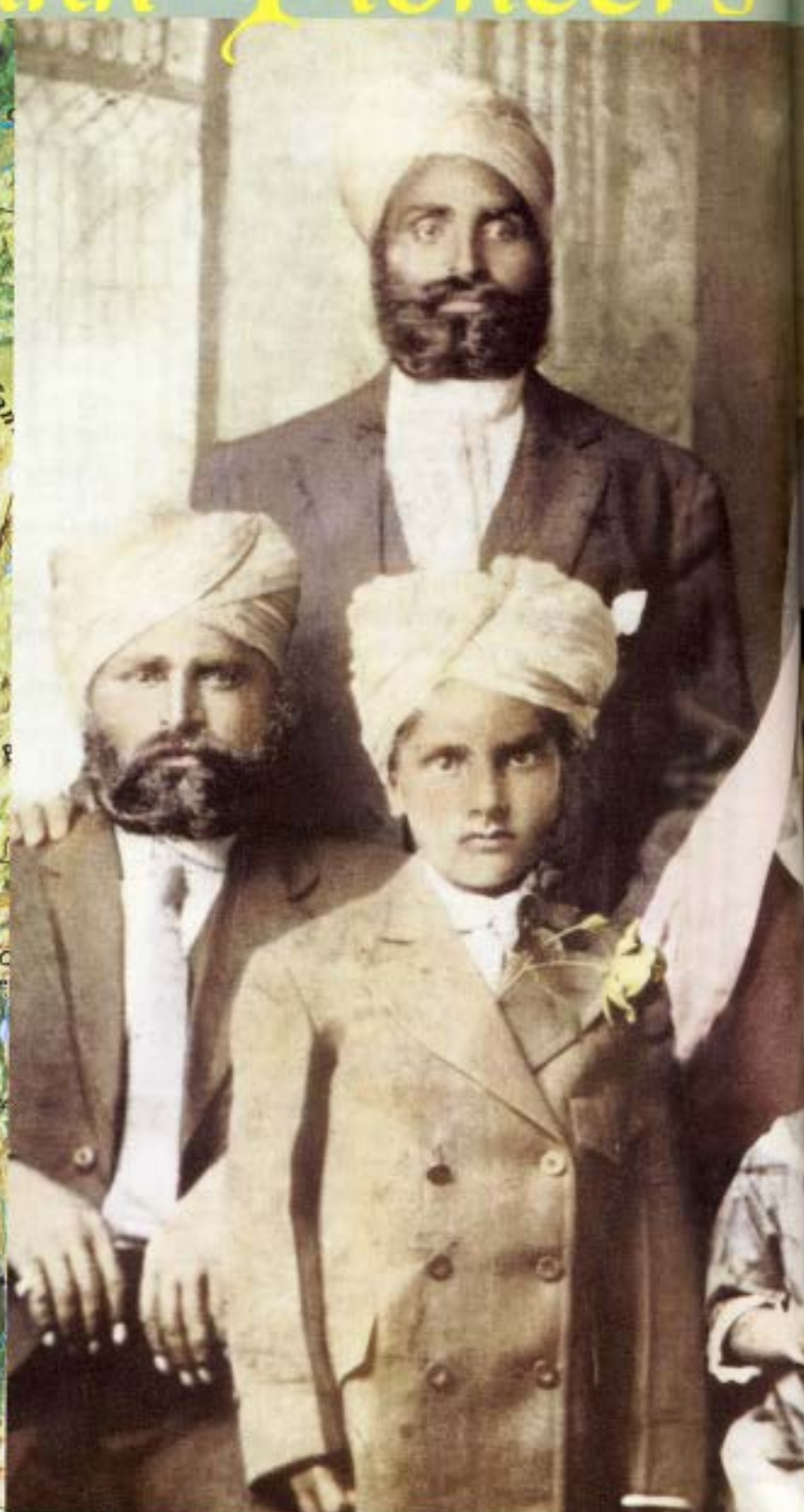
I require only one letter, alif. - Kafiya.

ਇਲਮੇ ਬਸ ਕਰੀ ਓ ਯਾਰ। ਇਕੋ ਅਲਫ ਮੇਰੇ ਦਰਕਾਰ।

Alif is the first letter of the Arabic-Persian alphabet. Here it signifies *Allah*, because *Allah* starts with the letter *alif*.

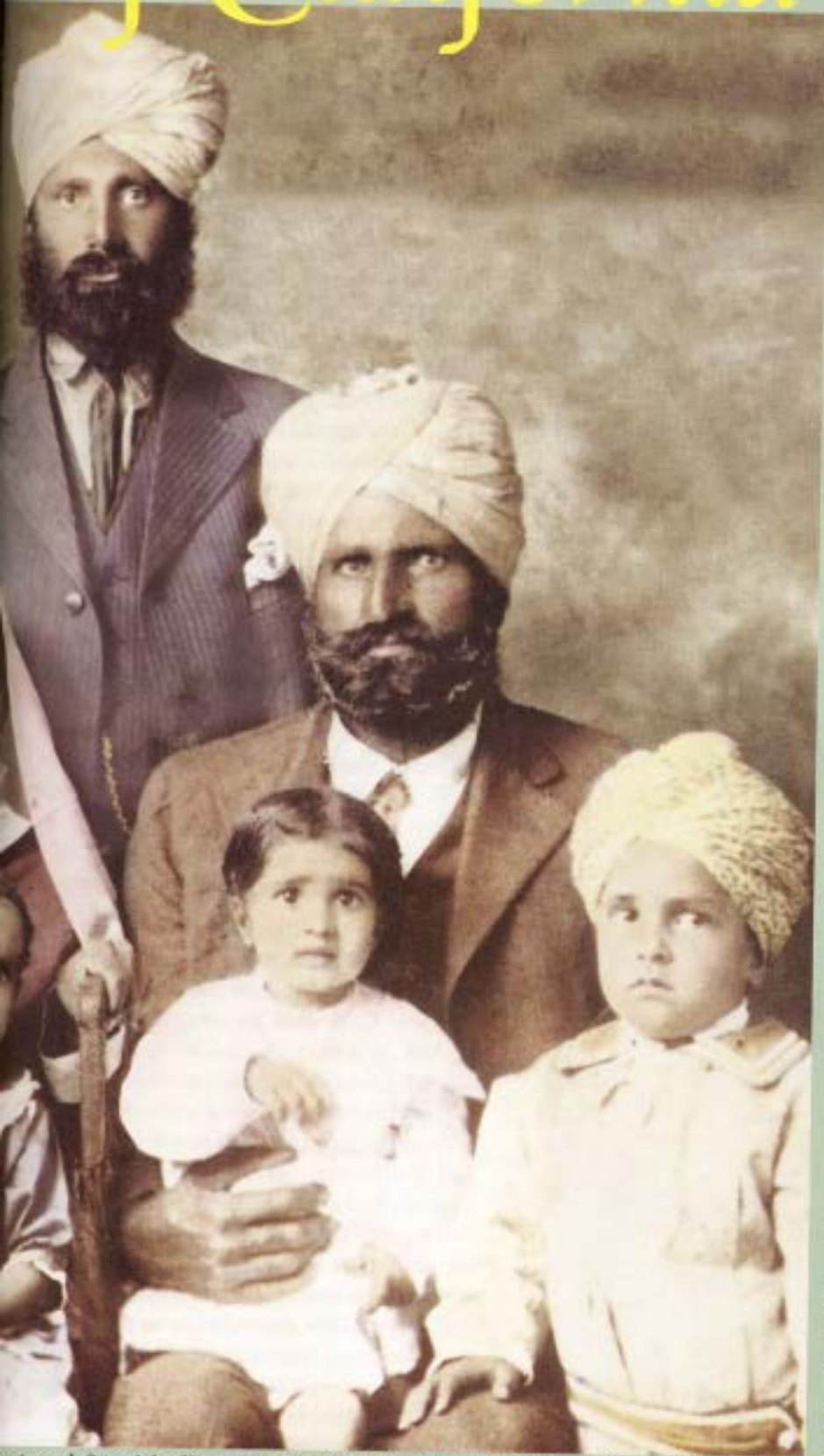
Prof. Jaswant Singh Neki

The Sikh Pioneers



Among the pioneers: Bakhshish Singh and family with friends, Astoria, Oregon, 1916. Bakhshish Singh; back row: Mula Singh, Arjan Singh.

of California



front row, left to right: Karm, Kartar, Budh; middle row: Bhan Singh, Kapoor, Rattan Kaur,

The Sikh pioneers who came from India, across the great Asian landmass and thence by ship across the vast Pacific Ocean to the western coast of north America at the close of the 1800s were only a few decades behind the great movement "westwards" of the American colonialists from the eastern United States. The wars against the French, Spanish and native Indians were over by the 1760s but the age-old presence of the original inhabitants along the Appalachians prevented mass movements of the American settlers, very hungry for land. In 1803, Thomas Jefferson bought Louisiana "for a fistful of dollars" and after the war of 1812, which weakened the native Indian resistance in the Mississippi Valley, American settlers poured into Alabama, Illinois and Missouri. The native Indians were squeezed onto reservations of diminishing size. The war with Mexico broke out in 1846 but the Americans marched largely unopposed through Santa Fe and towards San Diego, occupying land that would become America's Southwest. The gold rush followed and by 1849, prospectors and home-grown miners poured into California, many transitting San Francisco and even if only a few struck gold, California became the most favoured emigrant destination of them all and achieved full statehood shortly thereafter.

The Sacramento Valley, where the majority of Sikh settlers moved into, initially prospered as a agricultural centre of Swiss immigrants till the gold rush. It soon became hub of river transportation and terminus of the first California railroad but a modern ship canal in the 1960s has since made it a deepwater port for the area's extensive agricultural production. The area also has military installations and besides food processing, has printing and aerospace industries. Yuba City, at the junction of the Feather and Yuba rivers, was laid out during the gold rush of 1849, at the original site of a native Indian village and a large percentage of its population today are Sikhs.



(Above) Group of Sikh immigrants, Angel Island, c.1910.

(Below) Sikh mill workers at the Northern Pacific Lumber Company, Barnet, British Columbia, c. 1905.



The Punjabis were the first South Asians to migrate to North America. Their history of migration to America is full of adventure, a story of struggle against discrimination, and a battle for survival. The first verifiable record of an East Indian in North America is a 1670 Colonial diary that mentions the visit to Salem in Massachusetts, by an Indian from Madras who was accompanying a sea captain. Such visits by an Indian to American soil were sporadic, and the first significant South Asian immigration to North America began in 1803 at a time when Ranjit Singh forged the Sikh Kingdom. In the late 19th Century, Sikhs were evident in larger numbers, as recorded by the *San Francisco Chronicle* of 6 April 1899. Between 1903 and 1908, about 6,000 Punjabis entered Canada in North America, and nearly 3,000 crossed into the United States. The first group of immigrants can be divided into two general groups, the majority were illiterate and semiliterate labourers from agricultural and/or military backgrounds. The second, very small group was the educated elite group of professionals and students. The labourers were mainly peasant Sikhs, with some Muslims from the Doaba and Malwa regions of Punjab province in Northwest India, while the latter was composed of Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims from throughout northern India. The working class South Asians left few written records of their early experiences. In contrast, the educated group wrote prolifically on issues such as immigration and citizenship rights.

Between 1903-1908, the Punjabis primarily worked on the Western Pacific Railway in Northern California. Two thousand Punjabis worked on a 700-mile road between Oakland and Salt Lake City (which is probably now the modern Interstate 80). Some worked in lumber mills and logging camps in Oregon, Washington and California. Several hundred Punjabi workers had moved across the border into Bellington because of rising anti-Asian sentiment in Canada. Mill owners were interested in a steady labour supply, and the Punjabis could be depended upon to show up every morning. Then on the night of September 5, 1907, a mob of 600 lumberjacks of European ancestry raided the living quarters of Punjabi mill-workers in Bellington. Punjabi possessions

were thrown away into the street and their valuables were stolen. A few Punjabis leaped out of windows in an attempt to escape. Many others were dragged out of beds, half-naked and whipped, and then forced into the streets. Some Punjabis fled across the border into Canada and about 400 were jailed. There were no fatalities but the police "looked the other way", allowed mobs to expel the Punjabis from certain areas, although they did protect individuals from beatings. The press and the general public were unsympathetic to the plight of the Punjabis. The employers however welcomed the Punjabis, and some used them to undercut the organising efforts of Euro-American workers. The Punjabis even became strike-breakers in some situations. They were paid lower rates than other workers who still organised to drive the Punjabis away; and the community was pushed out of Oregon, Washington and Northern California.

The Asiatic Exclusion League was formed in 1908, whose leaders were also leaders of the organised labour movement. By 1910, the Asiatic Exclusion League was successful in lobbying for the imposition of immigration restrictions on Indians. The Punjabi immigration to the United States was really a spill-over from Canada when the Canadian Authorities firmly shut the door in 1908, but by then a small community of Punjabi labourers had established themselves in the Pacific coast states. There were over 6,000 Punjabis in California by the end of 1910. The Punjabis, who were by and large Sikhs, established the Khalsa Diwan Society in 1909,

Passage to California

At age seventeen, while still beardless, Munshi Singh joined his cousin and seven other Sikhs from his native village on a trip to Canada. His father gave him 400 rupees for the trip and Munshi arrived in Vancouver on the "Empress of Canada", on 14 October 1908. Munshi found Canada too cold and after six days crossed the United States border into Seattle. From Seattle, Munshi and fourteen other Sikhs rode the freight cars to Chicago. None of them could speak English, and Munshi recalled the strange looks they received as people peered at their turbans and beards and listened to their different language.

Many of the Sikhs had received money from relatives or had mortgaged their land to pay the fare of Rs. 300-400 from India to North America. Most saw their move as a temporary strategy and planned to return home after making enough money to clear debt or to purchase land. These men usually went by steamship from Calcutta to Hong Kong, a journey of twelve days, and thence from Hong Kong to Canada or the United States, another eighteen or nineteen days. As immigration restrictions tightened in Canada, more immigrants came directly to California, passing through the Angel Island station on their way to San Francisco. While they were being detained at the station, prospective immigrants were housed in barracks, crowded and sometimes unsanitary. In 1910, Luther Steward, Acting Commissioner for the Immigration Service in San Francisco said: "If a private individual had such an establishment, he would be arrested by local health authorities".

Indian immigration to the United States peaked during 1907-1908 and again in 1910, but the numbers were always small in comparison to East Asian immigration. Each year approximately ten to twenty women entered as immigrants, regardless of the number of male immigrants, and the percentage of Indian women to men was the lowest for any group immigrating from Asia.

The Immigrating Act of 1917, prohibiting immigration from an Asian "barred" zone and imposing literacy restrictions, along with the Oriental Exclusion Act of 1924, banning most immigration from Asia, slowly stifled immigration from India and between 1931-45 only 841 Indians immigrated legally to the United States. Though no reliable statistics are available, many Indians entered the country illegally, going first to Panama and then coming up through Mexico and crossing the border. For a fee, an established network would facilitate the border-crossing. Joginder Singh, however, found that he had to pay a double fee. Jog, as he was called by everyone, "entered the United States in 1922 through Mexico at the cost of \$ 400. The usual price for smuggling at that time was \$ 200 if the alien would shave off his beard and remove his turban [sic] so as to hide his East Indian identity. Jog refused to cooperate, however, and was smuggled across the International border at the higher price".

After the passage of the Luce-Celler bill in 1946 immigration increased and between 1945-1965, from India 6907 and from Pakistan 1497 immigrants were admitted. After the Hart-Celler Act of 1965 immigration jumped dramatically with 582 immigrants from India and 187 from Pakistan in 1965, and 2438 immigrants from India and 347 from Pakistan in 1966. The number of immigrants from South Asia has risen steadily since then with around 40,000 immigrants per year admitted during the decade of the 1990s.

and by 1912, the first United States Gurdwara was built in Stockton. Indians were not allowed to purchase any land except one for building a place of worship; nor could an Indian run a business independently, yet these Punjabi immigrants continued to struggle against all odds. The growing network of railroad lines brought increased agricultural activity to large areas of Northern California. The Punjabis started moving into farming jobs in the Fresno area and by 1910, the agricultural business had expanded swiftly and the Punjabis started getting the higher wages



Working on the Pacific & Eastern Railroad construction, c.1909.

because of their traditional agricultural expertise. (The Punjabis had origins in the Indus Valley and history records the Indus Valley civilisation as the first to get into agriculture). However, in Canada, the Punjabis remained in the lumber industry.

Professor Bruce La Brack, in his article entitled "Study of Sikhism and Punjabi migration" writes about the Stockton Gurdwara: "During those trying years, the Gurdwara in Stockton was the religious and social centre for East Indian people. Here Sikhs, Hindus, Mexicans, Catholics and even Muslims met, worshipped and socialised with each other. The Pacific Coast Khalsa Diwan Society built the Gurdwara in 1912, now a historic place. It was here that the Ghadar Party was founded with the view to doing-away with the British rule in India". The Punjabi settlements began farming lands in the Sacramento Valley, the San Joaquin Valley and in the Imperial Valley in California. Most Sikhs worked for the next few years and established permanent homes. Some worked in the Vacaville Orchards, five hundred living in Newcastle, picking and hoeing orchards. In 1909, four hundred worked in the best fields in Hamilton, Oxnard and Visalia and most of them eventually settled in these places. In Fresno, ranchers considered the Punjabis reliable in their financial



Studio portrait of California Sikhs in 1910.

dealings. By 1919, about 60% of the Imperial Valley was owned by non-residents. Tenant farmers ran 88% of all the ranches around by 1924. They were able to provide regular profit from land without supervision. But the Punjabis were not content to remain labourers, and soon started pooling money to lease land and then started seeking loans. By this time, they had acquired some capital, and with their reputation as hard workers already well established, they were viewed as reliable borrowers. Many Punjabis decided to stay in the Imperial Valley. The present mayor of El Centro is a third-generation Punjabi-Mexican, David Singh Dhillon.

In 1923, Asian immigration, except from Japan, had been completely halted and the "Thind" case of 1923 declared Indians ineligible for citizenship on the basis that they were not white people. A great deal of race literature preceded and followed the "Thind" case (see box). Ethnically and linguistically, the South Asians in the U.S. and in Canada were actually Caucasians, speaking languages related to other Indo-European tongues, which stemmed from Sanskrit. But from the American view-point, because of their origins in South Asia, they were all considered "Oriental". Because of the restrictive immigration laws, the males could not bring their wives and family and so many of them married Mexican women and lived close to the Mexican border. By 1946, there were 400 Punjabi families in California. Virtually 80% involved Mexican women married to Punjabi men. Culturally, it was tough-going. Mexican women insisted on raising the children in their own culture, brought them up as Catholics, and taught them Spanish and English. Although the Punjabis were tolerant of their wives, they began to reassert their traditional family control. The cultural conflicts saw at least a fifth of the marriages ending in divorce but the women received custody of the children. Most of these children then married among Anglos or Hispanics. The Punjabis had achieved a surprising degree of economic success in California but at great personal price.

Since a vast majority of immigrants were Sikhs, the earliest immigration organisation centered on the Gurdwaras. The difficulties faced by the Sikhs inevitably put them in the lap of revolutionaries. The traditional Sikh response against domination was to vigorously fight back. The Gurdwaras were the only public places where they and other Indians could meet and so these became strong centres of

From Laborers to Landowners

Their confidence in their own ability to make good and the hope in the success of their endeavour, made them look forward to the future; and by dint of perseverance they have, in the course of only a few years, changed their status from that of common laborers to that of farm operators, farmers, independent businessmen, and even employers.

The Indian (mostly Sikh) immigrants went to work in the lumber mills of British Columbia and Oregon, helped build the Western Pacific Railroad lines, and found work in factories or iron foundries. But since most of the immigrants were skilled in agriculture, they were naturally drawn to the farming areas. "They had been used to farming since their childhood", says R.K.Das. "The farming opportunities in California offered an irresistible temptation to them. Moreover, practically all of them had been owners of farmland and homestead in India. The spirit of freedom gained from the ownership of land is a dominant feature in their life. When California offered the opportunity to them to lease land or even to buy it, they moved southward". The similarity of the California landscape to Punjab gave a sense of homeland to this unfamiliar world. Puna Singh describes his first impression of California. "On arriving in the Sacramento Valley, one could not help but be reminded of the Punjab. Fertile fields stretched across the flat valley to the foothills lying far in the distance. Most of the jobs available were agricultural and I found many Punjabis already working throughout the area".

The immigrants moved around California in work groups, appointing a "boss man" who spoke English to contract work for the group. They began in the Sacramento Valley, working in the orchards, vineyards, and sugar beet fields, moving on to the vineyards and citrus groves of the San Joaquin Valley in central California and finally to the Imperial Valley in the south working in the cantaloupe and cotton fields. The work groups kept up informal contact with each other throughout the state. The Punjabis quickly built a reputation as efficient farm laborers and competent men of business. "Almost immediately they established relationships with bankers and lawyers, getting loans and filing court cases, in their new setting. Their success was partly because of their hard-working Punjabi background and perhaps also because of their previous experiences with British colonial rule".

In 1920 the immigrants owned 2099 acres and were leasing 86,340 acres of farmland. This land was almost exclusively in the Imperial and Sacramento Valleys, where they grew large volume cash crops like cotton and rice, but also crops that required intensive farming like peaches, grapes, pears, apricots, almonds, beans, peas, corn, potatoes, celery, asparagus, and lettuce.

Community and Religion

The Stockton Sikh Temple became the centre of religious life for the Sikhs and of social and political life for all the Punjabis in California, who gathered there several times a year. Nand Kaur from Yuba City described this as a convention, "a three-day sequence of meetings, with a meeting of the 'Indian Lady Education Society' or 'Doaba Educational Society' on the first day, a Ghadar Party meeting on the second day, and then the celebration of the birthday of the Tenth Guru, Guru Gobind Singh, on the third day". One woman remembered the Stockton Temple as the place she played with the Khuan children each year when they came to pick peaches.

Of central importance to the immigrant community in California was the Pacific Coast Khalsa Diwan Society, dedicated to promoting the education and welfare of the immigrant Indians. The Society was largely responsible in 1915 for the construction of the two-story wooden Sikh Temple in Stockton, one of the first religious centres for Indians in the United States. R.K.Das provided a contemporary description of the Stockton Temple. "On the ground floor is a hall for meetings, also several rooms and a residence of the priest. Upstairs is a prayer hall. There is an altar at one end of the hall on which is kept the Granth or sacred book containing the precepts of the Gurus or the leaders of Sikhism. The hall is decorated with rich carpets on the floor, a rich canopy above and pictures and texts on the walls. In this hall scriptures are read and expounded by the priest twice daily". The Sikh Temple also maintained a free kitchen that was open to

all, as well as facilities for the care of elderly Sikhs.

In Punjab, the gurdwaras were centres of worship for the Sikhs, but they were also meeting place where secular concerns were discussed and dealt with. The Stockton Sikh Temple followed this model and Punjabis from all over California gathered there several times a year. At these gatherings the men would meet together in a group and the women would sit separately, according to Indian custom. However, this division had a more practical basis for the California Punjabis. While the men all spoke Punjabi, the women chose English as a common language since some of the wives were Mexican, some Punjabi, and some white. The Sikh Temple became a center of Ghadar Party activity after the 1917 trials and hosted many social and political events, such as the lecture by Sarojini Naidu, who spoke there during her 1929 tour of the United States.

Muslims, who made up about 10 percent of the early immigrant group, kept up their religious practices in the United States in various ways, meeting as groups in people's homes or rented halls, often traveling great distances to be together at special times. In 1919, California Muslims formed the Moslem Association dedicated to social improvement, Americanisation, reformation and education. Partition and the creation of an independent India and Pakistan sharpened awareness of religious identities among the California immigrant community and the Muslims came to feel the need for a permanent Islamic place of worship. In May 1947, the first mosque in California was constructed at Fifth and V Streets in Sacramento.

After Punjabi men began to marry Mexican women, Catholicism also became a factor in the community. Usually the husband would retain his religion and the wife would retain hers, but the children would be baptised in the Catholic Church, often attending catechism classes and receiving confirmation. Godparents for the baptisms were drawn from the Punjabi-Mexican couples. These practices meant the Mexicans wives could remain in the Catholic Church and continue to take communion.



Home Life

We took the best of two worlds and made one world.

While most of the early immigrants intended to work a few years in the United States and then return to India, as they became established in farming or successful in business they began to think of staying permanently. But immigration policies severely restricted the entry of the immigrant's families into the United States. Because of these policies only a very few Indian women immigrated to the United States before 1945. According to R.K.Das, nothing embittered the immigrants "as much as this policy of exclusion; for it is not only injustice to them, but also to their innocent wives and children".

A few men did succeed in immigrating with their wives. Balkrishish Singh, who had first come to San Francisco in 1899 as a businessman, returned permanently in 1910 with his new wife, Rattan Kaur. The couple lived first in Oregon and finally settled in the San Joaquin Valley. The few Punjabi women who did immigrate felt very isolated at first in the United States. In India the women were rarely alone, working together, sharing the domestic duties. When interviewed by Allan Miller, Nand Kaur, the wife of Puna Singh, said "she was very lonely when she first came to America, but, since then, because of her family and occasional get-togethers with Mexican wives of Sikhs, she feels happier". Mrs Singh's son Paul had recently married the daughter of Lashman Singh from Los Angeles in a civil ceremony followed by a Sikh ceremony at the Stockton Temple, after which a banquet, including 75 pounds of "Sikh candy", was served.

But many men could not bring brides from India and so sought wives among women living in the United States. Anti-miscegenation laws, which stayed on the books in California until 1948, prohibited intermarriage between races. This meant that it was hard for the Indian men to marry white women. Although a number of these marriages did take place, they were always the occasion for comment. When "well-to-do farmer B.K.Singh married the sixteen-year old daughter of one of his tenants in 1918 one headline read, 'Hindu Weds White Girl by Stealing Away to Arizona'. The article speculated that since Imperial County would not issue a licence for a Punjabi and a white woman, it was doubtful that the clerk in Yuma acted legally".

Most Indian men sought wives among the Mexican women, many of whom were themselves recent

immigrants to the United States, fleeing from the violence of the Mexican revolution. While these marriages were technically between different races, according to race definitions of the time, most civil authorities sanctioned them, giving the same race on the marriage registry for both bride and groom - "brown", "black", or "white". When a Punjabi did marry a Mexican wife it was common for her to then facilitate the marriage of her sisters or other relatives to Punjabis. Cultural differences sometimes caused friction. The men were not used to the degree of freedom the women expected. And in a system where business partners became, in many ways, like an extended family, the women found they had the strange and unwelcome duty of cooking and washing for their husbands unmarried partners. The rate of divorce, sometimes reaching 20 percent, was slightly higher than the average at that time. Still the majority of the marriages were stable unions, characterised by tolerance and love. Moola Singh married Susanna Mesa Rodriguez Singh in 1937. About the marriage Moola relates:

When I met Susanna, she did sewing, she's a good farmer girl. Susanna, she didn't want to buy anything, she only wanted to buy groceries. She chopped cotton, she worked, she didn't even want to buy a dress. I went to the store, I bought her a dress.

Although the Punjabi men were tolerant and adaptable to the new culture themselves, they sometimes were more adamant in their expectations of their children, particularly of their sons. Karen Leonard relates a story told by Mike Singh. A group of fathers were sitting around one day boasting about their sons and betting heavily on who could run the fastest. Mile's father took him aside and told him to run like "a lionhearted Sikh warrior. Nobody can beat you; run and win". Mike gave it a try. "I ran", he remembers, "but the other boy was ahead of me most of the way ... Then I hit it and ran, a Sikh warrior, ran for my heart and beat him by two yards". The image of a Sikh warrior was not very familiar to the boy, but his father's unbending expectation - that he would be the best and never give up - struck a chord. According to Indian custom, the men did not expect their wives or daughters to inherit their land and usually made wills in favour of sons or other male relatives. Widows were often poorly provided for and usually fared better if their husbands died intestate.

In Northern California fewer immigrants married and the dominant pattern of social life continued to be bachelors living in dormitory-style bunkhouses or several bachelors living together on land that one of them owned or leased. They would hire one man to cook. Men in the camps ate mostly *roti*, an Indian whole wheat pancake, and vegetables, many grown in their gardens, including Punjabi favorites like *karela* (bitter gourd) and *okra*. The men were fond of cooking with butter and had a saying, *gli banarunda salan* (the butter makes the curry). R.K.Das estimated the Indians consumed about 15 pounds of butter a month each. Ice cream was also a food universally liked by the Punjabis and, when visiting, it was considered polite to bring along a package of ice cream as a gift for the host. One of their favourite pastime was making jokes, many revolving around someone's birthplace in Punjab. The men of the Patiala area would claim to be of excellent physique and prowess, while poking fun at people coming from Hoshiarpur, whom they viewed as hillbillies. Allan Miller reported that these men had very few bad habits except for the heavy drinking that was a regular part of their social interaction, during which discussion and debate could escalate into quarrels and violence.

The immigrants were frugal, directing most free money to purchase or leasing of land, but they also spent some money on luxuries. "The Hindustanees on the Pacific Coast", says R.K.Das, "enjoy a good many comforts, such as silk shirts and turbans, scented oil and soap and perfumery of all sorts". Some even bought gramophones and sent for records from India. Movies were also an occasional treat and the bachelors at Van Tiger Ranch had pictures of Indian movie actresses on their walls. They were fond of modern vehicles, starting with bicycles, then moving on to Fords, and finally up to Buicks and Dodges. But they never went into debt for comforts. During depressed times they would lower their standard of living and stay within their means rather than borrow money.



(Top) Women of the community with the Guru Granth Sahib in the Stockton Gurdwara, c. 1927.

(Above) The Gurdwara in Stockton, California, 1915.

political activity. The Khalsa Diwan Society and other organisations began to publish tabloids in Gurmukhi, Urdu and English.

A large number of immigrants were ex-soldiers and it was only after they had failed to attain any redress that they began to lend an ear to radical counsel. In and around San Francisco, a small group of Indian intellectuals arose to become the nucleus of a revolutionary independence movement. The vehicle for this was *Hindustan Ghadar Party*. Sohan Singh Bhakna, a lumber mill-worker in Oregon, became the elected president, and the well-known Indian revolutionary, Har Dyal was elected as secretary of the organisation. Jwala Singh a well-known Sikh farmer remained behind the scenes, but provided most of the funds, including scholarships to many students who were part of this party. In November 1913, the *Ghadar Party* was formally organised to promote the national independence of India. The first issue of the *Ghadar* newspaper appeared in the same month, and was



(Far left)
Bhagat Singh Thind,
c.1918.



(Left)
Bhagat Singh Thind,
c.1945.

(Below)
Parade in Stockton,
California to honour
Madame Vijay Lakshmi
Pandit, 11 May 1945.



United States vs. Bhagat Singh Thind

*You must never be limited by external authority, whether it be vested in a church, man, or book.
It is your right to question, challenge and investigate.*

Bhagat Singh Thind, from the Punjab, immigrated to America in 1913. By working in an Oregon lumber mill he paid his way through the University of California, Berkeley and enlisted in the United States Army in 1917, when the United States entered World War I. He was honourably discharged in 1918. In 1920 he applied for citizenship and was approved by the U.S. District Court. The Bureau of Naturalisation appealed the case, which made its way to the Supreme Court. Thind's attorneys expected a favourable decision since the year before in the Ozawa ruling the same Court had declared Caucasians eligible for citizenship and Thind, as most North Indians, was clearly Caucasian.

Now the Supreme Court found it necessary to qualify "Caucasian" as being synonymous with "white", according to the understanding of the common man of the time. Justice Sutherland expressed their unanimous decision, denying Thind citizenship.

It is a matter of familiar observation and knowledge that the physical group characteristics of the Hindus render them readily distinguishable from the various groups of persons in this country commonly recognised as white. The children of English, French, German, Italian, Scandinavian and other European parentage quickly merge into the mass of our population and lose the distinctive hallmarks of their European origin. On the other hands, it cannot be doubted that the children born in this country of Hindu parents would retain indefinitely the clear evidence of their ancestry. It is very far from our thought to suggest the slightest question of racial superiority or inferiority. What we suggest is merely racial difference, and it is of such character and extent that

the great body of our people instinctively recognise it and reject the thought of assimilation.

The Supreme Court decision, however, was not the final word for Thind. "Roots in the Sand" fills in details from Thind's later life. Bhagat Singh Thind remained in the U.S. and campaigned actively for the independence of India. He completed his Ph.D. and delivered lectures in metaphysics, basing his lessons on Sikh philosophy, comparative study of religions, and the works of Emerson, Whitman and Thoreau. In 1931, he married Vivian Davies, and they had a son, David to whom several of his fifteen books on spirituality are dedicated. A few years after being turned down by the U.S. Supreme Court, Thind applied for and was granted U.S. citizenship by the State of New York.

But because of the Thind decision, many Indians who were already naturalised had their citizenship rescinded. The Thind decision also meant that the Alien Land Act applied to the many Indian immigrants who had already purchased or leased land. After this ruling some landowners lost their property, but many continued to hold property they had previously acquired and to buy or lease new property in the names of American lawyers, bankers, or farmers whom they trusted. A few were able to hold land in the names of their American-born children, though this strategy did not become widespread till after a 1933 court case challenging the practice of Hindu farmers holding land through American front men. The actual loss of land at the time of the Thind decision is not easy to estimate since official records, of necessity, hid rather than revealed the true owners.

mailed to every Indian in North America. Also, copies were sent to Europe, India and the Far East. The Ghadar Party continued to support Indian independence until 1947 when it was disbanded, and then turned all its assets over to the new Indian Government. The Ghadar Memorial Hall still exists in San Francisco.

Jagjit Singh, who arrived in the United States in 1926 became president of the newly-formed India League of America in 1938. He was an importer of Indian goods in New York, and developed a wealthy clientele. He started acting as an official lobbyist for India and Indians. He was able to obtain TIME magazine's support for Indian nationalists, and he energised various Congressman and diplomats in support. A number of Punjabis fought for the

restoration of citizenship, which they had lost in 1910, but the U.S. Congress still balked at it. The outbreak of World War II, combined with the struggle of Indian nationalists finally reversed discrimination. Jagjit Singh was instrumental in convincing some Democrats in Congress to restore the rights and citizenship to Indians, but it was not until 1946 that Congress passed a bill granting naturalisation and immigration quotas to the Indians of South Asia.

Sikhs soon moved fast track into the political mainstream of America. Dalip Singh Saund became the first Indian-American congressman. Born in a farming Sikh family in the Punjab, he came to the United States in 1920 and eventually earned a Ph.D in Mathematics from

Berkeley. He worked as a foreman on a cotton-farm and then became a farm owner in the Imperial Valley. He married an American woman, and together they got involved in civic activities. He organised the Indian National Congress Association of America. Dalip Singh Saund was elected as a judge in 1953, and a Congressman in 1956.

After 1965, immigrant laws were modified to admit more Indians. In 1968 a large number of Indians were allowed to migrate to the U.S. Actually, it was after 1965 that most of the Indians who had migrated to America came from the Punjab, but the credit goes to the pioneering of Punjabis who were able to bring about changes in the American Immigration laws to help Indians and other South Asians to reap the benefits of American opportunities and freedom. Since 1965, approximately two million South Asians have immigrated to the U.S.A. and Canada. ☺

Dr. Jasbir Singh Kang
Yuba City, CA

Dr. Jasbir Singh Kang is a medical doctor practicing in the field of Internal medicine and residing in Yuba City, CA since 1991 with his wife and three children. He acquired his M.B.B.S. from the Government Medical College, Punjabi University at Patiala in India. After his graduation, he did his residence at the Rajindra Hospital (University Teaching Hospital) in Patiala with one-year rotational internships in departments including Dermatology, Psychiatry, Anesthesia, Orthopedics and Ophthalmology.

In 1986 Dr. Kang moved to the United States in order to seek better opportunities and freedom as he describes in his interview that was published in December 1999 in the newspaper *Appeal-Democrat*. "The personal memory which changed my life was when the Indian Army invaded the Golden Temple in June 1984 and there were anti-Sikh riots in New Delhi (in November 1984). That really was my most dramatic memory. I never expected those things can happen in a democratic country."

After moving to the United States, he joined a three year Categorical Internal Medicine Residency Training Programme in Cook County Hospital, Chicago. After commencement of this programme he joined the Peach Tree Clinic at Marysville, CA, a neighboring town of Yuba City which is the home of a large Sikh farming population.

In 1995, Dr. Kang established his own Internal Medicine private practice in Yuba City, which he is successfully running with special emphasis on management of Diabetes Type II.



He is now a permanent medical licence holder in the State of California and Illinois.

Apart from being an excellent medical professional, Dr. Kang has been an active community leader too, playing a key role in mobilising efforts to reach out to the mainstream non-Sikh Americans in the Yuba, Sutter area by undertaking various outreach activities and programmes. He is a firm believer that culture is the cement for any religion that helps strengthen bonds and friendships between people of different communities and origins. He was the founding member of the *Punjabi American Heritage Society*, which is responsible for many cultural initiatives such as the Annual Punjabi Mela in Yuba City. This mela has become the largest ticketed event of a minority group in the United States. Other than the mela, the *Punjabi American Heritage Society* proudly hosts a "Teachers Award" night on an annual basis to thank and acknowledge the contributions of Teachers in the Yuba City area.

He is also the founding member of Yuba Sutter Interfaith Council and the Vice President of "Friends of Yuba City Foundation". Furthermore to promote better understanding and friendship between cultures and communities in the Yuba city area, Dr. Kang and his brother jointly operate a Punjabi Television Channel called "Apna Punjab". He has frequently interviewed both Sikh and non-Sikh leaders in this channel, and uses this to educate people on diseases such as Diabetes.

After the tragic events of September 11th 2001, Dr. Kang has been actively organising press meetings and candle night vigils to pray for peace in America. After the terrorist attacks, many Sikh Americans were racially profiled and attacked. In order to handle this growing problem, Dr. Kang co-produced a documentary entitled "Mistaken Identity" which features the plight of Sikh Americans during those days. He was also frequently seen and heard appealing for peace on many radio and television news channels such as CNN. Furthermore he has been widely speaking and conducting multimedia presentation on Sikh tenets and philosophy in public gatherings to educate the general masses about Sikhism.

Dr. J.S. Kang has authored over 100 articles on diverse subjects including health and medicine, early Sikh migration to North America, growing traffic in Northern California and on the Stock market. These articles have been published in many magazines, websites and journals.

Being a devout Sikh, Dr. Jasbir Singh Kang practices towards being a good human being first and then a religious person. He feels blessed by being in a position to help society through his medical skills.

Acknowledgement : Virtually all historic pictures and extracts in the boxes, are from "Echoes of Freedom", *South Asian Pioneers in California, 1899-1865*, from an exhibition in the Bernice Layne Brown Gallery in the Doc Library, University of California, Berkeley, whose curator is Suzanne McMahon.



The Uniqueness of SIKHISM

What a dreary, needless controversy has been raised by the Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh's Chief, K.S. Sudharsan that *Sikhs are Hindus!* He blames the English for deliberately distorting meaning of the word *dharma*, as they did not have any such synonymous word in the dictionary. It is an interesting observation of Sudharsan who seems to be totally ignorant about Sikh identity and Sikh history far prior to the English arrival in India. If the Sikh religion has no separate identity, then he has to explain the following facts that underline the separate identity, from day One of Sikh history.

- ❖ The Sikh scriptures delineate independent Sikh identity : the Third Guru (SGGS page 360) is very clear that "although the six Hindu systems are prevalent elsewhere, the Guru's belief is profound and unequalled".
- ❖ Martyrdom of the Fifth and Ninth Gurus to uphold religious freedom - not necessarily of one's own faith.
- ❖ Testimony of Mohisin Fani (Muslim Chronicle, 1645 A.D.).
- ❖ Execution of Banda and 740 Sikhs in New Delhi, 1715-16—with no Hindu protests.
- ❖ First Sikh *ghalughara* in 18th century when Governor Yahya Khan issued proclamation for killing all Sikhs; again, with Hindu acquiescence.
- ❖ The Misl Period of Sikh confederacy.
- ❖ Maharaja Ranjit Singh's kingdom (Government known as *Sarkar-e-Khalsa*; coins were issued in the name of the Guru and all his princes were addressed as Khalsa ji).

Brief comparisons of traditions, religious beliefs and practices of the Sikhs—and others:

SIKHISM	VAISHNISM	VEDANTISM	NATHISM
Spiritual Experience - life affirming God is Love, Ocean of virtues, a dynamic experience	<i>Sach Chit Anand</i> - blissful quiet	<i>Sach Chit Anand</i> - blissful, quiet	Blissful Isolation Quietist
World, Real - an arena of spiritual growth, Dharamsal	Maya (worldly possessions), life-negating	Mithya (Illusion) world does not exist!	Real, but a place of misery - death to the World!
Monotheistic	Pantheistic	Monotheistic	Pantheistic
God's interest in the world: He is sustenance to the child, gives vision to blind, riches to poor and helper of weak: combination between spiritual and empirical life of man.	Dichotomy between spiritual and empirical life of the man. Hence monasticism and sanyas enchanted.	World is an illusion; all activity is delusion. Sanyas.	Yogi: vows to withdraw from the world.

SIKHISM**VAISHNISM****VEDANTISM****NATHISM**

Householder's life with full social responsibility, realisation of Divinity in existence.

Equality of man and woman: Women in life in-charge of missionary tasks

Equality and brotherhood of man. Casteism decried

Spiritual assessment of man's virtuous deeds. By our deeds we are near or away from God. Higher than Truth is truthful living.

Work and sharing of Lords bounties

Methodology for remembering God. With virtuous deeds and social responsibility, acceptance of other's will

Use of force "if other means fail"

Goal of life is to be the instrument of God's Will

Jivan Mukta active - accepts social responsibility. In the above context, Guru Nanak did three things. He created a panth and appointed a successor to continue the mission. He identified the social problems of caste and that of the political oppression. Rejected Ahimsa as an inviolable rule. Finally the Khalsa Panth was created and Guru Granth was appointed as Guru in pursuance of the doctrine of Miri and Piri, establishing a community of societal dynamism.

Celibacy and sanyas

Woman not fit for Vaishnava path

Hierarchical castes Shudras not fit for Bhakti

All morality is supernalmoral. Do only one's caste duty or ritual acts

Sanyas

Ritualistic, formal, or emotional dancing. Sex-methodology, meditation

Ahimsa

Merger in Brahman

Individual salvation. Ritual duties performed.

Celibacy and sanyas

Woman a hurdle in spiritual path

Accepts caste Stratifications and Varnashram

No deeds or ritual acts for man of low intellect.

Sanyas

Meditation. Also premium on ritualism accepted

Ahimsa

Realisation of "I am Brahman"

No interest in the world. Unconscious of misery to be abandoned

Avowed to celibacy and never to work

Avowed to celibacy Nath's do not even eat with Nath women.

Accepts caste system Low castes not admitted

Vows never to work.

Vows never to work

Hath Yoga and Kundalini Yoga Sex methodology accepted,

Ahimsa

Merger in Siva

Individual salvation. No interest in the world, being a place of misery, to be abandoned

Sikhism: A Religion of Numina (Naam) and not Phenomena

Guru Gobind Singh himself directed the Sikhs to follow the Shabad as in the Guru Granth and no other book nor any living human being. Numinous experience is inherent in Frie's *Ahndung* (longing), Schleiermacher's *Feeling*, Kant's *Things in Themselves* (noumena) and Kapur Singh's *Antithesis of Phenomena*. It stands for the holy, minus its moral factor and without any rational aspect. It is irreducible to any other factor. Numinous consciousness involves shaking fear of repulsion and an element of powerful fascination. It can only be understood by "ideograms" i.e. not through logic, but only symbolically. The core of religious experience is inherent in the awareness of non-moral holiness as a category of value. The numinous experience is the core and base of Sikh religion and its ingredients i.e. religiously sensitive mind in relation to his/her apprehension of himself/herself and universe around him/her. The ultimate reality is not comprehensible through the sensory motor perceptions and speculations. Sikhism is a religion of *Naam* (neumina), which is asserted through 30,000 hymns of Sikh scripture through revealed statements, literary similes and allusions. *Naam* is God, and God is *Naam*, and the practice of religion revolves around the *Naam*. Sikh religious thought cannot be interpreted through any phenomenal process.

The Guru Granth is a unique scripture and Sikhism has its own identity:

- ❶ The Guru Granth Sahib, the Sikh Scripture is purely monotheistic. It accepts only one God and rejects all other deities, spirits, angels, etc. Only God is immortal. All other deities are mortal and prone to death.
- ❷ The religion of Guru Granth Sahib, being free from inhibitions of any kind regarding the way of life and its adaptability in all the religions of the world vouches its universality. It is not a religion of the chosen people (like Judaism), but instead, it is the religion of entire humanity. It rises above all the regional barriers.
- ❸ It rejects all ritualism, formalism, and symbolism. It has no belief in any sacrament.
- ❹ It focuses all its attention on the enfoldment of discipline for the attainment of the unity of the soul with God. The emphasis has been laid on the adoption of godly qualities by the seeker.
- ❺ It repudiates the prevalent theories of Creation and scans the universe as the work of the Creator, whose existence pulsates everywhere in His Creation. The extent and expanse of the Creation of the Infinite Lord cannot be delimited.

- ❶ It lays great emphasis on honest and sincere labour. Its religion is the religion of workers and householders. Therefore it decries the renunciation and all types of ascetic practices.
- ❷ It advocates the equality of all human beings, irrespective of birth and sex. The woman is in no way inferior to man. It rejects all distinctions of caste and colour.
- ❸ The State has to play its part in the provision of food, shelter and clothing to members of society. There can be no devotion, if the individual is not free from want of his needs.
- ❹ It presents a balanced combination of action, devotion, and knowledge. Whereas the body has to work, for the well-being of family and society while the mind has to remain in tune with the Lord. Service is, thus, the motto of an adherent of Guru Granth Sahib. His best service toward the Guru and the Lord is the remembrance to the Name and serving His Creation.
- ❺ The religion of Guru Granth Sahib is most practical. The devotee overbrims with love and devotion. The whole world appears as a family to him. The earth is an abode of Dharma for him.
- ❻ Breaks dichotomy between spiritual and empirical lives.
- ❼ Rejects Asceticism.
- ❽ Rejects Varnasharm Dharma which incorporates basic caste system.
- ❾ Rejects Ahimsa.
- ❿ God Never incarnates. He is Un-Incarnated and Transcendent.

World-View and The Guru Granth Sahib

Both the surveys of Maxwebster and Schwitzer bring out that all Indian religions are life-negating and suggest withdrawal from life. This is quite true of Buddhism, Jainism, Vaishnavism, Vedanta and even the Sant Tradition. All these Hindu systems involve withdrawal from life and denial of social responsibility. Evidently, systems that recommend Ahimsa, asceticism, monasticism, Sanyasa, celibacy or withdrawal from life, reject every kind of social involvement, much less social responsibility, as an unwanted bondage.

S. K. Mitra, who has surveyed the ethics of all Hindu systems, says "that the common feature of all doctrines of the ideal life, or *Moksha*, is the conception of ideal as strictly moral idea." It is so, because all these systems accept a clear dichotomy between the spiritual path and the empirical path, and, thus life-negation is a natural and logical consequence of all these religious systems and their world-view.

(contd. on page 55)

Are the SIKHS, HINDUS?

“All Muslims living in India are Hindus. All Sikhs are Hindus”, asserted the RSS chief K.S. Sudarshan, at a recent meeting in Amritsar. Citing Guru Tegh Bahadur, the ninth Sikh guru, he said: “He himself acknowledged *Hum Hindu Hain*”. This is a completely erroneous view. Sikhs have always been willing to accept diverse ideas and institutions, be they Hindu or Muslim, but in acceptance they have adapted and transformed their inheritance. Not always able to work the various strands into a harmonious whole, they have well maintained their identity. This holds good for almost every manifestation of Sikh life and thought.

My own maternal grandmother, a devout Sikh, was married into an Arya Samaj family. Did she define herself as a Hindu? She did not! Her way of life, her association with the Sikh *Kanya Mahavidyalaya* in Ferozepur, and her perception of India's Partition signified her distinctive identity. Even though married into Hindu families, many like her remained wedded to Sikh values. Without denying the existing bonds and alliances between the Hindus and Sikhs, not much has changed since my grandmother's days.

In fact, the basic flaw in Mr. Sudarshan's assertion is that he disregards the differences that have historically existed between the experiences and the lives of people of the two communities. He must know that no matter what he might say with regard to the origin and development of Sikhism, Sikh consciousness has invariably followed an independent course.

Two scholarly and popular views exist on Sikh identity. One of them traces its beginning to the Sikh Gurus (1469-1708) and its crystallisation during Ranjit Singh's rule (1799-1839). All this while, so runs the argument, the Sikh religious and cultural heritage ran parallel to, not always antagonistic with, Hinduism. The other interpretation underlines the Sikhs' fluid identity in the pre-colonial period and brings into sharp focus the role of the *Tat Khalsa* (the true Khalsa) leadership in heightening a separate and exclusive consciousness in the later 19th century. It is fair to argue, therefore, that neither Mr. Sudarshan nor any of his predecessors have understood the changing meanings of Sikh identity. They have sought to impose their own

worldview, ignoring how Sikh ideologues have understood, categorised and defined their community over the centuries.

Guru Nanak (1469-1539) had rejected the authority of the Brahmins, spurned ritualism and repudiated idol worship. Through the *gurbani* (guru's word), *sangat* (religious congregation) and *guru ka langar* (community meal) he endeavoured to fashion a radical theology and create a moral community. However, it was the initiative of the tenth Guru, Guru Gobind Singh (1666-1708), which endowed his followers with a distinct identity.

The Khalsa Sikhs, thereafter, vested the authority of the Guru in the Guru Granth Sahib and the corporate community. This was a defining moment, carried to its logical culmination by the *Rahit* (code of discipline).

By the closing decades of the 19th century, the Singh Sabha movement defined the boundaries of the Sikh community vis-a-vis the Hindus. Such moves were largely in response to the Arya Samaj movement's strident initiative to incorporate Sikhism within the Hindu fold. In opposition to its agenda, that of promoting Hindi as the official vernacular language, the Sikh reformers championed Punjabi as the medium of education and the language of administration. Moreover, Hindu idols which had been installed in the Golden Temple premises, were removed. Bhai Kahn Singh, a Sikh spokesman, wrote in 1899, *Hum Hindu Nahin* “We are not Hindus”. This sentiment was vividly expressed in the everyday lives and rituals. The Sikhs certainly knew by now who they were **not**.

Historically, the Sikhs have moved in and out of multiple identities. Yet, their quest for an exclusive identity was the most significant feature of their history in the last century. Although the meanings of identity have differed in certain contexts and in response to various challenges, the Sikhs have hardly ever integrated with any specific version of Hinduism. Consider, their demand for separate electorates (1917) and the role of the Gurdwara Reform movement. Thereafter, the Sikh Gurdwaras Act (1925) defined a Sikh as “a person who professes the Sikh religion”, adding, “I solemnly affirm that I am a Sikh, that I believe in the Guru Granth Sahib, that I believe in the Ten Gurus, and that I have no other religion”.

Before India's Independence, the Akalis tried to safeguard the political and cultural interests of their constituency. Thus, through the demand for "Azad Punjab" (1943) and for "Sikhistan" or "Khalistan" (1946) the Akalis sought to safeguard their interests as a distinct and unified entity. The Sikh leadership also considered the idea of an 'autonomous' Sikh area within what was to become Pakistan. Their ultimate acceptance of Punjab's partition was, in fact, conditioned by such communitarian anxieties and aspirations (and specific assurances given by the Congress: Ed.).

After Independence, various Sikh outfits have insisted on defining themselves and their followers as a 'minority' living under the shadow of Hindu majoritarianism. This found expression in the demand for separate representation in the Constitution, and was followed by the movement for a State comprising Punjabi-speaking people. The demand for greater autonomy gathered momentum in the 1970s and 1980s, giving rise to the Khalistan movement itself. The Indian Army's assault on the Golden Temple in June 1984, according to Khushwant Singh widened the Hindu-Sikh gulf and gave the movement for Khalistan its first martyr in Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale.

The brutal anti-Sikh pogrom in November 1984 that followed the assassination of Indira Gandhi fuelled anti-Hindu sentiments, especially in parts of north India.

Identity rests on the notion of difference with the other(s). Yet the other is not constant, and keeps changing. Thus, in the 18th century, the Muslims were the bete noire of the Sikhs. In the late 19th century, the 'Arya Hindus' took their place. A century later, the British colonial state became the predominant antagonist.

At the time of partition, the 'Muslim' was endowed with a new kind of otherness, especially with the imaginary fear of Sikhs being subjected to Muslim rule. Finally, the 'Hindu Congress' became the principal adversary in the 1980s.

The Sangh Parivar harps on all the others, but effaces the presence of the Hindu as other in the revolution and crystallisation of a specific Sikh identity. It denies the fact that if the Sikh communities had demonised the Muslims or the Congress in the past, they did so only to protect their own cultural identity and not to consolidate the Hindutva forces. Like the Muslims, the Sikhs have resisted the Hindutva project of absorption and sameness.

The Sangh Parivar's agenda, of suppressing the contested history and identity of the Sikhs as well as the Muslims, is ahistorical. It is also a contrived agenda, for it rests on a spurious notion of Hindu identity. The political language as echoed by Mr. Sudarshan, is neither rooted to the historians' histories nor in the diverse communitarian narratives. Finally, his comment degrades the historians' histories and ridicules a minority's own self-image and perceptions.

Nonica Datta

*Teacher of History at Miranda House, Delhi University
(From The Hindu)*

(contd. from page 53)

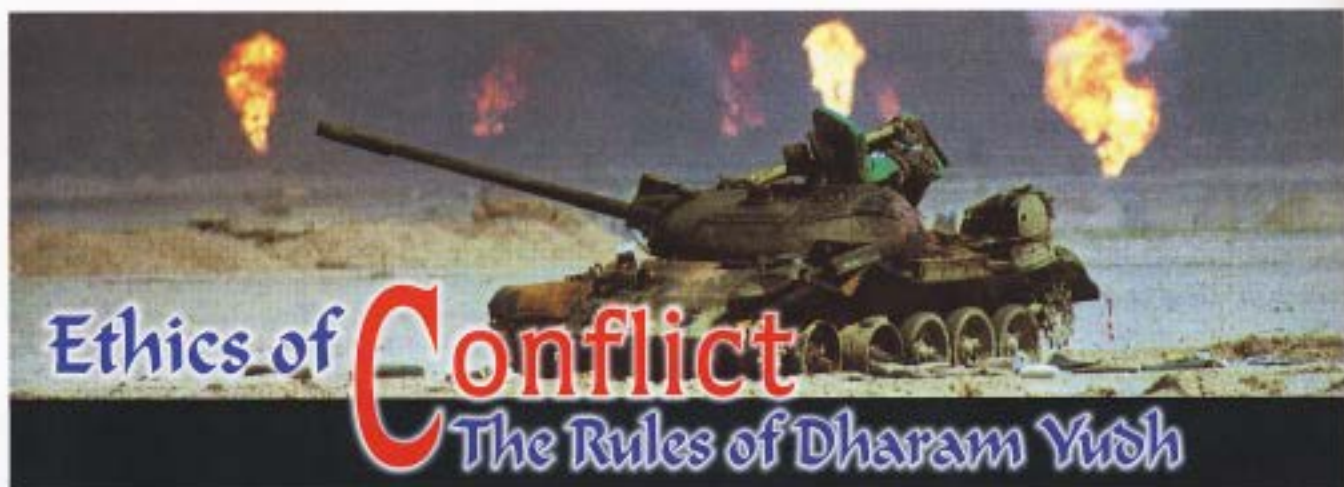
But Sikhism, as the hymns and lives of the Gurus express and demonstrate very clearly, has a world-view of life-affirmation, since in the Sikh ideology there is an inalienable combination between the spiritual life and the empirical life of man. For, whatever is within the domain of God, is also within the sphere of operation of the Godman. In short, *Sikhism is a whole-life religion with a world-view entirely opposite to that of other Indian religions.*

The Guru Granth as a New Scripture with New Ideology with New Religious Experience.

The Vedas and Upanishads are without doubt the scriptures of all Hindu systems. But Sikhism completely denies their authority and Guru Nanak even calls some of their injunctions to be wrong. The Sikh Gurus were so clear and particular about the independent and separate identity of their religious system and the complete originality and newness of its character that they took very significant steps, which no other religious leader in the world had done. They specifically compiled and authenticated themselves, the Sikh Scripture. Since the time of its compilation in 1604 A.D., this is the complete repository of and the final authority on the Sikh ideology, and its doctrines. Since the Gurus called it revealed Bani, it has been regarded as the *Shabad* having the sanction of God (and revealed as *Shabad* Burn).

The Tenth Master took two important steps in this regard. First, he introduced the Nash doctrine, thereby making a complete and final break with all other Indian ideologies. Neither the Vedas and Upanishads, nor any other religious systems is given any sanction or accepted as authentic. We all know that the Bani of Bhagats in the Guru Granth is a selection. It is accepted only where it is in consonance with the doctrines of the Gurus. And even where differences seem to be suggested, the Gurus have made adequate comments and clarifications. The Bani of Bhagats outside the Granth Sahib is not given any sanctity, or authenticity. Secondly, he made the Sikh Scripture not only as the exclusive vehicle of the Guru's message, but also gave it the status of the Guru, Guide or Teacher of the Sikhs. The creation and sanction of Guru Granth as the sole scripture of the Sikhs reveals that the Gurus were very clear and conscious of its independent and separate character and wanted their ideology to remain as such without chance of any addition, alteration, or any departure from its authenticity or contents.

Dr Jasbir Singh Mann, USA



The Sikh Gurus gave a new dimension of life to war ethics and preached the people to follow these. Guru Nanak condemned Babar for the invasion of India which involved the killing of innocent men and women as also the violation of ethical norms which he believed must be followed during war. To quote the Guru:

*If the powerful duel with the powerful,
I grieve not;
But if a ravenous lion falls upon a flock of sheep,
Then the Master must answer.*

- SGGS p.360

For the Sikh Gurus, war was *dharam yudh* and as such was the goal; Sikhism considered war only as a means of the last resort. Guru Gobind Singh says:

*When all efforts other
Prove useless
Laxful is it
To wield the sword*

- Zafarnama

According to the Ninth Guru, the sword (or force) should not be used to frighten but only to achieve the good:

*He who feared no one, nor makes other afraid
He alone is wise, O mind he alone knows his God.*

- SGGS p.1427

The Sikh Gurus Sri Guru Hargobind and Sri Guru Gobind Singh who fought battles against tyranny and for the defence of Hindu rights, followed the well-established ethical norms during the wars. The Sikh scriptures have laid down the following laws to be observed during wars:

Not to Attack the Unarmed or the Weak

The Gurus maintained that it is cowardly to attack a weak or unarmed person and does not befit the conscience of the strong. Guru Nanak said that "the mighty person can attack the mighty person but if any mighty person

attacks a meek person, then it is to be condemned." In the his Epistle of Victory, *Zafarnama*, Guru Gobind Singh warned Emperor Aurangzeb not to attack the weak, timid or humble. To quote:

*When with thy cruel hand O Alamgir
You do torment the humble and low.*

- Zafarnama

In principle, it is immoral to force or coerce an innocent person and accordingly, he condemned the cruel deed of Aurangzeb, in whose name the Guru's innocent, young sons, Zorawar Singh and Fateh Singh were murdered, they had done no wrong to the Mughal emperor. This was indeed condemnable and unpardonable that a mighty emperor, without any reason, should suffocate two innocent young lives. To quote the Guru:

*The voice of my beloved sons
Thou has O King for ever stilled
Of what avail is this hateful deed
When I breathe alive fully filled!*

- Zafarnama

Warn Before Launching an Attack

Nobody should be attacked or killed stealthily. Unless there is a proper warning or challenge to the enemy, it is totally improper to invade or attack even an armed force. The Guru stated:

*What more forty famished men can do
In a bloody combat of hellish hue
When a million armed foes pounce
Unawares upon them in moments few.*

- Zafarnama

To help the Enemy if the Cause is Righteous

There is no permanent enemy unless it is proved that the enemy's cause is unrighteous. The moral principle demands the upholding of *dharam* in human relationships.

There is no place for personal enmity with anyone. If there has to be a fight, the cause has to be right. The fifth Guru says:

*I am enemy of no one,
Nor is anyone enemy to me.*

- SGGS p.1299

Guru Gobind Singh set up a unique convention to help even a foe for the cause of righteousness. This was because the Guru had no personal enmity with anyone.

No Violation of Agreements

The Sikh Gurus laid stress on honesty of thought, word, and deed. According to them, one should keep one's word and have an integrated character. Guru Gobind Singh found Aurangzeb treacherous in not keeping his oath, and in attacking the Guru after vacating the fort of Anandpur. He criticised such devious acts of the emperor in the *Zafarnama*:

*Keep in view thy solemn oaths O King,
And abide by them to thy level best.
Stick to the positions once taken up
Within and without the same be you.*

- Zafarnama

The Guru expected that once an agreement is made, it should be sincerely adhered to and considered any violation by either party as a crime and a sin. He wrote to the emperor:

*Had I even in secret taken oath
On the holy Book as didst thou
I would never take a single step
Beyond the mark set by that vow.*

- Zafarnama

No Violation of the Cease-fire

Guru Gobind Singh observed that in simple, commonsense morality, once hostilities have stopped by common agreement, there should be no violation or attack from any side. It is a civilised norm for the ceasefire to be obligatory. To quote:

*Whoever in his dealing O Alamgir
On his holy Book doth once swear
Must never imprison the innocent
Nor to shed their blood ever dare.*

Sanctity of Places of Worship

According to Sikhism, religious places are sacred to whatever religion those places might belong, be they temples, mosques, churches and gurdwaras. No desecration or demolition or damage to places of worship should be allowed even in war. The history of Muslim rule in India is full of examples of Hindu killings, demolishing of their temples and erecting of mosques in their place.

Bhai Gurdas condemned this in his first *Var*:

*The (Hindu) temples are razed to the ground
And mosques are erected in their place,
The sin is prevailing.*

Guru Gobind Singh saw no distinction, nor did he preach any discrimination between a temple and a mosque or any place of worship for that matter. These are all places of God. Therefore, these places have to be respected and not to be violated or damaged. In *Akal Ustat* he says:

*The temple and the mosque are the same;
The Hindu worship and the Musalman prayer are the same;
All men are the same;
It is through error they appear different.*



Not to Harm Persons who Surrendered

Long before the Geneva Convention, which prohibited the killing of surrendered persons, the Sikh Gurus had laid down the rule that whosoever had surrendered must be protected because our Lord also does so:

*Whoever seeks Lord's refuge, him He hugs to His bosom;
This is the innate nature of the Lord.*

-SGGS p.544

Similarly, the third Guru Amardas says:

And he who seeks Thy refuge him Thou redeems.

In the *Zafarnama*, Guru Gobind Singh reiterates this law when he refers to the principle that whosoever surrenders before God or takes His refuge or protection, He takes him in His shelter and protects him. This rule was strictly followed by the Sikhs in wars during the period of Guru Gobind Singh and there after.

Halemi-Raj **The Ideal State**

In accordance with India's age old tradition of an ideal state based on religious and moral values often called as *Raj-Dharma* or *Ram-Rajya*, deemed as the rule of an ideal king or the rule of righteousness, the Sikh philosophy has also produced the concept of an ideal state named as *Halemi-raj*, a compassionate rule founded on moral values, theological norms, and people's welfare.

The genesis of these concepts in Sikh literature can be traced to the *Guru Granth Sahib*, the sacred scripture containing the eternal voice of the Gurus where the foundations are laid for an ideal state.

The first principal of *Halemi-raj* finds its expression in Guru Arjan Dev's concept of a divine order of peace, non-violence and amity where human behaviour is governed by courtesy, modesty, humility, and other human virtues where there is no suffering, poverty, domination, exploitation, and where compassion finds its highest manifestation as if flowing from God's mercy. To quote the Guru:

*The merciful Lord has now given the command
 That no one will domineer over
 And give pain to another,
 And all will abide in peace,
 Such O dear is the rule of my compassionate God.*
- SGGS p.74

Thus, Sikhism found Guru Arjan Dev's proclamation of the divine manifestation of temporal sovereignty as institutionalised in *Halemi-raj*, as the perfect rule.

The other ingredient of the ideal state is provided in the *Guru Granth Sahib* hymns of Bhagat Ravidas where he visualises a state without fear or grief, where everyone was free from tension, worries, suffering and pains. Where the citizens did not have to pay any taxes, nor did they face injustice. Both rulers and the ruled were devoid of the voices of lust and greed and lived like one family, in harmony. The king was to behave as the father, with the people as his children.

Bhagat Ravidas's concept is symbolised in *Beghumpura*, meaning a land without grief or sorrow, and contained the principles of a welfare state. The concept of justice is a part of Bhagat Ravidas's dream of a society where there is no discrimination between low and high caste and where one was not deprived or looked down upon. Bhagat Ravidas himself was a tanner by birth, and thus voiced the sentiments of the oppressed. He was honoured by Guru Arjan Dev who included his hymns in the *Adi Granth*. This was the highest egalitarian ideal adopted by the Sikh state and Bhagat Ravidas is mostly quoted by scholars in their description of an ideal political society:

*Griefless is the name of my town,
 Where abide not either pain or care
 No anguish there of tax on goods,
 Neither fear, nor error, nor dread, nor decline
 Oh! how wonderful is my fatherland,
 Where there is always peace and calm, O friend
 Ever-enduring is the regime of my Lord over that land,
 And there is no second nor third there,
 But my only Lord.
 Populous as ever, its repute is eternal;
 And, there abide only rich and the content,
 And there men go about as and where they wish;
 They know the mansion of their Lord, so no one prevent (them)
 Ravidas, a mere tanner, has been emancipated in this land,
 And, he, who's his fellow citizen is also his friend.*

- SGGS p.345

There has been a reference to another component of an ideal state where Guru Nanak, the founder of the Sikh religion and social order, conceptualised *Nanak-raj*, providing truth as the basic structure of state and society. Guru Nanak maintained that God's empire was like the fortress of truth.

Nanak Raj Chalaya Sach Kot Satani Nivide.

- SGGS p.966

(Nanak established the Lord's empire, and laid a strong foundation for the fortress of truth).

It is interesting to note that Guru Nanak's philosophy came at a time when the ancient tradition of a state based on righteousness was being thrown to the winds and the rulers had started butchering people, killing them, all in the name of religion. At a time when religious hostility was at its peak, the Guru sent out signals of a universal message pronouncing that "we are all children of one God." The distinction between Hindu and Muslim is false, as there

is a spiritual equality amongst all men. All men have the same soul and, therefore, all religious divisions are arbitrary and false.

In his own words:

*Truth is higher than everything,
But higher still is truthful living.*

- SGGS p.62

There is another reference about the ideal state of the Sikh conception in *Bansavali Namah* as a text which describes the regime of Guru Amar Das, the third Guru, as a utopian ruler who preached the Sikh ideology, and upheld the need for spiritual awareness among all the people. It is said that during his rule, as in the mythical *Ram-rajya*, nobody suffered. There was allround prosperity and the subjects were infused with virtuous conduct. Here was a society where everybody was contented, happy, healthy, with the needs of life met, where mortality prevailed and righteous behaviour was the common code in everyday life. To quote: "During his rule (which is more in the spiritual sense) all the subjects are free from normal worries which are the bane of modern society. During his time neither a woman has lost her husband nor a father his son."

However, the authenticity of this text remains suspect with regard to *Prem Sumarag Granth* which is otherwise regarded as providing a detailed blueprint of an ideal concept of the Sikh state and is also a comprehensive document, considered to be a source of religious, social and political inspiration. It is not given credibility nor authenticity by Sikh scholars but still, is a rich source of information with regard to the philosophy and operation of the Sikh state. *Prem Sumarag Granth* lays down the basic attributes of a Sikh state and its goals, such as peace, order, security, and justice. The ruler's responsibility is not only to uphold law and order, or to punish the corrupt and the wicked, but also to encourage the positive virtues through religion, moral education and provision of a system of general well-being.

It is generally surmised that this scripture belongs to the times of Guru Gobind Singh although, curiously, the author is not known and has not been traced thus far. But the contents of this text breathe the spirit of Sikhism in so far as the king has been exhorted to behave like a divine servant and who is supposed to pray to God to grant him the capacity to discharge his duties of protecting and caring for his subjects. It is interesting to note that his model of the state looked very much like a modern welfare state.

Final Analysis

In the final analysis, the concept of the Sikh state is founded on equality of opportunity, but also recognition of merit. While Sikhism does not at all recognise the aristocracy at birth or privilege, it does uphold the principles of equality and social justice. What is earlier referred to as *Halemi-raj* is an order of society characterised by values of equality, liberty, justice and welfare without any discrimination on the grounds of sex, caste, country, race and social position. Benevolence and equality are the concepts which are deeply rooted in the institutions of *Sangat*, *Pangat*, *Kirtan*, *Krah-Parshad* and *Gurdwara* established by the Sikh Gurus. It is a concept of an open society based on brotherhood, democracy and freedom. Eliminating the caste system is very much imprinted on the Sikh psyche and it is believed that even low castes, by taking the *Amrit*, at once become an equal member of the Sikh fraternity and enjoy all privileges of the Khalsa. *Halemi-Raj* is a restructured society on the foundations of equalitarianism and egalitarianism where neither are there any exploiters nor the exploited because exploitation is the very negation of godliness. The Gurus bestowed temporal sovereignty on the common people and defined statecraft as a liberal order where temporal power was vested in the *Khalsa* and the spiritual power in the holy *Granth*. Thus, theology and secularism were suitably blended in a harmonious system. There has to be a proper balance between religion and state so that neither controls the other. If a suitable term is to be used to describe the *Halemi-Raj*, it would be a combination of spiritual and democratic polity where the consciousness of the common people reached a level where they are their own masters and the state is just an instrument of their service.

Besides, the idea of *Halemi-Raj* accords with that of the modern welfare state which ensures social security, employment, health, education and shelter. But the ideal Sikh state transcends the welfare state in the sense that the state is considered not as an artificial device of acquiring power, but a divine manifestation of love and compassion. The Sikh thought spurns Machiavellianism where power is the end and not the means and where any means are justified in order to acquire power. The concept of *Halemi-Raj* is repugnant to the notion of the Machiavellian statecraft. Not force or coercion or external imposition but maintenance of *dharma* and spiritual transformation of human beings are the end-all and be-all of life. ☸

Gurdeep Kaur

(From "Political Ethics of the Guru Granth Sahib")

CONFLUENCE, NOT CONFRONTATION, OF CIVILIZATIONS IS NEEDED

Some scholars believe that there is a clash of civilizations, between the Western and the Eastern civilizations. Some scholars see a growing confrontation between the Christian and the Islamic civilizations. Samuel Huntington's book *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of the World Order* really promoted this concept.

If we analyse the history of human development and progress over the many thousands of years, then one fact becomes apparent. The most fundamental clash is between the lower centres (basic instincts) and the higher centres (spirit or awareness). Therefore, being civilised means bringing the lower centres under the control of the higher centres. According to Eastern spirituality, the journey of human development and spiritual elevation starts from the body and travels to the mind, intellect and finally to the soul. The body and the mind seek pleasures from the sensory organs (sensual pleasures). This tendency leads to lust, anger, selfishness and greed, possessiveness, extravagance, arrogance and vengeance. On the other hand, the intellect and the soul bring a higher level of pleasure, the spiritual ecstasy by bringing one in a state of equipoise. This tendency leads to moderation, restraint, dedication, selflessness, humility and forgiveness.

All civilizations try to make a person a better person. Therefore, the basic human values are similar. Their ultimate goal is the same; they are just advocating different paths. Should we keep fighting over the different paths or unite in finding commonality of the goal? In any given situation, finding a common minimum factor helps to unite people.

What is the common minimum factor which can unite the people of the world? The development and the growth of means of communication and transportation have already transformed us into a global community, but we are lacking a global perspective. This is the most fundamental cause of tension and unrest in the world today.

How to resolve this contradiction is the common minimum factor, which can unite people. The consumer culture, which is the product of unadulterated traditional capitalism, is the root cause of our problems.

There is no concept of restraint or balance within consumer culture. In the last two centuries, the dominant Western civilization has been primarily influenced by the consumer culture. Because of this, even though there has been unparalleled growth in the fields of science and technology, we have not been able to bring the benefits of this progress to the majority of the population of the world. Also as a result, we have other problems such as environmental damage to a degree which was never seen before. More plant and animal

species have disappeared from earth in the last two centuries than in any other time in history.

The world's natural resources have been over-utilised, resulting in environmental pollution and problems such as global warming. We have been able to control many infectious diseases, but overall, we perhaps have the unhealthiest population. Look at the incidence of obesity, depression and related diseases. Why are we losing overall health? It is because health is not only determined by our physical and mental status but by our spiritual status also. Consumer culture promotes values exactly opposite to the founding Christian values. We have a deep spiritual crisis. The superstructure is contradicting the infrastructure. Moreover, the Western prescriptive spirituality can not now fully meet the spiritual needs of the population because of the social and political system being more individualistic; while the prescriptive spirituality is more collective and unable to accommodate the different levels of individual spiritual development.

The Eastern cultivational spirituality can complement the Western prescriptive spirituality to fill the spiritual gap. There are many good ideas and concepts in different civilizations which can help us solve problems and meet challenges faced by all mankind. Looking at the different civilizations as a rich pool of resources can be termed a "global perspective." In the contemporary situation, we have globalization without a global perspective. We need to make up for this deficiency. Once we change our outlook then we can have access to many great ideas and concepts. For example the Western world largely became familiar with the Sikh religion during the Second World War. The Sikhs were identified as the bearded and turbaned loyal soldiers of the British Empire. But the Sikh religion is far beyond that! The Sikhs are saints and soldiers at the same time. Khalsa is the highest developed form of a person. When a person becomes a perfect human, this state is termed "Khalsa." The Sikh religion is chronologically the last major religion to evolve in the Indian subcontinent, nay in the world. It can be considered the essence of Eastern spirituality and zenith of Indian thought. It's ideas and concepts of diversity, pluralism, tolerance, universal brotherhood and universal well-being can be very useful in the current world situation. Eventually, the confluence of civilizations will prove far better than the clash of civilizations. ❧

Dr. Sawraj Singh MD FICS

Laser and General Surgeon

*Chairman, Washington State Network for Human Rights
Chairman, Central Washington Coalition for Social Justice*

Sikh Organisation of New York

A landmark bill seeking to protect the rights of Sikh-Americans to wear turbans and sport beards as part of their chosen professional occupation has been introduced into the State Legislature of the State of New York. Sponsored by the Honorable Thomas DiNapoli, Honorable Donna Ferrara and Honorable Brian McLaughlin, the bill was initially introduced into the State Assembly on March 15, 2003. Members of the Sikh Organisation of New York (S.O.N.Y.) had been working for several months with prominent State officials and other community organisations to draft this bill.

On Monday 7 April, the Sikh Organisation of New York took a delegation of about sixty prominent members of Sikh community led by Mr. T.J.S. Bindra (President of S.O.N.Y.) from across the New York tristate area to the State Capital at Albany where they were cordially met and hosted by members of the State Legislative Assembly. This was the first time that a delegation of Sikh-Americans was received and honoured in the Chamber of the New York State Assembly. The delegation was allowed to view the proceedings of the house.

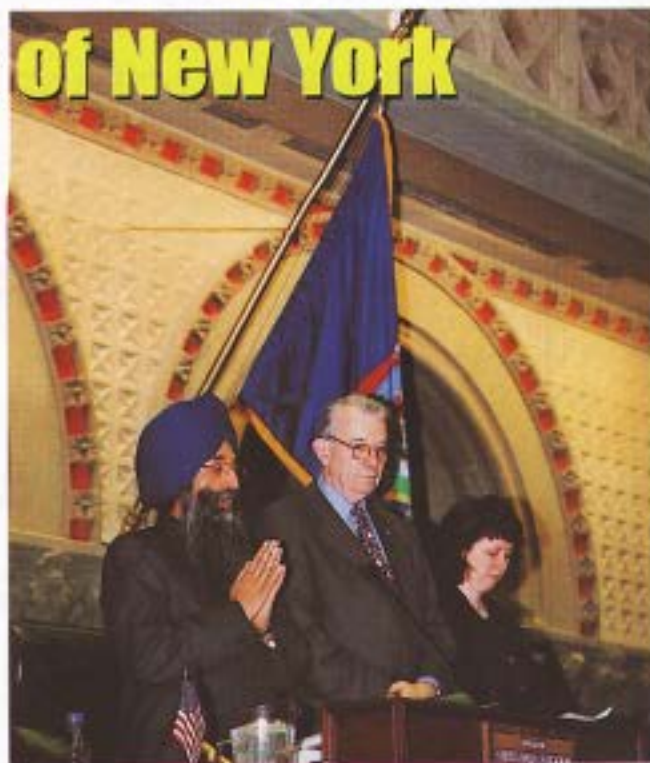
Precedents continued to be set throughout the day beginning with an invocation by a Sikh priest, Giani Jagtar Singh of Glen Cove. A hushed Chamber listened intently as the Giani invoked the Lord's blessings for the Sikh New year or Baisakhi festival.



(Left to Right): Mohinder S. Taneja, Secretary; P.V. Rath, Consul General of India; Brian McLaughlin; Tejinder S. Bindra, Tom DiNapoli, P.S. Sabharwal, Donna Ferrara.

Subsequently information about the Sikh delegation and the new legislation was then divulged to other members of the house by Assemblyman Thomas DiNapoli, Assemblywoman Donna Ferrara and Assemblyman Brian McLaughlin and Assemblyman Anthony Semerino.

In continuation of the day's landmark proceedings, the New York State Legislative Assembly accorded special recognition to those whose efforts had made this event possible, notably: to S.O.N.Y.'s office bearers Mr. T.J.S. Bindra (President), Mr. Mohinder S. Taneja (Secretary), Mr. Ishar Singh Bindra (Patron), Dr. P.S. Sabharwal (Patron), Mr. S.S. Dhall, Mr. Paul Kandhari and Mr. Maninder S. Sethi. The Legislature gave special recognition to



The day beginning with an invocation by the Sikh priest, Giani Jagtar Singh of Glen Cove.

Honorable P. Rath, Consul General of India and Dr. Arvind Pal Singh Mandair Chairman of Sikh Studies of Hofstra University. Leaders of Sikh Gurdwaras in Queens like Mr. Harpreet S. Toor, Mr. Raghbir Singh, Master Mohinder Singh, Mr. Gurbhej S. Sandhu and Mrs. Uma Sengupta were also recognised.

In a very memorable late afternoon session, the Sikh-American delegation met with the New York State Governor George Pataki, Speaker of the Assembly Sheldon Silver, Senate Majority Leader Joe Bruno and with other leading dignitaries.

The final event of the day was a reception hosted by the Sikh Organisation of New York to celebrate the Sikh New Year or Vaisakhi festival. The reception was very well attended by the state officials and members of the Sikh community. Mr. Mohinder Singh Taneja General Secretary of S.O.N.Y. welcomed everyone to the evening's reception. The audience listened to memorable and stirring speeches by State Officials and community leaders alike. Of significance was the speech by the Consul General of India; Mr. P.V. Rath, who spoke generously of the unique contribution of Sikhs to India's independence struggle and in establishing the foundations of India's current prosperity. Mr. T.J.S. Bindra President of S.O.N.Y. thanked the members of the State Legislature for the honour the Legislature bestowed on the Sikh-American community and the Legislation which was introduced. He reminded the audience of ongoing dangers faced by Sikhs due to the mistaken perceptions about Sikhs appearance—no more so than in the aftermath of 9/11. He then thanked the three very dear friends of the Sikh American Community, who had sponsored the Legislation and made this day possible: the three Legislators being Assemblyman Tom DiNapoli, Assemblywoman Donna Ferrara and Assemblyman Brian McLaughlin. ❹

State of New York Legislative Resolution

Assembly No. 568



BY: M. of A. DiNapoli, Ferrara, Grodenchik, McLaughlin and Sidikman

PAYING tribute to the Sikh community of the State of New York upon the occasion of the celebration of the Baisakhi

WHEREAS, It is with great admiration and deepest respect that this Assembled Body is moved to pay tribute to the Sikh community of the State of New York upon the occasion of the celebration of the Baisakhi; and

WHEREAS, The Baisakhi is considered a New Year's Day and is the most important and most popular Sikh festival; it is always greeted with much preparation and much celebration; and

WHEREAS, The Baisakhi falls on the 13th or 14th of April each year; and

WHEREAS, The Baisakhi is also the collective birthday of the Sikhs known as the Khalsa or the Sikh brotherhood; and

WHEREAS, It was on this day in 1699 that the tenth and last Guru of Sikhs called a large assembly of followers and baptized the Five Chosen Ones who had come forward to sacrifice their lives; and

WHEREAS, The Baisakhi is also a harvest festival in Punjab, the birthplace of the Sikhs and bread-basket of India; and

WHEREAS, The Baisakhi is the harbinger of the Spring season and marks the ripening of the wheat crop; and

WHEREAS, The Baisakhi is celebrated with great gusto and colorful celebrations, and with folk music and dancing throughout Punjab; and

WHEREAS, Recognizing the significance of their contributions to the State of New York, this Assembled Body is proud to honor all of New York's citizens of the Sikh religion, joining them in welcoming the Baisakhi; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, That this Legislative Body pause in its deliberations to commemorate the auspicious occasion of the celebration of the Baisakhi; and be it further

RESOLVED, That copies of this Resolution, suitably engrossed, be transmitted to distinguished members of the Sikh community.

ADOPTED IN ASSEMBLY ON
April 7, 2003

By order of the Assembly,



June Egeland
June Egeland, Clerk

Sikhs in North America, Europe and South-East Asia took out colourful processions to mark *Baisakhi*. Huge *nagar kirtan* processions were taken out in Toronto (Canada), Vancouver (Canada) and New York (USA), besides Southall and Birmingham (UK), the Hague (Holland), Paris (France) and Kuala Lumpur (Malaysia).

The Centennial Foundation

The 7th Annual Centennial Foundation Gala Banquet entitled "People of the Book: Devotion to Learning" was held at the Mississauga Convention Centre in Toronto on 29 March 2003, with some 650 people attending.

Jeevan Singh Deol, a young Canadian scholar who is professor of history at Cambridge University, delivered the key note speech. He spoke on this year's theme which revolves around a multi-year celebration of the 400th anniversary of the original compilation of the Guru Granth Sahib, holy scripture of the Sikhs. In this, the second year of this three-year commemoration, the concepts of scholarship and contemplation within Sikhism are being celebrated. Dr. Deol spoke passionately of the value of knowing oneself: "Through history, you learn about who you are, where you come from. But once you've done that,

you need not be shy and afraid about understanding it on your own terms".

"Our ancestors came here and sacrificed much of their lives for us to be comfortable. It is time to stand up, pick up that torch and move it forward and make sure there's something that we can all pass on to our children".

In the tradition of the six previous highly successful events, this year's Gala Banquet featured art exhibits and a silent auction. In addition, individuals, Sikh and non-Sikh, who have made outstanding contributions were honoured. Award recipients included community activist Harmeet Kaur Dhillon, scholars Inderpal Kaur Grewal, Avtar Brah and Mohindar Singh Sachdev, community leader Harnam Singh Khalsa, businessman Joginder Singh (Vice President Finance of Ford Canada), artist Manu Saluja and human rights advocates Akaash Maharaj and Zanana Akande.

The evening featured entertainment by JOSH, a dynamic young singing group from Montreal and by comedian Gary Dee who had the crowd in stitches with his parody of stereotypes held by immigrants.

MCs Ritu Bhasin and Kulvir Singh Gill were masterful in ensuring that the Banquet proceeded smoothly.



MCs for the evening - Ritu Kaur Bhasin and Kulvir Singh Gill.



Pardeep Singh Nagra promoting "Silent Auction" and book sales to banquet guests.



Lorna Marsden, President York University presenting award to Sarbjit Singh Marwah, Chief Financial Officer- Bank of Nova Scotia.

Each attendee received a book entitled *Being and Becoming a Sikh* written by Dr. I. J. Singh and published by The Centennial Foundation, a poster, cuff-links and a calendar.

The Centennial Foundation was formed in 1997 to commemorate the centenary of Sikh settlement in Canada. The Foundation seeks to showcase the diverse achievements of Sikh-Canadians and to promote greater awareness and understanding of Sikh culture and tradition.

Satwinder Singh Gosal

Sikh Parade in New York

Over 10,000 people participated at the Sikh parade in New York on 22 April that Mayor Michael Bloomberg stated recognised the contribution of the community. Bloomberg's proclamation, declared the 16th Annual Sikh Parade Day to "recognise the contributions of the Sikh Community of our city".

The event was organised by the Sikh Cultural Society of Richmond Hill, Queens, with the help of various gurdwaras.



Among those present at the parade were Randy A. Daniels, Secretary of State for New York who represented Governor George E. Pataki; Mathew W. Daus, commissioner of New York City Taxi and Limousine Commission who represented Bloomberg; Assemblyman Brian McLaughlin; and Councilmen Gary Hudes and John Liu.

There were a total of 11 floats at the parade that were led by the *panj pyaras*. The first carried the *Guru Granth Sahib*. People also enjoyed the *langar* that was served at Madison Park at the end of the parade.

Daniels wished the gathering a happy *Baisakhi*, the Community's New Year day, and said he knew little about the Sikhism till such time he read the history, and has now come to know that "the Sikhs are brave warriors and honest people". Daus said it was unfortunate that the Richmond Hill gurdwara burned down last year, but added that the incident, which was condemned worldwide, helped people understand Sikhism better. McLaughlin said Sikhs would soon be able to wear turbans on duty, when a bill to that effect was passed. Displayed in the evening was a model of the new Richmond Hill gurdwara.

Sikh Religious Leaders in USA

In an unprecedented event, the *Jathedars* of four of the five *Takhts*, head granthi of Gurdwara Sis Ganj, president and secretary of the Delhi Sikh Gurdwara Management Committee (DSGMC), president of the Patna Sahib Management Committee and other eminent religious leaders addressed the overseas Sikh community at Gurdwara Gurjot Parkash in Chicago, USA, from 20 April in connection with the eight-day-long 400th Anniversary celebrations of *Sri Guru Granth Sahib*, the *Parkash Utsav*, which will be in 2004. Never before has such a galaxy of Sikh religious leadership been together in a country other



Arriving at Chicago airport is Giani Iqbal Singh Jathedar of Takht Sri Patna Sahib and Giani Tarlochan Singh Jathedar of Takht Sri Keshgarh Sahib. Welcoming them are Bhai Daljit Singh, Bhai Balvir Singh Chandigarhiteale, Bhai Mohinder Singh Sagar and some senior citizens of Chicago.

than India. This mega event was organised under the patronage of Bhai Daljit Singh, of the Guru Nanak Sikh Mission of America. During this sojourn in the USA, the five *Jathedars* — Giani Joginder Singh Vedanti (Akal Takht), Giani Iqbal Singh (Patna Sahib), Giani Tarlochan Singh (Keshgarh Sahib), Giani Balwant Singh (Damdama Sahib) and a nominee of Giani Kulwant Singh (Hazoor Sahib) — and the head granthis of Gurdwara Sri Sis Ganj Sahib (Delhi), Giani Ranjit Singh, met the Governor of Illinois

state and the Major of Chicago to apprise them of the problems of the Sikh diaspora.

Others joining the celebrations included S. Paramjit Singh Sarna and Bhajan Singh Walia (DSGMC), Manjit Singh Calcutta (former MLA), Giani Jaswant Singh Parwana, Bhai Harjinder Singh (Srinagar), Bhai Manjit Singh (Pathankot), Bhai Sarabjit Singh Rangila (Durg), Sant Pritam Singh (Mithe Tiwane), Bhai Sarabjit Singh (Sri



Giani Iqbal Singh reading the Hukummama at the Chicago Gurdwara Sahib.

Darbar Sahib), Bhai Amrik Singh (Gurdaspur), Bhai Bhupinder Singh Paras and S Didar Singh Bains (Yuba City).

"Never before have the Jathedars of more than two Takhts been together at any religious gathering outside India", according to Sant Daljit Singh. "We are trying to impress upon the Illinois Administration to declare a public holiday either on *Baisakhi* or on the occasion of birth anniversary of Guru Nanak Dev".

"The Sikh community is also facing some problems with regard to their physical identity as an average American tends to confuse a Sikh with an Arab. The presence of our religious leadership will help us explain our position to the people in general and the administration in particular", he added. The Sikh religious leaders also met with religious leaders of other communities for world peace.

Baisakhi in Britain

Baisakhi was very special this year in the London suburb of Southall; it had to be, considering that a beautiful new Gurdwara had been opened just a week earlier.

It was almost as if there had been two Baisakhis this year: a week earlier, the procession at the opening of the new Sri Guru Singh Sabha Gurdwara drew an estimated 50,000 people. The procession for Baisakhi, which happily came on Sunday, drew about that many again. Many of

the Southall Gurdwaras joined in as before, including the Ramgarhia Gurdwara-goers.

But this time all roads seemed to lead to only one Gurdwara; the new one on Havelock Road. Or one could say that no road really led there, so heavy was the traffic around and so long the procession through Southall led by the *panj piare*.

Thousands of Sikhs from other towns and cities across Britain joined in. And if anyone thought they could lose weight in the march that lasted hours, forget it! Not just because of the great *langar* that followed, by also the *langar* by the hundreds who lined the roads. Britain's Prime Minister Tony Blair who has plenty on his hands and more than plenty on his mind, still took time off to wish the Sikhs "A great Baisakhi".

"I know that the British Sikhs have made a great contribution to the economic, cultural and political life of the U.K. and I firmly believe that your faith and culture have brought tremendous strength and benefits to our society", he stated.

He praised the Sikhs for their belief in equality, social justice, tolerance and respect for other religions and faiths. "These are values shared by the wider British community and I am delighted to have this opportunity to send you my best wishes at this special time".

Mr. Iain Duncan-Smith, Leader of the opposition Conservative Party, sent a message to a Baisakhi meeting held at the House of Commons. "I praise the courage and the collective spirit of the Sikhs who have also done so much for Britain", he said. It was for the first time Baisakhi was celebrated in the British Parliament, just as last year was the first time that Diwali was celebrated in the House of Commons.

Baisakhi in the Netherlands

This year like everywhere else around the world, *Baisakhi* was celebrated in the Netherlands as well, which with a population of around 16 million people bordering Germany and Belgium in mainland Europe, has a limited population of Sikhs. This year, the younger generation along with the local Sikh sangat and Gurdwara decided to bring awareness among the Dutch population by distributing leaflets in Dutch and English about Sikhism throughout the *Nagar Kirtan*.

The *Nagar Kirtan* started at 12.30 pm on Sunday 13 April 2003 from the Hague Gurdwara Sahib and moved through the important areas around the city with approximately 1500 strong sangat holding Gurbani banners in Dutch,

singing Shabads, distributing leaflets and leaving a lasting impression of the Sikh identity and *Baisakhi* on the bystanders. Reaching back to the Gurdwara Sahib at 4.00 pm where everyone was welcomed for *Guru ka Langar* and Shabad Kirtan. It was truly an amazing sight to see so many Sikhs (most of them wearing saffron turbans and chunnis) together on the streets in a foreign land, spreading the message of *sarbat da bhalla* which is so deeply engraved in the Sikh way of Life.

New Asian Art Museum at San Francisco launches permanent Sikh Art Gallery

On 5th April 2003 *The Sikh Foundation*—an organisation founded by Dr.Narinder Singh Kapany, the well known scientist and father of fibre optics—celebrated its 35th anniversary and marked the opening of the first permanent Sikh Arts Exhibit in North America: *The Satinder Kaur Kapany Gallery of Sikh Arts*. Dr. Narinder Singh Kapany has endowed this Gallery in his wife's honour and he has donated over 100 historical Sikh art objects from his personal collection to support this permanent exhibit.

"This museum is expected to receive almost 10,000 visitors on daily basis and now through this gallery, all historical Sikh Arts" says Dr.Emily J. Sano, Director of the Asian Art Museum, San Francisco. The 500-year old Sikh faith, originally from the Punjab has a second home in California, where the Sikhs arrived and settled over a century ago. The first Asian to join the US House of Representatives was Dalip Singh Saund, a Sikh Californian. The Sikh presence particularly in California, as in the whole of North America and countries all over the world can be felt in all fields – from agriculture to science, high-tech engineering, medicine, law, accounting, teaching and businesses.

The Sikh Foundation started its celebration by organising a seminar on Sikh Arts with almost 300 attendees, in the morning of 5th April at the Osher Hall of the Asian Art Museum. The seminar was chaired and opened by Dr.Forrest McGill, Chief Curator, Asian Art Museum. After the welcome address of Dr. McGill, Professor Nikky Guninder Kaur Singh, Chair of the Department of Religious Studies at Colby College talked about the importance of arts to humankind as described in the sacred Sikh scripture: *The Guru Granth Sahib*. After Professor Singh's talk, five Sikh women speakers presented their works and research materials related to Sikh Arts. These speakers included: Amrita and Rabindra Kaur Singh, England-based twin sisters who have been painting on Sikh subjects for the last

twelve years, Manveet Kaur Saluja, the portrait artist from New York, Dr.Mary Ann Milford on behalf of Arpana Caur, the well know Sikh artist from New Delhi, India and finally Shivi Singh, a resident of San Francisco bay area and doctorate student of North Indian Arts at the Punjab University, Chandigarh.

The American, as well as the Sikh national anthem was respectively sung by Jasdeep Kaur Kang, an eleven year girl from Yuba City and Kartar Singh, a ten year old boy from San Jose. Following these, Dr.Narinder Singh Kapany made a welcome statement in which he honoured various groups of attendees and gave a description of *The Sikh Foundation* activities for the past 35 years.

The Sikh Community takes on the NYPD

Ever since Amric Singh was a young child, he had dreamed of becoming a police officer. Born and raised in New York City, he had no doubts that this dream would one day become a reality.

Amric is a proud Sikh. Growing up in New York City, he did not think his religion would ever get in the way of becoming a police officer and serving his neighbours. Unfortunately, Amric Singh is being denied his civil liberties by the very city he wants to serve. After passing all required examinations and beginning training, Amric was asked by the NYPD to remove his turban and trim his beard — an order Amric found to be ludicrous and requested religious accommodation.

Amric was humiliated by the NYPD when he refused to take off his turban. He was segregated and placed in a separate room. He attended a NYPD hearing to discuss his religious accommodation request and was told "We have consulted a Muslim Cleric regarding your case." Since Amric isn't a Muslim, he was right on the mark when he replied: "Which religion are you accommodating?" Soon thereafter, Amric was fired for refusing to comply with the orders of his superiors.

When *The Sikh Coalition* heard about Amric's plight, it made countless calls, sent letters and faxes to both NY Mayor Bloomberg and NYPD Commissioner Kelly in hopes of reaching an amicable solution. A Legal Counsel was hired, and a worldwide petition signed by over 8,000 people was submitted. Unfortunately, the NYPD and the City of NY refused to take the Sikh Community seriously.

In May 2002, *The Sikh Coalition* filed a suit with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. The response by the media was overwhelming. Every major news station



A contingent of Sikh police officers from Great Britain and Canada are seen here with Amric Singh (on the left) at the press conference organised by The Sikh Coalition at New York. They included Kashmiri Singh Mann and Parminder Singh Bhogal from the Metropolitan Police Sikh Association, U.K., and Arvinder Singh Sandhu and Pardeep Singh Nagis from the Ontario Provincial Police.

and newspaper picked up on the story, positively depicting Amric Singh's fight for equal rights. Amric and the Coalition received a "Right to Sue" letter from the EEOC in late 2002. Continued lack of response from the City of New York left no other alternative but to take the NYPD to Court.

On March 4, 2003 almost two years after Amric was fired from the NYPD, Ravinder Singh Bhalla, an attorney retained by the Sikh Coalition, filed a lawsuit against NYPD Police Commissioner Ray Kelly and the City of New York for employment discrimination and denial of Amric's civil rights.

A press conference announcing the suit was held just hours after the paperwork was delivered to the courts. Mr. Bhalla, members of the Coalition, Amric Singh, Sikh police officers from around the world and various interfaith representatives were present to show their solidarity with Amric Singh. Amric, who was quite emotional at the Press Conference, said "I'm doing this to make things easier for the next generation."

The presence of Sikh Police officers from Canada and the United Kingdom had a tremendous impact. It sent a strong message that if Sikhs could serve in the police forces in other jurisdictions, New York City was no different. When asked about the significance of the turban, Kashmiri Singh Maan, Chairman of the London Metropolitan Police Sikh Association stated, "It's not a cultural item, it's not a fashion statement, it's who I am."

Newspapers and television news stations from New York to Los Angeles covered the story. Amric, while just a simple man like the rest of us, has become a symbol of what it means to fight for your rights. Prabhjot Singh, Director at the Coalition, declared, "We are committed to this battle and will take this challenge to the highest court in the land if necessary."

Ajeet Kaur

Ajeet Kaur is Director of Communications for The Sikh Coalition, which has become a leading voice representing Sikhs in the United States. The Coalition is made up of Sikh professionals who volunteer their time and effort for Sikh causes. www.sikhcoalition.org

Sikh Pilgrims at Hasan Abdal

Hundreds of Sikh devotees from across the world congregated at the Hasan Abdal Gurdwara in Pakistan's Punjab on Baisakhi eve to celebrate the festival.

Sikh devotees came from India, USA, Australia, Germany, Russia, Afghanistan and Canada for a 10-day trip and were present in Hasan Abdal, where the famous gurdwara marks birthplace of Guru Nanak. They also visited the gurdwara in Nankana Sahib, near Lahore.

Nearly 100 Indian Sikhs had been given special permission to cross into Pakistan through the Wagah border to celebrate the festival. 🇮🇳



A beautiful view of the Hasan Abdal gurdwara, also known as Panja Sahib, two hours drive west from Islamabad, the capital of Pakistan.



A Seminar was held on "Gender-equality in Sikh Philosophy" on 30 April 2003, at the Hotel Imperial in New Delhi. Organised by Sardarni Sarabjit Kaur, President of The Sikh Women's Association, jointly with The Nagaara Trust, the eminent speakers this evening included Bibi Kiranjot Kaur, former General Secretary of the SGPC, Dr. Mrs. Mohinder Kaur Gill, former Principal of the Mata Sundari College for Women, the eminent Dr. Jaswant Singh Neki and Sardar Rajbir Singh, Convener of the Khalsa Environment Project.



In celebration of "World Earth Day", the Khalsa Environment Project co-ordinated by Rajbir Singh and his wife Jyoti Kaur enthused the Sikh Community of Delhi to participate in a tree plantation function on 27 April 2003 at Gurdwara Mata Sundri Sahib. Earlier on Baisakhi, 14 April 2003, the Khalsa Environment Project held a painting function for children at Gurdwara Majnu ka Tilla in Delhi. Nearly 500 children participated, the project co-ordinated by Gagan Singh Khalsa, an artist himself.



Baisakhi 2003 was celebrated at the Revesby Gurdwara (Sri Guru Singh Sabha) at Sydney in Australia. The Aye Vaisakhi concert was organised by the Waheguru Simran Society of Australia and presented by the students of the Revesby Public School, seen in this picture.

The Guru Gobind Singh Chair, in the University Department of History, at Mumbai University was inaugurated by the Chief Minister of Maharashtra State, Sushil Kumar Shinde at the Sir Cavasjee Jehangir Convocation Hall at Mumbai on 23 April 2003. Seen in the picture are Dr. Bhulchandra L. Mungekar, Vice Chancellor University of Mumbai, S. Kulwant Singh Kohli, ex-Sheriff of Mumbai, the Chief Minister Sushil Kumar Shinde and Dr. A.M. Murudkar, the Registrar.