

III/2005

NISHAN

NAGAARA

Preserving Heritage

**Sikh Coinage:
Symbol of Sovereignty**

Banda Bahadur & Lohgarh

Forts, Palaces & Havelis

Nanak Jhira Sahib

Beyond Nanavati Report



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Cover: Decorated door at a haveli
at Fatehgarh Churian
Photo by Sandeep Shanker

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Whenever despair descends, introspection becomes imperative. Who has not sat tense before his own conscience? The Nanavati Report should essentially have made many a conscience reflect inwards. "The test of a civilised person", according to Clarence Day, "is first self-awareness and then depth after depth of sincerity is self-confrontation". The 'organised massacre' of 4,000 innocent Sikhs in November 1984 puts to shame every God-fearing individual. First of all, perpetrators of that heinous crime need to confront their inner selves. Then, the many inquiry commissions and committees set to find out facts ought to look into their conscience. Lastly, the Sikh community must reflect on why it became the victim of such carnage.

Let us at the outset accept that the truth still very much eludes us. That is why we most respectfully request Justice Nanavati to search his conscience and tell us if he really did not know who the "master mind", the supreme director of that genocide really was? He had before him affidavits that had not been rejected by him and witnesses whose credibility he had not doubted. He was also probably aware of "Teach the Sikhs a Lesson" and "Big tree falling ..." pronouncements which were widely reported in the press. However, he chose to base his verdict on some statements that departed from what the aforementioned evidence suggested. One wishes to know from Justice Nanavati, "Could the veracity of the statements he relied upon be verified beyond doubt? Also, could the intentions behind them be really authenticated?" It is said that justice should brook no fear or favour. If Lord Buddha were present, he would ask, "Tell me Justice Nanavati, was it fear, or was it favour or both fear and favour or neither fear or favour that was working behind your report?"

One is repelled by the fact that some of the well known netas of the time, leaders and instigators of the killer mobs, were shortly thereafter rewarded by being appointed Union Ministers. "Did it not occur to you, honourable Justice, that the one who rewarded them would have done so because they carried out most diligently the mission allotted to them by him?"

Justice Nanavati! In your report, you made a grave statement: "The politicians have no value system and the police know no limits". But when you came to draw conclusions from the facts relating to that truism, you did overlook the politicians (except the minor 'local ones') and showed sympathy for the police because 'they were under instructions'. But how was it that you omitted to suggest under whose instructions the police became so heartless?

Let us now turn to the Congress party and its Government. One would admire them for having continued with their game plan of deceit and prevarication so uninterruptedly for twenty-one long years. Their confession of the numbers murdered in 1984 rose as time passed - from around 800 in 1984, through 2733 in 1987 and to 3949 sometime later. The rising gradient of these figures suggests some logical possibilities as to its explanation. One, that the process of killing continued unabated over the years and so the figures have been swelling continually? Two, that those responsible for scoring the tally suffer from a deficiency called *ocalculo*? Three, that it took the Congress

party that many years to thaw the truth out of their deep-frozen lies. The Congress may choose whichever suits them.

One here wishes to ask the Congress party that were not its top leaders initially responsible for installing Bhindranwale in the Golden Temple Complex, surreptitiously arming him and building up his image in order to use him to oust the Akalis from the Government? Did not Rajiv Gandhi describe him as a saint? However, when this stipulated strategy did not work, because Akali leaders actually joined hands with saint Bhindranwale, the Congress Government decided to call him a terrorist and mount its armed might with tanks on him and his followers in the Golden Temple Complex in June 1984.

It so happened that some of Bhindranwale's followers managed to slip through the armed siege only to find themselves between the devil (Pakistan) and the deep sea (Indian Army). Sensing sure death behind, they had little choice but to take shelter with the devil. Isn't it, then, that the policies of the Government of India actually pushed them into being used as terrorists by Pakistan against their own country? I sometimes ask myself, "Was there no leader with more patriotic intent who could have offered them clemency and thus reclaimed them?". Those few have lingered on in Pakistan and continually been used to create problems for us. However, such clemency could obviously not have been considered because the Congress party had reaped electoral benefits by dubbing them as terrorists.

The Congress government had actually commissioned one Union Minister to draw up and execute a master plan to dub the entire Sikh community as "terrorists" and then propagate this disgraceful lie all over the world. In fact, Indian diplomatic missions abroad wilfully promoted this terrible canard through the decade 1984-1994. Sikhs were never "terrorists". Only a handful of them, without their choice, found themselves pushed into that corner. But, the entire Sikh community was vilified as terrorists through such damning projections.

One must marvel at the gall of the Congress for tabling in Parliament an ATR that actually was a non-ATR under masquerade. Interestingly, there is tacit confession in that report that the Home Ministry could not find time to consult the Law Ministry over as long as those six months in matters where even they suspected that action was required. Obviously that was a device to postpone action and then count on fragile public memory to preclude the need for taking any action at all.

If anyone has done some damage control, it is the Prime Minister who did what his party should have done 21 years ago, namely, to apologise not just to the Sikh community but to the entire nation. No one before him could muster any such moral courage.

Let us cast a quick glance also upon the BJP, the major opposition party. Now this party is trying to derive as much political mileage as possible by censuring the Congress. However, no one has forgotten that their leaders, including a later Prime Minister, were among those who endorsed and applauded Operation Bluestar. Now that the Congress appears to be on the defensive on account of merciless onslaught by the media, those very BJP leaders want to be seen among its unforgiving critics. Nonetheless, even in such disapprobation of the Congress, one

can still sense a degree of cautious hesitancy by BJP leaders, as consequences of the Nanavati Report might well cause a fallout in Gujarat.

Now, a word about the role of the media. During the period 1984-1994, the media was, by and large, anti-Sikh, doing all that they could to portray the Sikhs as anti-national, fundamentalist terrorists. They might have towed the line prescribed by the ruling party, or, maybe they also wanted to 'teach the Sikhs a lesson'. Interestingly, almost the entire press described that planned pogrom as rioting. This could not have been inadvertent, because the press surely knows what the two terms differentially connote.

One wonders how such a dramatic change in attitude of the media took place soon after the Nanavati Report became public. What possibly seems to have happened is that the new generation reporters, many of whom might have only been infants in 1984, went out to interview the widows and orphans of the carnage which happened twenty-one years ago. Listening to their tales of terror and the abject cruelty – worse than that of Durrani and Abdalis – that was perpetrated on the Sikhs by their own fellow nationals, touched their conscience so much that they took up their issue with vigour and it is mostly on account of this that some action had to follow even the non-ATR. The Sikh community ought to be thankful to them.

Let us now address the Sikh community itself and its "leadership". They need to introspect solemnly and humbly analyse where they went wrong and why they were so mercilessly targeted. It is easy to point out a mole in the eyes of others while overlooking a molehill in one's own.

First of all, the Sikh community itself has yet to imbibe any strategy of living with dignity as a minority. So far, they have been employing threats of marches, parading processions and shouting slogans as their modus operandi. They have almost always reaped frustration in political bargaining on account of such inadequate skills. And such frustration has led them almost invariably to issue arrogant threats and offensive shouting, which might be why ruling politicians sought to 'teach them a lesson'. If this is true, then the ruling politicians, avowedly Gandhian pacifists, morally gravitated down to unleash brutal violence upon those who had in reality done nothing but shouting loudly.

Sikhs in general and the Akali leadership in particular, have never been clever enough to see through the treacherous game into which they were being craftily sucked. In euphoria, they happily fell into various traps and their baseless threats provided the Congress government with just the opportunity they want to mount that dastardly Operation Bluestar upon them.

At the time that Operation Bluestar took place, it was Giani Zail Singh, a devout Sikh, who was not only the Rashtrapati but also Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces of India. He, however, did nothing to stem the holocaust inflicted upon the Sikh people. Was he helpless? Was he afraid – afraid for his life? In any case, the Sikh people were disgusted by his inaction.

When Indira Gandhi decided to mount that armed attack on the Golden Temple, the first Divisional Commander asked to carry it out declined to undertake such an attack. "The army is meant to fight foreign invaders, not the country's own civilians". However, other high ranking officers who did not hesitate and carried out this in famous attack, were astonishingly, both Sikhs, albeit one being clean-shaven. And their men entered full-shod into the precincts of the highest temple of their faith. Let us be reminded of a saying: "One who is not true to his God cannot

be true to anything else – not even their country, nor even their family".

After Operation Bluestar, the Sikh nation went into impotent rage. Funds were donated and collected everywhere for ill-defined projects, none of which survived. Plans were initiated to launch an International body, the World Sikh Organisation. Its president, another retired Sikh General, turned out to be a Government agent, who betrayed his own community and vanished after making the organisation completely defunct of ideas and funds!

Another shaven Sikh was then Secretary with the Government of India who forced the Head Granthi of Darbar Sahib, under threat of life, to announce on television, that no damage had been affected on the Golden Temple. Actually, however, showers of bullets and sharpnel had damaged the walls of the temple and a bullet even hit the priest in attendance upon the holy Granth Sahib inside the Temple.

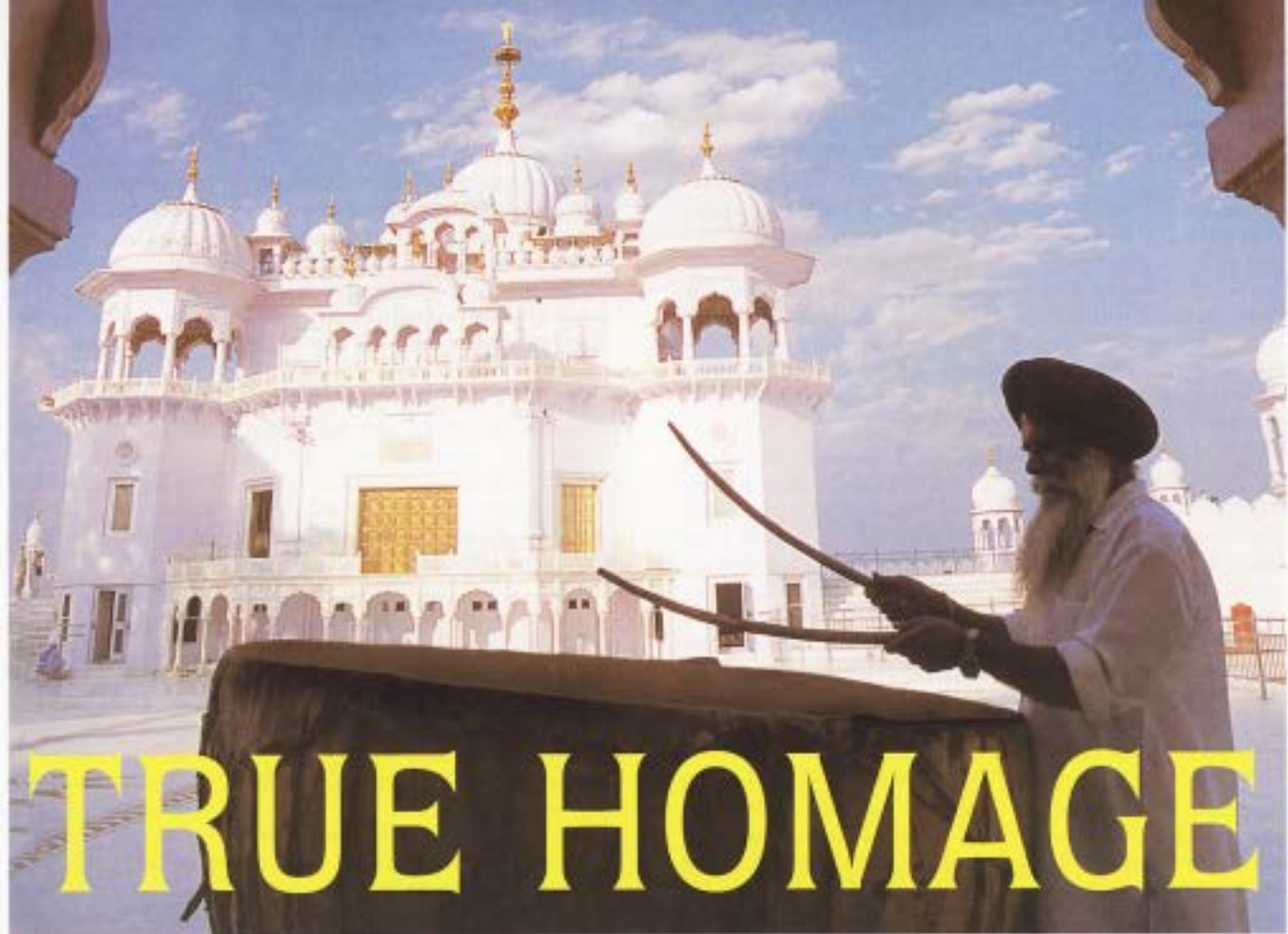
Let us now comment upon the Akali Dal, that major political party of the Sikhs. After Master Tara Singh, this party went through accelerated fractionation and many name-brand Akali Dals mushroomed. No more can any of the Akali Dals legitimately claim to represent the Sikh community and that is why the relatively bigger faction chose to lean upon the BJP, particularly because of Sikh resentment with Congress on account of 1984. This clever move led this faction to come into power. However Badal Sahib chose to shelve all the promises made in his election manifesto, one of the most urgent ones being to work for release of the hundreds of Sikh youth under detention in jails and lingering there without any trial. One of the documents published by the RSS reported that the then CM prevailed upon the BJP government not to release those detenus as "they might prove a threat to his suzerainty in Sikh politics". Thus far, neither Badal nor any other Akali leader has contradicted this grave allegation by the RSS.

The hapless Sikh community became disillusioned and alienated from this Akali regime on account of its failure to provide an honest and efficient government, which soon lost to the very Congress party whom the Sikhs had begun to loathe.

If justice has been denied to the Sikhs, it is also, in part, owing to their own politico moral indiscretions. When HKL Bhagat, in a case relating to his role in the carnage of 1984, was being tried in a court of law, the key witness, a Sikh woman, is said to have turned hostile ostensibly under pressure from the some members of Delhi Sikh Gurdwara Management Committee.

The name of Jagdish Tytler was on the lips of everyone as a 'murderer-leader' immediately after the pogrom of 1984. Yet, a member of the Delhi Sikh Gurdwara Committee from the Trans Yamuna area, conferred a saropa upon him in his local Gurdwara. Even more recently, the same Tytler was given another saropa in the presence of the President Delhi Gurdwara Management Committee in another Gurdwara. Shameful is not the word. Is there no sharam!

All these examples show that the real danger that the Sikh Community faces is from within itself, casting an aspersion on the spiritual health of the Sikh people, their leadership as well as their intelligentsia. For us just remorse would not do, because remorse is simply impotent and is likely to sin again. Let us awaken in ourselves repentance of a degree that should hold us back from repeating such sins. Every Sikh needs to reburnish his faith in Nirbhau, the Fearless Lord, so that he is not awed by any mundane power on earth. ☯



Developing The Guru Gobind Singh National Park around Anandpur Sahib and its environs

In developing a comprehensive plan for the region around Anandpur Sahib with its centre at Gurdwara Keshgarh Sahib, the objective should be to develop the entire area carefully, punctuated by various projects in a restrained and unostentatious manner, so as to evoke the true spirit and divine inspiration that led to founding of the Khalsa Panth.

The region – to be defined in cooperation and consultation with concerned people – should be essentially low-profile but articulated with a “sense of the appropriate” and marked by restrained elegance. The aim throughout should be to enhance the character of the entire landscape of hills and meadows, by bringing into focus spots and sites associated with the Gurdwara Keshgarh Sahib (above).

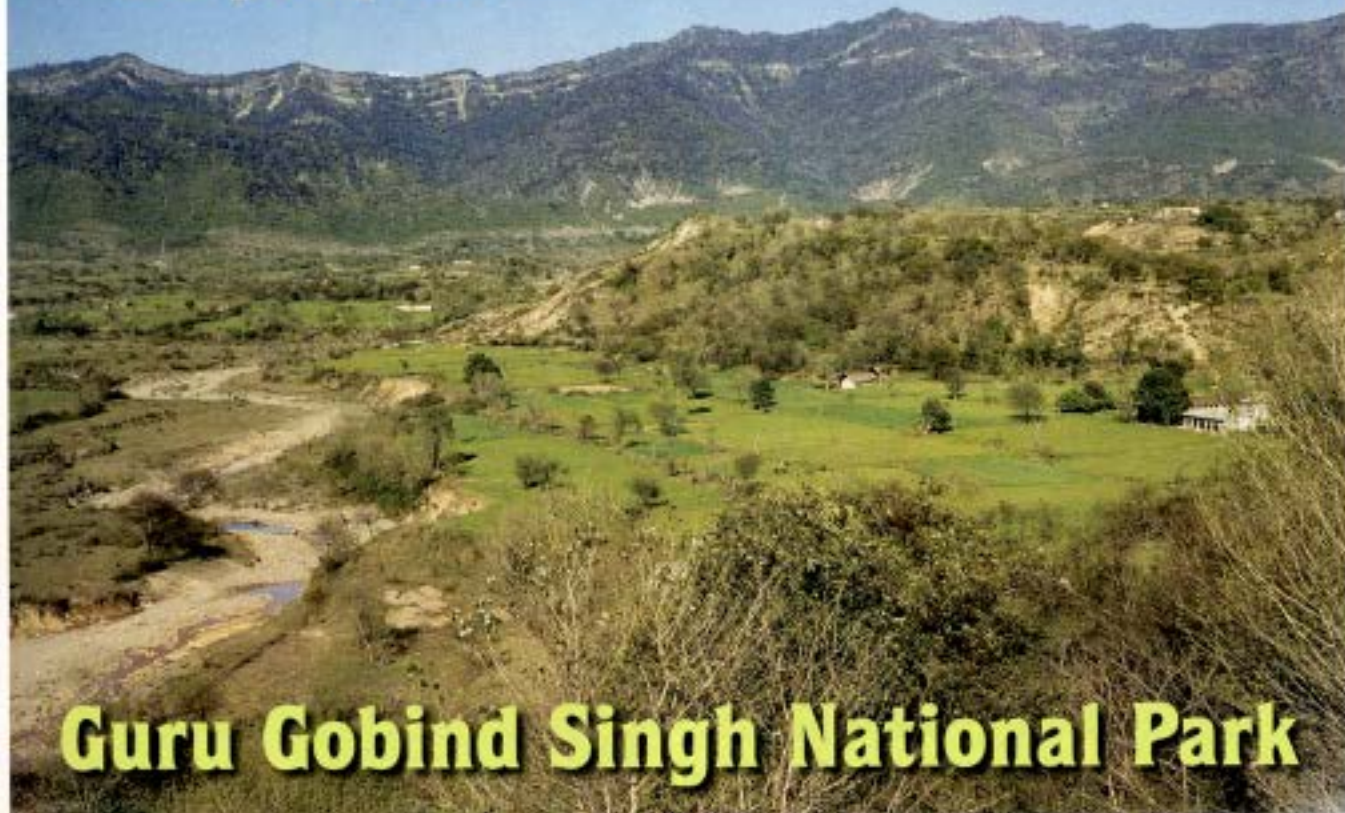
We have to recreate the mood of that epochal period. The historicity associated with the Gurdwara is well-understood and cherished because it is the site of the Khalsa Panth’s birth, so nothing should be developed or built which will in any way distract from this vital heritage and natural assets around

it. The key to the success of the planner’s approach will lie in avoiding the spectacular and flamboyant, or anything which could diminish the impact of the sacred space. Sensitively planned elements and components of the project should instead, help the people of India, nay, the world, to gain insights into the quintessence of the Sikh faith and its universal appeal of equality, brotherhood, rational thinking and ethical conduct. These qualities are even more relevant in the contemporary world with its unending conflict, turmoil and lack of tolerance for others.

Given the fragile nature of the Shivaliks, the *Spatial Plan* should aim at conserving and enhancing the natural landscape through planned afforestation with appropriate plants and trees, facilitating gatherings of the few and many who come as pilgrims and visitors during Baisakhi, Hola Mohalla and other events of significance throughout the year.

The *Spatial Plan* for the “defined region”, demarcated on a detailed map, must need be conceived at several levels and scales.

The proposed



Guru Gobind Singh National Park

Covering an extensive area of 15,000 to 20,000 acres, the National Park should be developed as a gift to the nation, three centuries after founding of the Khalsa order.

The Park must recreate a game and bird sanctuary, reminiscent of those ancient times as also a herbal garden for plants that once did or can now be, grown here. Much else can be planned for the Park.

Development of areas around Gurdwara Keshgarh Sahib

The historic Gurdwara has to be carefully conserved in a systematic manner. Incongruous structures and garish buildings in its immediate vicinity and down below should be discouraged and others in the future forbidden. All new structures should be built within the framework of a carefully drawn Master Plan. Particularly the high and unsightly water tower just opposite the main entrance to the Gurdwara Keshgarh Sahib should be demolished, since it is an affront to the dignity of the shrine. It should be replaced by an alternative water supply system.

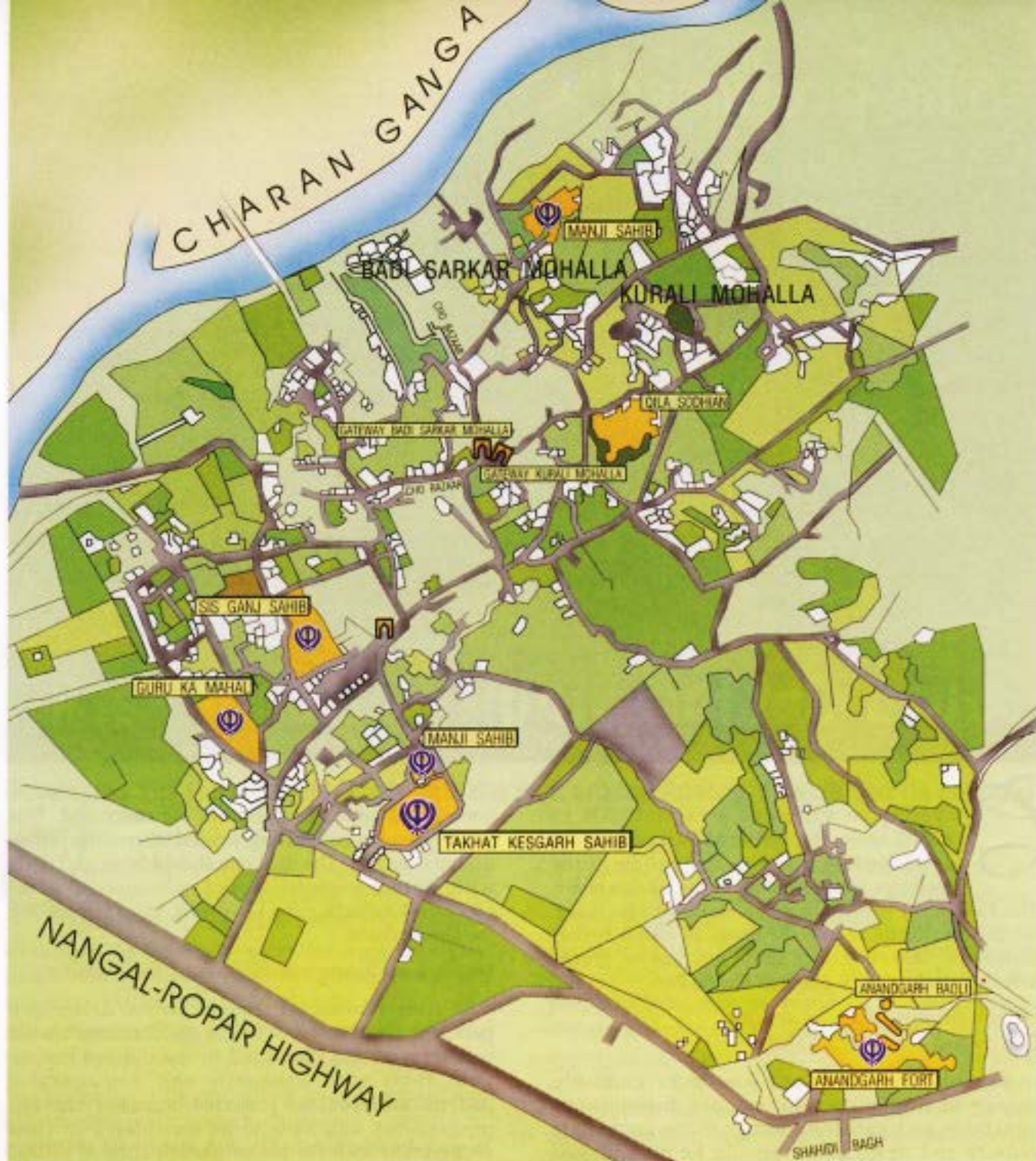
The township around the vicinity of Gurdwara Keshgarh Sahib needs to be properly planned with agreed "architectural controls" insofar as land use and activity patterns, new constructions, height,

zoning and colour of buildings are concerned. This would involve conducting several alternative urban design exercises. The final one should be agreed upon with mutual cooperation and collaboration of all concerned including the Gurdwara management and the Government.

Improving living conditions of the Habitats

All the human settlements in the designated park, the small towns, villages and hamlets, should be surveyed and identified in the defined region, with their socio-economic and demographic patterns analysed and projected because systematic programmes will have to be formulated in close cooperation with the active participation of village residents. Attention to basic services like clean drinking water, environmental sanitation and health care-facilities will qualitatively improve living conditions. Extreme care will be exercised to develop real understanding of the problems with a critical appreciation of local vernacular forms so that whatever is developed and built should respect traditional, living patterns evolved over the centuries in response to local felt needs.

These villages will be inter-linked by landscaped paths and cycle tracks, ultimately leading to the important focal points in the defined area.



The layout of Anandpur city.

Conservation of sacred sites

Places which are a part of this unique historic environment should be rediscovered, identified and marked for conservation in a sustained manner. The various Gurdwaras and Forts built by Guru Gobind Singhji should be brought into focus, however, not in a garish or jarring manner but by spatially integrating and linking them through landscaped paths, so that

those visitors and pilgrims who wish to can go on a yatra from one sacred space to another and gain new insights on the past associations of the area.

Bhai Kanhaiya Village and Baoli

The Bhai Kanhaiya Baoli is a landmark of immense significance since it is associated with a disciple of Guru Gobind Singh. The Baoli needs to be carefully restored. The village adjacent to the Baoli, fed by



Paths and tracks leading to focal points.



New irrigation canals in the area.



Bhai Kanhaiya village residents.

a natural spring said to have been used by Bhai Kanhaiya, would also be sensitively developed to show how traditional habitat forms can be retained, while improving environmental sanitation, clean drinking water supply, drainage and other need-based facilities. All this to be done with the active participation of villagers who must develop a stake and pride in their villages.

A Balak-Mata Centre, Crafts Centre and Chopaal would also be interwoven with the Baoli, within or around the village.

Hola Mohalla Maidan

Areas for small gatherings, meditation spots and areas for rest and reflection as also for passive recreation (family outings) should be developed at appropriate sites and furnished with rest rooms, toilet facilities etc.



Bhai Kanhaiya Baoli needs careful preservation.

Areas for larger gatherings during the annual Baisakhi, Hola Mohalla and other celebrations would be planned with basic facilities and amenities. Their demarcation would be undertaken in close collaboration with Gurdwara Keshgarh Sahib management and after observation and spot surveys of the areas during the Hola Mohalla and other festivals for furnishing essential services and amenities. These would include first-aid emergency services, ambulances, health care centres and other facilities.

Developing Taragarh Fort and its Environs

Standing majestically on top of the Taragarh Fort, the Gurdwara looks out on an enchanting view of a vast and serene panorama of undulating meadows and rivulets.

Archaeologists should be engaged to help discover and un-earth old battlements in and around the Taragarh Fort. The entire hillock could be landscaped and “re-created” on the basis of some documents or artefacts discovered. Perhaps a low profile Display-cum-Exhibition Centre could also be developed in its vicinity.

Around the Taragarh Fort, a number of hillocks and escarpments are visible and several spots could be sensitively developed for a dramatic son-e-lumiere show that would be projected from Taragarh Fort to the hill ranges some kilometres away. With the aid



The road towards Taragarh winds through low hills and scrub jungle, as it was 300 years back.



The Gurdwara, newly built at Taragarh, stands out amidst the natural surroundings.



Sewa at Taragarh, looking towards the Naina Devi hills.

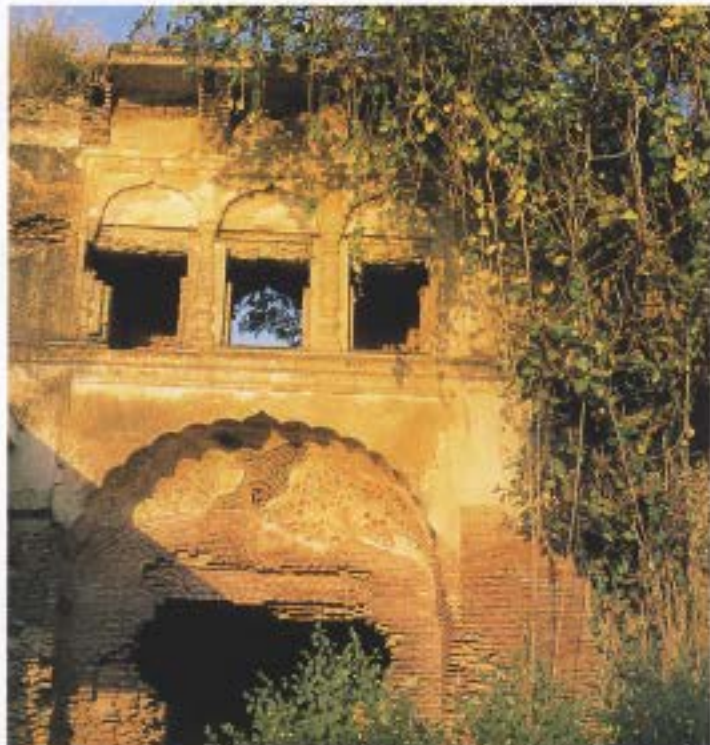
of the latest laser beam and electronic projection technology, powerful and moving re-enactments of history could be provided to audiences. A number of informal amphitheatres could be carved out at vintage points on the hills below Taragarh Fort where people could assemble in thousands without being subjected to endless traffic hassles.

Planning for a City of Tents

Baisakhi attracts a very large number of people from all over India and many thousands from abroad. While no firm figure can be given, it is perfectly possible that upto 2 million could visit Anandpur Sahib during the Baishaki week. Accommodation for such large numbers should be furnished in the form of tented townships, linked together as a large "City of Tents". Adequate spaces are to be left between each township for circulation and services. Each township within the tented city should be provided with basic infrastructure, essential services and amenities, adequate street lighting (with emergency back-up generators), safe drinking water, hygienic sanitation, clean toilets, regular garbage collection and disposal systems which need to be planned and commissioned well in time. Along with infrastructure, adequate arrangements (and spaces earmarked for them) for feeding large numbers in an orderly and dignified manner will be required.

Likewise, emergency field services, first aid, medical support for emergencies with telecommunication facilities, a fleet of ambulances and fire-fighting services must be planned at strategic locations to encounter any unexpected eventualities. The idea is to avoid, as far as possible, incidents that have been occurring during the Hajj and Makah and the Kumbh Mela (Hardwar). The planning and location of the tented city with several townships will have to be done with care so as to avoid mishaps.

As Anandpur Sahib attracts large number of devotees, especially during Baishaki and Hola Mohalla, the infrastructure can so be planned on a modular system, so that as and when



Historic Manji Sahib building in a state of dilapidation.

required, appropriate section(s) can be commissioned in response to the number of visitors frequenting Anandpur Sahib and the sites in its neighbourhood.

The *Spatial Plan* for the Guru Gobind Singh National Park has to be formulated in a time perspective to be effectuated in several phases, each with a defined time-span; therefore, a programme should be developed as to where all buildings and institutions, open areas, parks and spaces for rest and reflection are to be developed. A systematic system of priorities must be established to ensure that the planning goals are realised according to the stipulation of the Plan. While some projects would take one or two years, others might take some five or even more. Phasing and development funding should be identified, as also for the future maintenance of the entire area.



Sayed Shafi in discussions with the Singh Sahibs at Anandpur Sahib.



Langar at Keshgarh Sahib.

Planned development would thus emerge as a living and continuous process in synchronisation with a living legacy.

This then will be the true *Ajooba*, true homage to the Dashmesh! ☺

Sayed S.Shafi

*Former Chief Town Planner
of India*

The Khalsa Heritage Complex, Anandpur Sahib



With a commitment of Rs 48 crores from the Government of India and a tie up arrangements with commercial banks for loans upto Rs 100 crore, the Khalsa Heritage Complex coming up at Anandpur Sahib is back on the rails, scheduled to be completed by March 2007.

Rather than being a mere repository of art objects collected and displayed, the Khalsa Heritage Complex would project the gamut of Sikh history and heritage, showcasing the stormy and eventful saga of the Sikhs in a unique way. Sikhism's story of raw courage, constant struggle, heroism and martyrdom, will be presented by means of a unique

'walk through' experiences, through scenes and images and a sensitive nuanced commentary by using state-of-the-art techniques. Some of the displays will be inter-active, and the visitors will feel as if they are participating in various events and episodes. A complete visit to the museum is expected to take about two hours.

The over-all project, its planning, construction and its O&M of the Khalsa Heritage Complex is being executed by an autonomous trust, the Anandpur Sahib Foundation. The architect is Moshe Safdie, an internationally renowned American architect. The contractors are the reputed M/s



Larsen & Toubro. Designing and display of the exhibits and the interior details of 500 years of history have been entrusted to the National Institute of Design, Ahmedabad. For O&M of this complex, an organisation known as "Cultural Innovation", an internationally established institution responsible for O&M of Royal Ontario Museum of Toronto and other similar level world class museums is being involved.

After a series of intense brain-storming sessions, sixteen eminent scholars and reputed historians identified the salient postulates of the Sikh faith and the key aspects of the heritage which the museum

should seek to depict. They are the ones who have laid down the signposts for the NID to follow. To further ensure that all the thematic installations and displays are in accordance with Sikh traditions, and there is nothing of which the authenticity could be challenged, another research team consisting of equally eminent persons in their respective fields has been associated with the National Institute of Design for guidance and collated research.


While the total acquired area of the project is one hundred acres, the covered area of the complex is 21465 sq.metres. Out of this, museum covers 6500 sq.m. the museum space has been divided into 27 halls and galleries which shall depict various scenes and episodes from Sikh history and specific highlights of the Sikh faith.

We approach the Sikh Sangats of various regions to adopt specific halls/galleries by undertaking to bear the expenses for their completion. Their contribution will be suitable recognised by the Foundation by dedicating that gallery to the particular Sikh Sangat adopting it.

Of a total estimated cost of Rs 225 crore, Rs 80 crore has already been spent and the shell of the building stands completed. The detailed designing of the exhibits and displays is in-progress. Foundation has promised the Govt. of India that one-third of the total cost of this great edifice would be contributed by "Sikh Sangat" in the spirit of *kar sewa*. We are confident that the Sikh Sangat will honour this commitment!

All donations given to the Anandpur Sahib Foundation for the construction of Khalsa Heritage Complex are exempt from Income Tax under section 80-G of the Income Tax Act. The Foundation has also been permitted to receive remittances from abroad in foreign currency by the Ministry of Home Affairs, Govt. of India, under the Foreign Exchange Regulation Act, 1976 [clause 6(1)].

For the status report on the construction of the Khalsa Heritage Complex and the details of expenditure so far incurred, kindly visit our website:

 **S. Piara Singh Bhopal**
Nodal Officer
Anandpur Sahib Foundation
Chandigarh

<www.khalsaheritagecomplex.org>

The Khalsa Heritage Complex

But is it an *Ajooba* or an Affront?

What is common to Punjab's dream project, the Khalsa Heritage Complex at Anandpur Sahib, upcoming Itzak Rabin Centre and the Tel Aviv airport? Well, it's the renowned Boston and Jerusalem-based architect, Moshe Safdie, who has designed projects such as the Yad Vashem Children's Holocaust Memorial in Jerusalem, the Skirball Centre in Los Angeles and the Exploration Place in Wichita.

Sadie is the brain behind Punjab's Rs 210-crore *Ajooba* (wonder) which when completed is sought to be the most striking show window of the state's rich cultural heritage.

Envisioned as part of the tercentenary celebrations of the birth of the Khalsa, the Heritage Complex is "an inspiring tribute to the heroic and poignant saga of the Sikhs and Punjab."

Though the project began during the tenure of former chief minister Parkash Singh Badal, the present Congress government led by Capt. Amarinder Singh is reportedly keen to speed up its construction. Efforts are afoot to seek funds from various quarters, including NRIs, so that the project is completed in time without any cost overruns. The government has also made an passionate appeal to the Punjabi community, particularly its Sikh brethren the world over, to take up this project in the spirit of Kar Sewa and donate liberally either in cash or in kind in the form of equipment and machinery required for the project.

As planned, the Khalsa Heritage Complex comprises two wings: one houses changing exhibit galleries, conference rooms, a two-level research library and a 400-seat auditorium, while the other is the museum complex which will cover the 500 years of Sikh Heritage with 6,500 sq mt of permanent exhibit galleries, besides space for administration, maintenance and museum services.

While M/s Larsen and Toubro were nominated for construction of the project, the National Institute of Design (NID), Ahmedabad, were entrusted with the job of conceiving the heritage's museum exhibition, billed as probably be the world's largest narrative museum dedicated to a single community.

Using the most contemporary communication technologies for a "story-telling" museum, NID envisages to create variety in the ambiance that would transport the visitor into a different time and space, thereby enhancing their capacity to receive the intended communication/message.

A multi-layered communication strategy, appropriate for a multi-layered narrative would ensure that the visitor's aspirations are met in a language and level of details of their choice. Some of the technologies proposed to be used by NID include 3D hologram, lenticular screen,

multi-image video/AV projection, plasmas, intelligent and special effects lighting and digital audio. Another highlight of the narrative museum would be the use of large scale installations as metaphors to represent various abstracts concepts and innovative use of fibre, textiles, glass and steel.

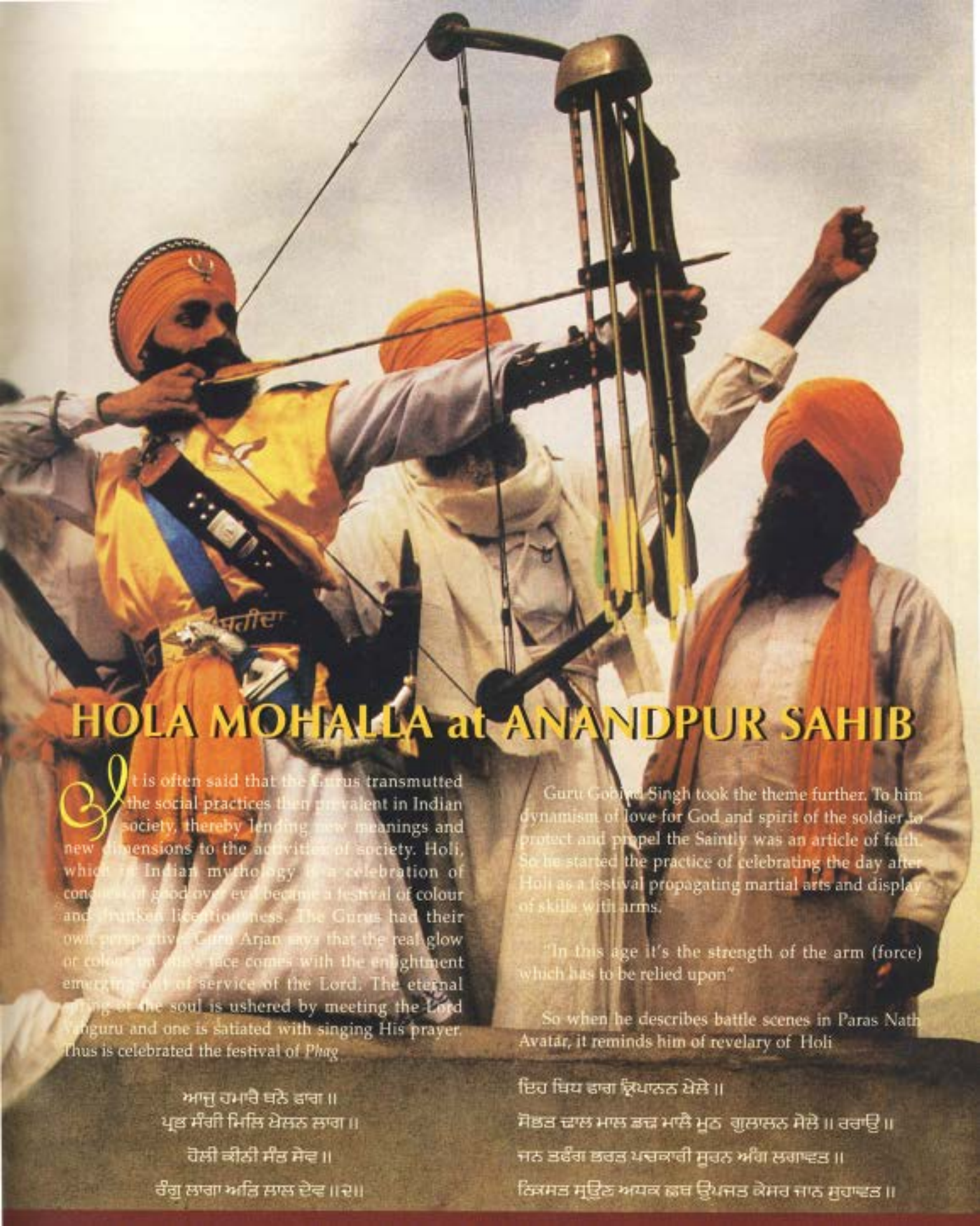
Moreover, rare artefacts and sacred objects pertaining to historical events of the past 500 years of Punjab's history will be on display to fill the gaps in this story telling museum, where the most contemporary communication technologies have been seamlessly integrated in a manner that enhances the primacy of the message over the media.

Spread over 100 acres, the Heritage Complex structure consists of its series of tower-like shafts that rise out of sand cliffs which is centre point to the rich tradition of domes which crown the sacred Sikh buildings. The roofs are carved out in concave shapes like greater receptors facing the sky covered with silvery stainless steel and reflecting the sun and light towards the famous gurdwara and the fort.

The Heritage Complex has already generated interest among leading professionals for its systematic maintenance and scientific operation. Some times back, a management expert from the management and consulting team of Royal Ontario Museum of Toronto, Canada, visited the project to study the prospects for development and operational purposes. Says Geetika Kalha, CEO, Anandpur Sahib Foundation and Punjab's cultural affairs and tourism and secretary: "The Royal Ontario Museum team may eventually be roped in, subject to clearance from the government, as permanent consultants for the maintenance and operation, while the actual operations will be entrusted to some qualified party in India to run it in a systematic way. L&T has been engaged for construction of the Rs 210-crore project which includes Rs 100 crore as cost of exhibit input and Rs-110 crore towards the building component.

Adds Ms Kalha: "Till 30 June 2002, Rs 55 crore was spent on construction of the project, of which Rs 50 crore has come from the Centre. The Punjab government recently released Rs 15 crore to the Anandpur Sahib Foundation for the project from its current year's budget.

However, with funds being a constraint, the cash-strapped Punjab government can do little. The responsibility of raising a portion of the funds would also lie on the consultants engaged. The consultants would be expected to assist the Anandpur Sahib Foundation to raise funds, especially from the NRIs using their good offices and expertise.



HOLA MOHALLA at ANANDPUR SAHIB

It is often said that the Gurus transmuted the social practices then prevalent in Indian society, thereby lending new meanings and new dimensions to the activities of society. Holi, which in Indian mythology is a celebration of conquest of good over evil became a festival of colour and drunken licentiousness. The Gurus had their own perspective. Guru Arjan says that the real glow or colour on one's face comes with the enlightenment emerging out of service of the Lord. The eternal spring of the soul is ushered by meeting the Lord. Singing His prayer and one is satiated with singing His prayer. Thus is celebrated the festival of *Phag*.

Guru Gobind Singh took the theme further. To him dynamism of love for God and spirit of the soldier to protect and propel the Saintry was an article of faith. So he started the practice of celebrating the day after Holi as a festival propagating martial arts and display of skills with arms.

"In this age it's the strength of the arm (force) which has to be relied upon"

So when he describes battle scenes in *Paras Nath Avatâr*, it reminds him of revelry of Holi

ਆਜੁ ਹਮਾਰੈ ਥਣੇ ਝਾਗਾ ॥
ਪ੍ਰਭ ਸੰਗੀ ਮਿਲਿ ਖੇਲਨ ਲਾਗਾ ॥
ਹੋਲੀ ਕੀਨੀ ਸੰਤ ਸੇਵ ॥
ਰੰਗੁ ਲਾਗਾ ਅਤਿ ਲਾਲ ਦੇਵ ॥੨॥

ਇਹ ਬਿਧ ਝਾਗ ਕ੍ਰਿਪਾਨਨ ਖੇਲੇ ॥
ਸੋਭਤ ਚਾਲ ਮਾਲ ਡਢ ਮਾਲੈ ਮੁਠ ਗੁਲਾਲਨ ਸੇਲੇ ॥ ਰਰਾਉ ॥
ਜਨ ਤਰੰਗ ਭਰਤ ਪਚਕਾਰੀ ਸੁਰਨ ਅੰਗ ਲਗਾਵਤ ॥
ਨਿਕਸਤ ਸੁਇਣ ਆਧਕ ਛਜ ਉਪਜਤ ਕੇਸਰ ਜਾਨ ਸੁਹਾਵਤ ॥



The spirit of Holi Mohalla.

It was said that this is how the brave played Holi. The idiom of valiant calls the red blood as *gula* and the shot of the musket reminds him of water spray. For after all, in the battle for victory, good is being upheld.

For three days following the Holi festival in March, the twin towns of Anandpur Sahib and Kiratpur Sahib in Punjab resound to the battle cries of Nihang warriors. Upholding a tradition started by the tenth Sikh Guru, Gobind Singh, the Sikh community gathers in huge numbers to watch the warlike Nihangs put up a scintillating display of mock battles and skills with traditional weapons. Swordsmanship, tent pegging, saddle-less horse riding and a variety of marital skills, otherwise long obsolete, are put on show. The festivities of Holi Mohalla are symbolic of revelry after subduing the aggressor. It is a platform for displaying the combative prowess of the Guru's own army.

The celebration of Holi Mohalla dates back to the early 1700s. Faced by the tyrannical Mughals, who were responsible for the death of his father

(Guru Tegh Bahadur), Guru Gobind Singh realised the importance of acquiring the capability to defend the Sikh community against oppression as well as the constant need to keep his forces fighting fit and in high spirits. The Khalsa Panth had been created on the *Baisakhi Day* of 1699 and Anandpur Sahib was now both a fortress and a religious institution. In the open fields surrounding the Lohgarh Fort near Anandpur Sahib, the Guru initiated the tradition of mock battles between groups of Nihangs, as his Khalsa warriors were called. And it was with the idea of giving a masculine connotation to all that was associated with his fighting force that he altered the word 'Holi' to the more manly and combative 'Holi'. So it was with many other words in a warrior's lexicon, with *barchi* (spear) becoming *barcha*, the sword or *teg* became *tega* and so on.

Holi marks the beginning of spring and is celebrated with colour and mirth over most of North India. It is also a festival extolling the conquest of good over evil. Holi Mohalla coalesces both the spirit of victory and the gaiety associated with spring and stretches this fusion over three days following


Holi. Once called the Guru's beloved army, the celebrations of Hola Mohalla belong to the Nihangs. They have resolutely preserved their heritage and traditions across time, move about in groups called *jatthas*, live together in cantonment-like tented encampments called *chhawanis*, always carry their weapons of war on their person and even cook and eat in iron utensils. They are governed by a strict code of moral and religious conduct set by Guru Gobind Singh and accept the harshest of punishment on breaking it. Each *jattha* specialises in some method of warfare and is peopled by weapon experts unique to that group.

Technology may have outdated the sword and the spear, but the Nihangs doggedly stick to them and preserve age-old skills associated with their use. For example the *chakkar*—a collapsible wheel with blades on edges that expands on being spun from its centre—needs the deft artistry of an expert to be effective in combat. The same is true of the simple spear. Whether used with deadly force from horseback or from the ground, the skill is required through sheer practice, its finer points being handled down the generations through first person instruction. The more glamorous archery, although a recognised Olympic sport now, loses its earthy appeal when formalised for competition. Seeing the rustic and hardy Nihangs wield their traditional bow and arrow with finesse is a visual treat, a virtual walk back to the times of individual gallantry. Displays of tent pegging, bare-back horse riding, straddling two galloping stallions together or even the utter oneness between a cantering horse and its rider, hark back to the days when the cavalry and its collective skills made the difference between winning and losing battles.

Nestling in the foothills of the Shivaliks, with the shimmering blue band of the Sutlej river barely a few miles southwest of it, Anandpur Sahib is ruled by deeper hues of blue and orange in March as the Nihangs—dressed in their colourful *chogas* (traditional robes) and sporting fierce-looking weapons—gravitate from all over the nation for Hola Mohalla. Cries of *Bole So Nihal* resound all over even as puffs of *gulal* (colour powder used to play Holi) fill the clear blue skies momentarily. The exuberantly tossed colours epitomise typical Sikh high spirits. And the aggressive war cries portray their battle preparedness and willingness to take on the enemy, however powerful, to defend the good.

The camaraderie and oneness amongst the gathered Sikhs is underscored by the sincerity with which they perform community service (*sewa*), irrespective of their financial or social status. As a part of the community service expected to be performed by any and every Sikh, voluntary community kitchens or *langars* are set for the visitors to Anandpur Sahib, as in any Sikh gurdwara. The third Sikh Guru, Amar Das, initiated this system of community kitchens with the aim of removing inequality amongst his followers, exhorting them to sit on the floor together and share common food. Volunteers serve the food cooked here with utmost courtesy and humbleness to all, irrespective of their caste or creed. The raw material and fuel for cooking come as voluntary donations from all the surrounding villages and so does the help for running the *langars*.

The third day of the Hola Mohalla festival is its high point. Nihangs begin their day early with a bath and prayers followed by the preparation of *parshada* (a mixture of wheat flour and sugar cooked to a paste-like consistency) that is distributed to pilgrims throughout the day. This is succeeded by recitals from the *Guru Granth Sahib*, followed by *ardas* (invocation to God) and the *bhog* ceremony, during which the *parshada* is first offered to the *Guru Granth Sahib* and the rest considered blessed for distribution to all pilgrims. By noon, the Nihangs are ready for their annual procession led by the *Panj Pyaras* representing in spirit, the five Sikhs who willingly sacrificed their lives on the bidding of Guru Gobind Singh. The procession, a surging river of blue and orange, starts from Gurdwara Takht Sri Keshgarh Sahib and passes through other important gurdwaras of Qila Anandgarh, Lohgarh Sahib and Mata Jitoji before culminating back at the Takht from where it started. Then begins a concerted display of military skills by the participating *jatthas* at Sahidi Bagh. The mock battles and skilled displays continue till setting of the sun. Awards and citations (*saropas*) are given to honour the skilled and the brave. And the day ends on a note of high spirits and full-fledged festivity.

Even days after the Hola celebrations, pilgrims keep streaming into Anandpur Sahib and they seem to sense a faint aura exuded by the battle-hardened Nihang warriors and can still hear fading echoes of their full-bloodied war cries. 

Sandeep Goswami
[Photographs by Malkiat Singh]
Courtesy: SWAGAT

Symbol of Sikh Sovereignty



Sikh Coinage

The historic and early Sikh coins have tended to be treated as part of the "native states" coinage of India and their study has been ignored presumably because a large number of Sikh coins were not readily available with collectors or in museums in India. Sikh coins have certain distinctive features, unique from other contemporary Indian currencies. Sikh coinage was first issued by Banda Bahadur in 1710-1713 on a limited scale. The capture and execution of Banda Bahadur and his associates in 1715-16 then virtually demolished the fledgling Sikh state, as concerted attempts were made by the Mughal Government to literally annihilate the entire Sikh community from the Punjab so that they did not rise again.

However, very soon, the Mughal rulers experienced the irrevocable defiance of the Sikhs unlike other rulers of Indian states, both Rajputs

and Marathas who had accepted overall sovereignty of the Mughal rulers. The price put on every Sikh's head even went upto Rs 100, which amounted to virtually three years' wages for an ordinary person. The relentless Sikh struggle, with guerrilla war tactics, went on for half a century during which time they had to face both the Mughals and the Abdalis. In 1765, the Sikhs emerged as main rulers of the Punjab with their taking control of the capital city of Lahore and most the surrounding areas of the Punjab even as the Mughal authority had greatly weakened. In the 18th Century, all states which were under Mughal hegemony had accepted the Mughal paramourcy –except for the Sikhs.

The Sikhs had evolved into a distinct social order over the 200 years of ten Guruships, from Guru Nanak to Guru Gobind Singh. Guru Nanak had laid down the basic principles of self-reliance, earning



Various Leaf Motifs on Sikh Coins.

one's living by one's hard work, sharing with others less fortunate, leading an upright life of truthful living. The succeeding Gurus developed the distinct script *Gurumukhi* for recording banis of the Gurus, religious practices to be followed after birth, death, marriage and so on. Perennial role of the Brahmin was totally removed from Sikh social life. The institution of *sangat*, *pangat* and community *langar* was developed which removed all caste barriers and took all humanity to the same status, whatever his original caste or creed. During the time of the 5th Guru, a levy of 10 per cent of one's earning, called *Daswandh* was to be offered by Sikhs to the community's coffers especially during Baisakhi and Diwali.

Historians have deemed that the Sikhs under Guru Arjan Dev at the close of the 16th century had become a state within the state of the Mughal Empire and the Guru was called *Sacha Padshah* (true sovereign) which soon enough became a terrible affront and irritation to the fanatics of Islam who then ruled India.

As it developed, the Sikh social order had overtures of possessing Sikh sovereignty right from the start. The martyrdom of Guru Arjan Dev in 1604 gave an impetus to their yearning to be independent, then under Guru Hargobind Singh who symbolically wore two swords, those of *piri* and *miri*, one representing the spiritual and other the temporal aspect. Every morning the Guru would sit at the *Darbar Sahib*, preaching the banis of the Gurus to his disciples while in the afternoons he sat on the *Akal Takht* to decide temporal matters of his followers.

The fanatical and cruel Emperor Aurangzeb had got the obsession that he would convert the entire non-Muslim population of India to Islam. Only the Sikhs remained his barrier. He thus felt that if he could convert Guru Tegh Bahadur, the 9th Guru, he would be able to convert the rest of India's population to Islam. The subsequent martyrdom of Guru Tegh Bahadur at Chandni Chowk in Delhi in 1675 gave an incredible inspiration to aspirations of the Sikhs to stand up against such tyranny and in defence of their faith. The Tenth Guru had meditated at Paonta and in 1699, created the Khalsa, the pure ones, gave amrit to the five chosen disciples and

then took amrit himself from them (*Aapi Gur, Chela*) and thus merged into the Khalsa social order. Guru Gobind Singh abolished the *masands*, the fund collectors who had become corrupt and outlived their utility.

In the Anandpur Sahib region, Guru Gobind Singh had about 100 sq miles under his sovereignty and suitably fortified the area with smaller fortresses, strategically located around the major fort of Anandgarh, sited on a hillock at the centre. He trained an army with the funds collected during Baisakhi and Diwali, owed no allegiance to any temporal authority nor paid any tribute to the Mughal state. Guru Gobind Singh had assumed all the functions of an independent ruler, except that he did not issue any currency of his own nor used any state seal on his *Hukamnamas*. He fought a score of battles both against the Hindu hill Rajas and the Mughal governors. It was their combined deceit, however, that had made him leave Anandpur Sahib in 1704.

Guru Gobind Singh did not give any place to his sons in the hierarchy while creating the Khalsa. When the Sikhs



Mughal coins countermarked with the Sikh khanda ensign.



Kashmir coins, 1876-1879 sambat.



Peshawar coins, 1892 and 1893 sambat.

چوں کار از ہمہ حیلے درگذشت حلال است بردن به شمشیر دست

forced him to leave Garhi Chamkaur Sahib, when just a handful were left to face the Mughal hordes, he did not flinch from sending his two elder sons into the fray. They died fighting valiantly facing fearful odds like his other soldiers. The Guru later sent his *Zafarnama* to Aurangzeb, damning the perfidious conduct of his officials who had agreed to give him free passage to leave Anandpur but treacherously went back on their pledges. He expounded the concept of rebellion against any ruler who did not attend to the interests of his subjects. The proletarian revolution against despot rulers eventually became a world issue in the late 19th and early 20th century in the western world, but Guru Gobind Singh had propounded this in the early 18th century, in a country where feudalism was most rampant.

In his twilight years, Aurangzeb invited Guru Gobind Singh for discussions, but died even as the Guru was on his way to meet him. His successor, Bahadur Shah, received the Guru with all respect and ceremony. Guru Gobind Singh demanded due punishment to the Faujdar of Sirhind who was responsible for the evil deeds and murder of the Guru's younger sons. Guru Gobind Singh proceeded to the Deccan at the emperor's request, but while camping at Nander, realised that the entire court of Bahadur Shah was hostile and the emperor would hardly be able to give any impartial decision against the desires of his court. Guru Gobind Singh also felt that if he tried to return to the Punjab, he may find Mughal forces in the way and then selected an ascetic camping close to the Guru's camp one who had now become his disciple: Banda Bahadur. He was sent to the Punjab in September 1708 with a council of five senior Sikhs and some soldiers. Shortly after their departure, the Guru was attacked by traitorous pathans who had been employed by him.

Shortly before the Guru's passing, he held a darbar of the few hundred Sikhs who had accompanied him to Nander and announced that the personal guruship

would lapse after his demise, which had always his intention from the creation. Guru Gobind Singh passed spiritual sovereignty to the Guru Granth Sahib and enjoined his disciples to read, understand and follow the holy book for their spiritual guidance forever. This order is part of the daily prayers of the Sikhs

"Agya bhai Akal ki tabi chalayo Panth,

Sab Sikhun ko hukam har Guru maniyo Granth"

Guru Gobind Singh put his temporal authority in the Khalsa and stated that "Where there are five Sikhs present, he would be deemed as present in spirit amongst them." This has remained the most democratic aspect of Sikh administration, all decisions being collective, not that of a single individual. Sikhs have not accepted temporal sovereignty as such, but have reposed that the Gurus remain *de-jure* sovereigns and hold this in trust as the *de-facto* sovereignty. The daily salutation of the Sikhs

*"Wahe Guru ji ka Khalsa,
Wahe Guru ji ki fateh"*

enjoins that the Khalsa belongs to the Guru and hence every victory of the Khalsa is that of the Guru. Guru Gobind Singh had created the Khalsa order strong enough to stand on its own in defence of the faith. Abolition of personal guruship also deprived the Mughal rulers to go after any Guru's person : they could never destroy the community.

Banda Bahadur reached the Punjab after six months and started contacting various Sikhs who soon joined him and within a few months had conquered Sadhura and surrounding areas. He made a mud fort at Sadhura which became his main base from where he fought two major wars against Mughal forces which were overwhelmingly larger in men and material. His next focus was on Sarhind where the faujdar Wazir Khan had cruelly executed the young Sahibzadas. Banda Bahadur's forces vanquished those of Wazir Khan, killed him and occupied the entire area by mid-1709.

The Sikhs under Guru Gobind Singh had all the perquisites of a well organised state except that there was no state seal or state currency. In early 1710, references were reported in *Akharat-i-Darbar-i-Mualla*

that the Sikhs had started their own currency, minting a silver rupee coin with the legend:



Obverse:

*Sikka zad bar har do alam,
Tegh-i-Nanak wahib ast.*

*Fateh Gobind Singh Shah-i-Shahan,
Fazal Sachcha Sahib ast.*

meaning that the coin has been struck in both the worlds under the blessing of Guru Nanak. "Victory of Guru Gobind Singh, King of Kings has been with the grace of the True Lord, God Almighty."

Reverse:

*Zarb ba aman-al-dahar,
masavarat shahr zinat*

Allakhat khalsa mubarak bakht.

meaning that "it was minted at a place of perfect peace, picture of a beautiful city where the fortunate throne of the Khalsa is located."

Banda Bahadur also created a state seal with the legend:

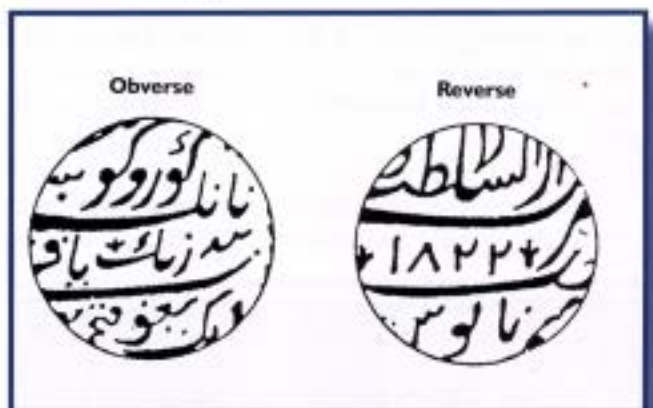
*Deg Tegh Fateh O Nusrat Baidarang'
Yaft Uz Nanak Guru Gobind Singh.*

In translation that "Economic, military power and resultant victory was wrought with blessings from Guru Nanak to Guru Gobind Singh, the inheritors being the Khalsa state."



In the study of Sikh coins, the most significant feature thereof has been that, unlike the contemporary prevailing currencies, both Hindu and Islamic where the coins were struck in the name of rulers, Sikh coins were struck in the name of their Gurus and never in the name of any Sikh sardar or ruler. Thus there is sanctity and reverence attached to these coins and one has deemed Sikh coins to be the symbol of Sikh sovereignty.

The Sikh state under Banda Bahadur did not last very long against the might of the Mughal Empire. After Banda Bahadur was captured, his entire force was tortured and killed and concerted efforts commenced to literally annihilate the entire Sikh community. The Sikhs retreated into jungles and launched an unending guerrilla warfare for the next half century and came out victorious, defeating the Mughals and the Durrani, thus creating a large state including the entire Punjab and to a large extent, the North Western tribal territories, with their capital at Lahore in 1765. Sikh coins were issued from 1765 and struck regularly till the annexation of the Lahore darbar in 1849 by the British.



The Sikh *misl*s had occupied most of the Punjab and built numerous fortresses throughout the country by the mid-eighteenth century. In 1765 the Sikhs passed a *Gurmatta* for occupying Lahore and the issue of Sikh coins from there. They did not secure coinage

from Banda Bahadur's time but adopted the state seal from *Hukamnamas* and issued Sikh coins with the legend:

Obverse:

*Deg Tegh Fateh O Nusrat Baidarang,
Yaft Uz Nanak Guru Gobind Singh.*

Reverse:

*Zarb Darulsulnat Lahores maiminat mantus
Julus - San 1822 (i.e. 1765 AD)*

Hari Ram Gupta and other historians have stated that Jassa Singh Ahluwalia had struck coins in his name in 1761 from Lahore with the legend:

*Sikka zad dar jahan bafuzal-i-Akal
Mulki-Ahmad garrift Jassa kalal.*

However, even after extensive search, no such coin has been found nor has the house of Kapurthala given any indication of the existence of any such coin as was rumoured in the mid-nineteenth century by Lepel Griffin who was investigating sources of the alleged coin. If Jassa Singh had got any such coin struck in his name, he could as well have done this in 1765 when he still was undisputed leader of the Sikhs.

It appears that around 1775, a Sikh coin from Banda Bahadur's time had been located and the legend thereon placed on the first Sikh coin minted from Amritsar. These two legends have been used on Sikh coins during period of the Sikh kingdom i.e., till 1849.

Maharaja Ranjit Singh's "tilak ceremony" was carried out in 1801 and the coins of 1801 and of later

years had the legend *Deg Tegh Fateh* but no names nor any reference on Ranjit Singh are on the Sikh coins minted from Lahore, Amritsar, Multan, Kashmir, Peshawar and Derajat etc.

It is historically considered that Ranjit Singh had taken fancy to a dancing girl by name 'Moran' around 1803 and numerous historians have alleged that Ranjit Singh struck coins in the name of Moran from the Amritsar mint during 1804-1807. Waheeduddin in his work 'The Real Ranjit Singh' states that Ranjit Singh went to Amritsar with a huge bridegroom's party and married Moran by formal rites and Waheeduddin even calls her a "maharani". The facts, however, seem that Ranjit Singh fancied Moran's dancing, but she never lived in the palace, was discarded around 1808-1810 and made to live in isolation in Pathankot fort. No writer wrote about Moran's affair during Ranjit Singh's lifetime and there certainly are no Sikh coins having any indication of Moran. Ranjit Singh would certainly not have placed Moran's name on coins struck and this obviously was delicious gossip of the time!

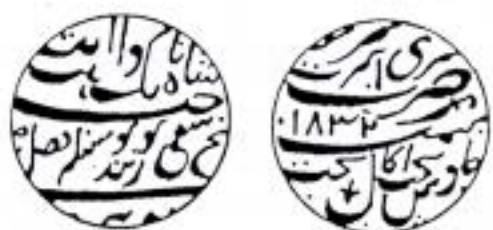


In 1836 Baron Hugel suggested that the Maharaja should have a coin struck with the "Deg Tegh Fateh" legend on the obverse and on the reverse, have himself depicted with folded hands before Guru Nanak so as to extend his life.

Ranjit Singh apparently agreed to the same. A few coins were made as proof but then Ranjit Singh,

Obverse

Reverse



perhaps anticipating the Community's objections, did not mint these coins. Today, there are two such coins displayed in the British Museum at London.

Another story that goes around is that of Hari Singh Nalwa having struck coins in his own name



while he was the governor of Kashmir in 1820-21. Numerous historians, and even numismatists, have narrated this. Hari Singh Nalwa was a very religious-minded person and placed the word *Har* in Gurmukhi script on the coins. The word *Har* means God, as is obvious from Hari Mandir, Har ki pauri, and

numerous shaloks in Guru Granth Sahib starting with *Har*, meaning God.



Certain Sikh historians have termed the Lahore coins, with *Deg Tegh Fateh* legend, as "Gobind Shahi" coins and "Amritsar" coins with *Sikka zad bar har do alam* as Nanak Shahi coins. In Sikh coins, the name of Guru Nanak comes

first and thereafter comes the name of Guru Gobind Singh. Obviously those coins, where names of both Gurus have been mentioned, can only be called Nanak Shahi coins and not Gobind Shahi coins.

There also appears a leaf motif on Sikh coins which have been identified as peepal leaf, ber leaf, kikar leaf etc but none have examined Sikh history as to whence the leaf motif came and why it came, was there any historical event for the placing of such a leaf on coins which are religious in nature? There being no historical account, the author has deemed it to be a symbol of fertility at the time the chalisa famine was raging in north western India. Many Sikh sardars sold their properties and fed people on 50 to 100 gms

of chanas per day to keep them from starvation. They seem to have prayed at Akal Takht and as a symbol of their prayer, placed the leaf motif on coins struck from 1841 Sambat or 1784 AD onwards.

The *Akhbarat-i-Darbar-i-Mualla* and *Hadiqat-i-Aqalim* stated that Sikhs made a silver coin with the legend:

*Azmat-i-Nanak Guru ham zahir O ham gaib ast,
Padshah din O duniya aap sachcha sahib ast.*

No coin with this legend has ever been traced. For Sikhs, Nanak was their first Guru and continued their great devotion to Guru Gobind Singh. Thus the congregations may have suggested that Guru Gobind Singh's name should also appear on coins. Shortly afterwards, the new legend *Sikka zad bar har do alam* as stated above appeared on Sikh coins in which both the names of Guru Nanak and Guru Gobind Singh occur. Likewise the seal "Nanak Guru Gobind Singh", in fact, encompasses the entire gurudom of Ten Gurus. In the first and second year, coins struck by Banda Bahadur had the word *Gobind Shah-i-Sahan*. The third year this is changed in as much as the above is shown as *Gobind Singh Shah-i-shahan*. It appears that some Sikhs might have suggested that the full name of Guru Gobind Singh should be on the coin, showing the democratic system of the early Sikh state where people gave their suggestions which were usually incorporated.

I have attempted to give a short account of Sikh coinage and an analysis of some of issues and distortions, primarily to give a review of the subject so that meaningful appreciation could be made by persons not familiar with such coinage. For serious students of history and numismatics I recommend study of the book *Sikh Coinage : Symbol of Sikh Sovereignty* by the author in which analytical details with historical and numismatic evidence are given in support of various findings. ☞

Dr. Surinder Singh

Dr. Surinder Singh took up the study of Sikh coinage, having collected over a thousand pieces, during the last few years of his service in the Punjab.

He has published over thirty research papers in reputed national and international journals and books.



Reviewing the Books

Sikh Coinage : Symbol of Sikh Sovereignty

Coin collection is a well-established hobby in India and abroad and there are a very large number of coin collectors interested in the collection / sale / purchase of ancient, medieval and modern coins. Dr. Surinder Singh is a coin collector with a difference. He has not only collected Sikh coins, but has carried out numismatic investigations dovetailed with historical accounts bringing to light various distortions in the books on history as also establishing that Sikh coins were a symbol of Sikh sovereignty.

The collector's instinct led Dr. Surinder Singh to make a sizeable collection of Sikh coins during his posting at Jullundur in the early eighties. After his retirement he started studying the Persian legends on Sikh coins with historical and religious background for the basis of these legends. Not having been able to secure the help of any expert conversant with the subject, he started an intense study of Sikh history, which till then had random references on such Sikh coins.

The writing of Sikh history has primarily been based on Persian, Punjabi and English sources wherein certain garnishings about Sikh coins were made perhaps to make this subject more interesting and lively. No rational and serious study of Sikh coins have made by any historian and their accounts are based on historical fiction and hearsay without real examination of the actual coins. The author claims to have discussed this aspect with Sikh historians including Ganda Singh, Hari Ram Gupta, Bikramjit Hasrat, Bhagat Singh, Gopal Singh and some others who admittedly wrote about Sikh coins without actually examining these !

Dr. Surinder Singh's attempt is the first detailed study of Sikh coins, in which he has dovetailed historical accounts with numismatic investigations

and thus revealed much disinformation and distortions, including:

- ❖ The often repeated story, by almost all Sikh historians, that Ranjit Singh struck coins in the name of a courtesan by the name Moran, which after numismatic investigation is totally found untrue.

- ❖ The story that Jassa Singh Ahluwalia struck a coin in his own name in 1761 is incorrect as the coins struck in 1765 under the leadership of Jassa Singh Ahluwalia were in the name of Sikh Gurus only and are still available.

- ❖ The solitary pictorial coin stated by all to be that of Baba Nanak with Mardana, is in fact that of Ranjit Singh before Baba Nanak, seeking his blessings. This is only a "proof" coin designed on Baron Hugel's advice that Baba Nanak may bestow him with longer spell of life but was not minted for formal issue as Ranjit Singh anticipated serious Sikh opposition in his being depicted on the coin with Guru Nanak.

- ❖ The story repeated by many historians that Hari Singh Nalwa struck coins in his own name while he was Governor of Kashmir and Peshawar, is incorrect as established by contradictory historical evidence and authentic numismatic investigation.

- ❖ Persian legends have not been studied with reference to Sikh ethos and have been interpreted incorrectly by various historians.

- ❖ The prevailing religious tokens with portrayals of Guru Nanak and Guru Gobind Singh are not Sikh coins, but religious tokens on lines of Hindu and Islamic religious tokens distributed by roaming mendicants. However, ignorant people often treat these as Sikh state coinage.

(i) The cis-Sutlej states, namely Patiala, Nabha, Jind and Faridkot were not part of the mainstream Sikh struggle and continued using Durrani coins (4th year issue of Ahmad Shah Abadali's coins). The Nabha State changed the Durrani coins to Sikh coinage with the legend "*Degh Tegh Fateh O' Nusrat Baidrang, Yaft uz Nanak Guru Gobind Singh*" around 1835 during the reign of Bharpur Singh. The Patiala State also struck coins in the name of Sikh Gurus with the above legend "*Degh Tegh Fateh*" in 1930s for Maharaja's personal distribution during Dussehra and were not state-issued for public distribution.

An important aspect has been the continued relationship between Persian legends and the concept of Sikh sovereignty bequeathed by Sikh Gurus to the Sikh Panth as one complements and authenticates the other. The Tenth Guru, shortly before his demise, abolished personal Guruship and placed spiritual sovereignty in the holy Granth and temporal sovereignty in the Khalsa Panth.

While creating the Khalsa in 1699, selecting the five Sikhs (*Panj Piaras*) and giving them *khanda pahal*, Guru Gobind Singh merged himself in the Khalsa by personally taking the *pahal* from those very *panj piaras*. He emphasised the democratic principle that wherever there are five Sikhs, he would be present there in spirit and their collective decision should be applied.

When the first Sikh state came into existence in the times of Banda Bahadur in 1710, they decided to establish a seal, the legends for which were :

*"Degh Tegh Fateh O Nusrat Baidarang,
Yaft Uz Nanak Guru Gobind Singh".*

Meaning the kettle to feed, the sword to defend with resultant victory achieved with the blessings of Guru Nanak to Guru Gobind Singh, presumably based on Guru Gobind Singh's writing *Deg Tegh Jag me duon chalen, Rakh lo Ap, mohe awar na dalen.*

Whereas the Tenth Guru placed the temporal sovereignty with the Khalsa, the Khalsa did not assume this in its own name, but kept the Gurus as de jure sovereigns and themselves carried on the administration on behalf of their Gurus. The

salutation *Wahe Guru ji ki khalsa, Wahe Guru ji ke fateh* is clear that the Khalsa belongs to the Guru and so does Victory belong to the Guru. The legend taken was:

Obverse:

*Sikka zad bar har do alam, Tegh-I-Nanak wahib ast,
Fateh Gobind Singh Shah-I-Shahan,
Fazal Sachacha Sahib ast.*


"The coin has been struck in both the worlds, under the guarantee of Guru Nanak's double-edged sword. The victory of Guru Gobind Singh, King of Kings, has been with the grace of God Almighty."

Reverse:

*Zarb baa man-al-dahar, masavarat shahr zinat altakhat
Khalsa mubarak bakht.*

"Minted at the Place of Perfect Peace, locale of a beautiful city, where the fortunate throne of the Khalsa is to be located".

The Sikh coins, minted in the name of Sikh Gurus, have sacrosance and dedication for the Sikhs. No Sikh sardar or ruler has ever attempted to put his name on Sikh coins when these remained in circulation from 1710 to 1849 after which the Sikh state was annexed by the British. The author has thus deemed Sikh coins as being the symbol of Sikh sovereignty.

The author has, in his analytical study, by dovetailing historical evidence with numismatic investigation, removed some of the cobwebs of ignorance and moss of disinformation about Sikh coins. In fact, he has carried out yoeman's service to Sikh history by opening a new dimension of authenticity and accuracy on the thus-far fiction-ridden study of Sikh history which can now be further studied by historians of the future. 

Sikh Coinage:

**Symbol of Sikh Sovereignty
by Dr. Surinder Singh
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Nanak Jhira Sahib at Bidar



Harmandir Sahib at Nanak Jhira Sahib.

The history of Bidar is traced to the Kalyani Chalukyas (977-1190 AD) which later came under sway of the Yadavas of Devagari followed by Kakatyias Warnanal (1322 AD) then the Tughluqs of Delhi (1341 AD) and finally the Brhamanis (1425 AD). Ahmed Shah Wali shifted his capital from Gulbarga to Bidar and built the massive Bidar fort, incorporating the old into new lines of defence, located as it was on the brink of a plateau, with triple moats hewn out of solid rock. According to Firishta, Mohammad Shah (1463-1482 AD) further developed the fortification on scientific basis and later, Bidar came under hegemony of the Barid Shahi Dynasty (16th century) before it was finally annexed into the Mughal empire by Aurangzeb.

It was in the 16th century that Guru Nanak Dev came to Bidar during his second *udasi*, this time to the Deccan area, on his way to south India and Sri Lanka.

After sojourning through Nagpur and Khandwa, he visited the ancient Hindu temples of Om Kareswar on the Narbada and reached Nander, where 200 years later, Guru Gobind Singh was to spend the last period of his life. From Nander, Guru Nanak proceeded towards Hyderabad and Golconda where he met Muslim saints and then came to Bidar to meet with Pir Jalaluddin and Yakoob Ali:

Guru Nanak and his disciple Mardana stayed in the outskirts of Bidar Fort, near the huts of Muslim fakirs, who took keen interest in the sermons and teachings of the great Guru. Such news soon spread throughout Bidar and the surrounding country about the holy Saint from the north and large numbers of people started coming to have Guru Nanak's *darshan* and blessings.

There was acute shortage of water in Bidar and the digging of wells were of no avail. The Guru was greatly moved by their plight and with divine name and mercy he touched the ground with his foot, removed some rubble and lo! Fountains of sweet water gushed from the ground and this is where Nanak Jhira now attracts lakhs of devotees from neighbouring Karnataka, Maharashtra and Andhra Pradesh, as also pilgrims from the Punjab, Delhi and abroad. Today, there is a beautiful Gurdwara at Nanak Jhira Sahib, the water collected in the Amrit-Khud built in white marble, Guru-ka-langar is partaken around the day, a Sikh



Main gate at entrance of the Bidar Fort.



Inside the Bidar Fort, showing buildings in various states of preservation.



Painting of Guru Nanak's travels, seen on the wall of langar hall at Nanak Jhira Sahib.

museum built in the name of Guru Tegh Bahadur and hospitals for the poor and needy.

The present Gurdwara Sahib constructed at Bidar owes much to Sant Bishan Singh, from the house of S Ram Singh whose ancestors had come to the Deccan as soldiers from the Punjab during the reign



Dakhni Sikhs doing puath at Harmandar Sahib.....



.....and giving prasad at Nanak Jhira Sahib, Bidar.



The Guru Nanak library at the Gurdwara area is well stocked with books and periodicals, in Gurmukhi, Hindi, Telagu, English and Kannada.



Citizens of Bidar come to Gurdwara Nanak Jhira Sahib throughout the day.

of Maharaja Ranjit Singh. Sant Bishan Singh was born in 1895 in the Bir district of erstwhile Hyderabad state and was most enthusiastically involved in religious and social activities. In 1939, during the Sikh Education Council at Hyderabad his role was recognised by him being given the title *Panth Bhooshan*. Elected as Pradhan of the Gurdwara Nanak Jhira Sahib in 1950, he continued to give his best and the climax of his untiring services came in 1966 with construction of the Harmandir Sahib which was celebrated on Hola Mahalla that year. He passed away that very year, in December 1966 at Hyderabad in the Deccan. 🇮🇳

The Enigma of Banda Bahadur: imperatives for authentic research

Banda Bahadur had a fairly short span of life, from 27 October 1670 to 20 June 1716. Out of these near 46 years, for the first 16 he was known as Laxman Das, a village lad coming of age and who had become a very good marksman with his bow and arrow. Around 1685, he renounced hunting and became a recluse.

The town of Rajouri near his village in the Jammu region was the halting place of Sadhus going into the Kashmir valley. He joined a group of ascetics under Janaki Prasad, adopted the new name of Madho Das dropping his old name and relationship with his family members. This was his second phase of life from 1685 to 1708.

He seemed to be of a restive nature, always seeking something beyond reach and not satisfied with worldly achievements. He changed his mentors a couple of times and ultimately set up an independent camp around 1691 on banks of the river Godavri near Nander in south-central India. He got acquainted with a tantrik yogi Aughar Nath from whom he gathered some tantrik practices. Guru Gobind Singh while at Nander, visited his dera in September 1708 and some sort of a magnetic attraction took place and Madho Das became a devout disciple of Guru Gobind Singh. The aim of life was achieved: he had met his master and was given the name Banda (Singh) Bahadur.

The third and most brilliant phase of Banda's life commenced from October 1708 and went to June 1716, less than 8 years, during which he spearheaded an energised movement of the Sikhs



Artist's depiction of Banda Singh Bahadur.

which contributed to the establishment of a great kingdom in the north-western part of India, even as it ordained downfall of the Mughal Empire. It is great irony that historians of various hues – Islamic, Sikh and British – have not done justice to the bedazzling leadership of this great warrior-saint, but instead have fictionalised his achievements to

such an extent that the truth is entangled in a mire of conflicting accounts, devoid of authentic evidence and catering to the whims and fancies of the writers, certainly not to the interests of truth.

This third phase of Banda Bahadur's activities from 1708 to 1716 can also be divided into three distinct eras.

I The first concerns socio-political history of this period, about which numerous historians have written, each giving new aspects which sometimes are self-contradictory and not supported by authentic or contemporary evidence. In fact, to glean true history has become increasingly difficult at this stage.

Islamic writers have mentioned about Banda Bahadur even while writing the history of their own rulers. The Mughals and their officials had developed a culture, financial wealth and a way of life as emperors of India. When the Sikhs rose against the tyrants for protection of their faith and their people and were finally able to defeat them, this created contempt as reaction in the Mughals against the ill-equipped and untrained Sikh devotees who were able, most times, to hold their own against far superior numbers. In various accounts, contemptuous names

like "dogs" or "brutes" are used for the Sikhs, no matter how great their victories. Non-Muslim writers on the other hand, created in all sorts of imaginary stories, either in praise or against Banda Bahadur, especially those who wrote long after his death. Thus to ascertain the truth becomes very difficult, almost impossible. British writers have, unfortunately, leant on side of the Islamic writers, showing their own bias.

A few major events in the life of Banda Bahadur from 1708 to 1716 are only mentioned in passing which shows the poor attempt at recording historical accounts, some contradicting the other and none giving any authentic or contemporary evidence in support thereof.

✦ In the meeting between Guru Gobind Singh and Banda Bahadur at the latter's dera, the Guru is said to have ordered the killing of Banda's goats to feed his Sikhs and himself having sat on the cot meant for Banda ! This is some sort of concoction and contrary to the Guru's own pristine examples.

✦ Historians are unsure whether Banda was initiated into the Khalsa or not by Guru Gobind Singh. The word 'Singh' with Banda also seems to have been added at a later date. On Guru Gobind Singh instructing Banda to remain chaste and not to live the life of a householder, a matter fundamental to the Gurus in their preachings, this too is against Sikh ethos, and also without any evidence.

✦ It is stated that after a grand darbar held at Nander by Guru Gobind Singh, Banda Bahadur along with his advisors and some soldiers were sent of to the Punjab amidst fanfare. This is contrary to the record that Banda left quietly, without the Imperial army getting to know of this. It then took Banda almost a year to reach the Punjab, which normally would have taken 3-4 months. Accounts also differ as to whether Banda left Nander before or after demise of Guru Gobind Singh.

✦ Khafi Khan and other Muslim newswriters have stated after the capture of Sarhind, Sikhs carried out terrible atrocities on the public, exhumed the

graves, torn open wombs of pregnant women, dashed every living child on the ground and desecrated mosques and tombs after the slaying of Wazir Khan. These and other suchlike stories are absurd as most of the tombs and mosques built during the 14th century onwards are standing intact till today without any damage whatsoever.

✦ The battle of Sahura began on 4 December 1710. Khafi Khan states that it is impossible to describe the terrible fight that followed. Sikhs in their faqir dress struck terror in the Mughal troops in armour. The number of dead or dying of the Mughal



Artist's drawing of mountain stream in foothills of the Himalayas, the type of country where Banda Bahadur set his fortified camps.

Army was so large that it seemed that they were annihilated. On 9 December, the Emperor set up camp on the Som nadi, within sight of Lohgarh. On 10 December, some imperial troops marched to the foot of the Daber hills on which the Lohgarh fort is located and laid siege. On the 10th night and early morning of 11th December, Banda Bahadur and his army left Lohgarh and moved into the dense forests, so the siege of Lohgarh lasted hardly 2-3 days. Banda Bahadur had about 30,000 ill-equipped and untrained volunteers. The emperor Bahadur Shah's army was about 150,000 strong. The four Governors of the surrounding areas in attendance on the Emperor

had their own armies and various zamindars in this rich basin of the Jamuna had their own *zaf* and *swars* which joined the imperial army in large numbers, swelling this to nearly 300,000 in all. For Banda Bahadur, it was not that he retreated surreptitiously, it was a tactical withdrawal to areas where the Sikhs could reduce the great odds.

☞ Mughal court newswriters and laterday historians have written that the Sikhs in Lohgarh fort had no stores of food and fodder. From the top of the fort they bargained with signs of their language and eyes with the grain dealers of the

standing, was hardly visible from Som nadi, the forest being very dense: nothing can be seen even at 50 yards what of the Som nadi which is more than a kilometre away.

☞ The purported differences between Mata Sundri and Banda Bahadur have no evidence in fact.

II The second section is regarding the military strategy adopted by Banda Bahadur in his wars against the Mughal imperial army from 1710-1716. This, in fact, was a golden period of the Sikh struggle. Banda Bahadur had made the Sikhs realise

that they could become an independent nation some day and the seed sown by him so ripened and flourished during the next half century of the *Misl* period when Sikhs occupied the capital city of Lahore in 1765, expelling both the Mughals and the Afghans from the Punjab for all times to come.

Banda was well aware of his inability to brandish his untrained volunteers against a trained Mughal army of 2-3 lakhs strength. So he devised his own war strategy and tactics to face the Mughals. He carefully honed such strategy for four years, fighting in Sadhura-Lohgarh axis and withdrawing into

the dense forests to regroup and thus fight again. These military strategies of Banda Bahadur and his wars should be analysed by a military expert, keeping in view topography of the area and other natural features from which he took support and was able to thwart the Mughals. Bahadur Shah was so exasperated that in 1710 that he lamented to his prime minister and commanders that "so many wild dogs cannot catch a jackal".

Banda Bahadur's wars have to be compared with similar wars fought by military commanders against very great odds in China, Central Asia and Europe. Banda Bahadur's war tactics were well adopted by the Sikh *Misls* in fighting against the Mughals and



Contemporary map of the areas where Banda Bahadur's sway extended.

royal army and bought what they could from them at 2-3 rupees for a seer of grain. Many of the besieged died of starvation. But since the actual period of siege was only 2-3 days, these accounts are fanciful and fabricated.

☞ Some historians have written that one Gulab Singh, a Hindu convert, offered to sacrifice his life, so dressed himself in garments of Banda Bahadur and seated himself at a prominent place to give an impression to the Mughal forces camped at Som nadi that Banda himself was there. The topography of Lohgarh and Som nadi clearly establish that this is absolute nonsense as the fort, even when it was

Afghans. These need tactical study by military in the actual areas.

III This deals with the concept of Sikh sovereignty and role of Banda Bahadur in setting up the initial Sikh state on those guidelines.

Sovereignty has been defined as *final and absolute political authority in a political community within a certain territory*: Hinslay

Guru Nanak's insistence on self-reliance, the institution of sangat, pangat and langar, earning livelihood through one's work and sharing with others had firmly laid the foundations of a strong and mature social order, to which further contributions were made by the successor Gurus. By the early 17 century, a peaceful and unobtrusive state had been slowly evolved and Sikhs became accustomed to a form of self-government under their Padshahs within the state of Mughal empire. Akbar's non-interference with Sikh religious affairs, in fact, his indulgence, had greatly contributed to the maturing of the Sikh social order. The martyrdom of Guru Arjan in 1606 and that of Guru Tegh Bahadur in 1675 gave great impetus to the urge among the Sikhs to rule their own destiny and no longer suffer the brutality and intolerance of the later Mughal emperors. Guru Gobind Singh was well aware of the situation and attitude of the emperor Aurangzeb and came to the conclusion that where it is evil to tyrannise, it is worse to bear such tyranny. He therefore took every means to defend his faith with whatever limited resources against the mightiest kingdom in Indian history. He evolved martial literature from ancient classics to raise the fighting spirit. He created the Khalsa to enhance the level of spirit and endurance in his men to face the might of the Mughal armies.

Guru Gobind Singh laid down the principle of revolution in his edict (Zafarnama) to Aurangzeb:

Chun Kar Uz Hama Healtay Dar Gazsh

Halal uz Buzdan Ba Shamshir Dast

"When all other means fail to correct the ruler, It is permissible to wield the sword and smite the tyrant".

Such philosophy was adapted by the Western world three centuries later.

Guru Gobind Singh abolished the living Guruship and placed spiritual sovereignty in the Guru Granth, very expressively explained as:

Agya Bai Akal Ki Tabhi Chalayo Panth

Sab Sikhian Ko Hukm Hai Guru Manyo Granth

"The order of God Almighty and the Sikh Panth has been established. All Sikhs are ordered that they consider the Granth as their Guru".

He placed temporal sovereignty in the Khalsa and expressed that wherever there are five Khalsa, he would be present in spirit amongst them. These are the cardinal principles of Sikh sovereignty laid by the Gurus and followed by the Sikhs, the principles on which Sikh society and the state is run.

Banda Bahadur came to the Punjab and started collecting Sikhs and greatly motivating them. Banda Bahadur's forces conquered Sarhind in May 1710 and continued to liberate surrounding areas. When the matter arose of setting up an administration of the conquered territories, Banda appointed his own governors and established his own chowkis. The account of a newswriter in *Akhbar-i-Darbar-i-Mualla* gives the first indication about Banda Bahadur's implementation of the Sikh concept of sovereignty in the initial Sikh state.

"The Khalsa Sikhs have strange practices amongst themselves. They call one person as an army. In their despatches they write that an army of Sikhs has arrived. Some say they have struck coins and in this *Hukamnama* the year Ahad is written. In the villages the produce is divided between them and the tillers of the land, two parts to the tiller and one to them. The lands have been given to the tillers. They want all this to be known to the emperor. Elephants, cash and grains of Wazir Khan of Sarhind have fallen into their hands in large quantities. They have made their own *mohar* (seal)".

Not only have they given the lands to the tillers, they want this to be known to the emperor so that he also comes to know about the formation of the Sikh state.

In fact Banda Bahadur had set up a wooden pillar at Thanesar thereby informing Bahadur Shah that beyond this pillar, all territory belonged to the Khalsa.

Banda Bahadur got a state seal made with the legend: "*Degh Tegh Fateh O' Nusrat Baidrang, Yaft Uz Nanak Guru Gobind Singh*" meaning that the *Degh*, (economic power), *Tegh* (the sword), *Fateh* (the resultant victory) have been ordained from Guru Nanak to Guru Gobind Singh. Recipients of such blessings are the Sikh community. ☸

Dr.Surinder Singh



Lohgarh : Symbol of Courage

Sketch of typical forested hill country in foothills of the Himalayas as it would have been in the early 18th Century. (from "Eternal Himalaya")

After the victory of Sarhind and surrounding territories, the matter before Banda Singh was the location for his military headquarters (not the capital of the state) which should be strong, protective, invincible and out of sight from the enemy. The choice fell on the fort of Mukhlispur, as a base depot for his future military operations. Mukhlispur had been occupied after the conquest of Sadhaura.

The fort of Mukhlispur had been built by Mukhlis Khan under instruction from Emperor Shah Jahan who occasionally spent his summers there. This was a strong hill fort, about half way between the towns of Sadhaura and Nahan (about nine kos from Sahaura), within the boundary of the village of Amuwal, among the steep slopes of the Himalayas on an elevated summit, which could be approached only through craggy rocks and ravines. It was surrounded by two rivulets, Pamuwali and Daskawali Khols, or Khuds, which originally formed only one stream, parting into two to embrace the hillock of the fort.

The fort was in most neglected condition when Banda Singh occupied it, but was soon repaired and given the new name of Lohgarh, "Iron Fortress". The treasures of Sarhind, the material of various expeditions, tribute and revenue from the conquered territories were stored here, and Sikhs from various areas, trans and cis-Sutlej, now flocked to Banda's standard in much larger numbers and swelled the ranks of his volunteer-soldiers, some dedicated to the noble cause of the holy war, which others were surely attracted by the prospect of wealth and position under the rapidly rising power

of their co-religionists. Banda Bahadur had friendly relations with the ruler of Nahan. Nahan was in the rear of Mukhlispur and thus the place chosen by Banda Singh Bahadur for the headquarters was ideal from the strategic point of view. Location of the fort seems to have been determined not only by the strength of the place, of which there is no doubt, but it was also taken as firm base for future expeditions. According to Khazan Singh, Banda Singh fortified and provided Lohgarh with immense stores of war.

Sadhaura fort was strengthened with an extra wall and a moat, and the Lohgarh fortress (the entire area covered with water streams and forests) was also strengthened. Lohgarh is located on a straight mountain cliff about 700 ft above the ground on the border of a thick, extensive jungle area (which even after three centuries remains a reserved forest with virtually no habitation). Banda Singh Bahadur successfully used Lohgarh as a tactical retreat or rearguard action stage, when his forces could not withhold the onslaught of Mughal armies at Sahaura. When the combined Mughal forces, along with mercenary Rajputs and Jats, heavily outnumbered his forces and further fighting was suicidal, he would tactically withdraw his forces to Lohgarh, and after rearguard actions to stall the enemy forces, would move into the forests beyond Lohgarh. Such tactics were successfully employed in both the battles of Lohgarh in 1710 A.D. and 1713 A.D. The situation on ground clearly establishes this. The last few kilometres do not have even a cart road to the

fortress and the surrounding area is totally unsuited for habitation. There are remains of fortifications for rearguard action around the fortress which would have engaged advance by enemy suicide squads.

The Sikhs from Thanesar and Sarhind had retreated towards Lohgarh when Bahadur Shah arrived at Sadhaura on 4 December 1710. Banda Singh Bahadur had also come there to strengthen his fortifications. In the royal camp it was rumoured that Banda Singh Bahadur was a "most powerful magician, greater even than the one who made a calf to talk, he could turn a bullet from its course and could work such spells that spear and sword had little or no effect upon his followers". Owing to these idle rumours the Emperor and the nobles and the soldiers were much disturbed mentally and were disheartened and some even terror-stricken.

On 4 December 1710, a strong Mughal force under Rustamdil Khan advanced from its base at Sadhaura towards Lohgarh to examine the position of Banda's defences. At a distance of 5 km they were suddenly



Walking up the steep incline.....

attacked by Banda Singh's troops. Khafi Khan writes: "It is impossible for me to describe the fight which followed. The Sikhs in their faqir dress struck terror into the royal troops. The number of dead and dying of the imperialists was so large that, for a time, it seemed they were losing ground. A nephew of Firoz Khan Mewati was killed and his son wounded". In this battle Banda Singh Bahadur lost fifteen hundred Sikhs and two sardars. This battle was fought on 5 December 1710, when Banda Singh Bahadur cut off convoys and other detachments and killed two or three Faujdars. Then it rained for four or five days and the weather became very cold. Thousands of soldiers of the imperial force fell ill and many horses died. Their stench was unbearable. The soldiers attributed this calamity to the sorcery of Banda Singh Bahadur!

Another big contingent under the command of the Emperor's son, Prince Rafi-us-Shan, was then ordered to reinforce Rustamdil Khan. Kanwar Khan in his *Tazkirat-ul-Sulatin* writes: "This humble person was then present

with the troops of Prince Rafi-us-Shan and saw with his own eyes that everyone of the cursed Sikhs came out of the entrenchments, challenged the imperial troops and after great struggle and trial, fell under the swords of the Ghazis". With the setting of the sun, they retreated towards the eastern mountains and fell back upon the fort of Lohgarh. Rustamdil Khan was then raised to the title of Ghazi Khan Rustam-e-Jang, with 4,000 Zat and 3,000 Sawar.

Rustamdil Khan made a further advance of 4 km and reached the stream of Som. From there the fort of Lohgarh was visible, perched on the top of a hill. Between the stream Som and Lohgarh lay a dense forest. There were frightful sounds at night. The imperial camp arrived there on 9 December 1710. The Prime Minister Munim Khan and his son Mohabat Khan were assigned duty to guard the royal camp. The following day, on 10 December 1710, the imperial army, some 60,000 strong, pushed forward in battle array so as to surround the fort of Lohgarh from all sides. Wazir Munim Khan, his son Mahabat Khan and Chhatarsal Bundela were in charge of



.....through the forested hills....

the right wing. Udet Singh Bundela and Churaman Jat commanded the left wing. Rustamdil Khan was in the centre but when they reached within range of the Sikh guns, they were heavily shelled. The Mughal troops entered the trenches at the foot of the hill. The Sikhs fought hard, and the survivors retreated up the hill even as a large number of Mughal troops were being killed.

The fort of Lohgarh was actually quite small. There was no space for storing large quantities of grain and fodder. Their supplies had run short. One Diwan Hardayal, a prominent figure in the royal camp, an admirer of the Sat Guru, helped Banda Singh Bahadur with provisions as far as he could, but this could no longer suffice. The besieged were also said to have eaten their horses and other beasts of burden to appease their hunger. The last hope now left to the Sikhs was a desperate charge of cutting through the enemy. At 3 o'clock in the morning of 11 December 1710, a hollow trunk of a big tamarind tree lying in the lower parts of the hill was filled with gun power. Just as the gun




.....to the site where Lohgarh fort existed.



Marking the area of Lohgarh fort.

powder in the tree trunk was ignited, the guns in the fort fired simultaneously. Banda Singh and his men got through in the great confusion prevailing in the Mughal camp, and safely into the Sirmaur hills towards the mountains of the Barfi Raja of Nahan.

At sunrise on 11 December 1710 the imperial forces began their final assault on the fort. Gulab Singh and thirty of his wounded soldiers and a number of women and children of the neighbouring village who had taken shelter in the Sikh fort, were taken prisoners along with some horses and camels, five elephants, three big guns, seventeen light guns, a few muskets and swords, a canopy with silver poles, gold and silver coins worth eight lakhs of rupees and from the underground, gold coins to the value of twenty lakhs of rupees.

There were great rejoicings in the imperial camp. On 12 December 1710, a grand durbar was held and various honours conferred on all the commanders. In the evening however it was discovered that the real Banda Singh Bahadur had escaped and that it was an impersonator who had been captured. According to Khafi Khan, "the hawk had flown and an owl had been caught". The Emperor summoned Prime Minister Munim Khan and administered to him sharp rebuke, the Wazir taking the insult to heart, falling ill and dying two months later. 

Preservation of Lohgarh as a National Heritage

The fort at Lohgarh was only about an acre in area which was later demolished by the Mughals and now, nearly three centuries later, only its foundations are visible, located inside a reserve forest in Himachal Pradesh. There never was a Gurdwara set up by Banda Bahadur as per recorded historical accounts or even during the Sikh regime inside this fort. In fact, no Gurdwara existed in the fort during the last 300 years or so. It is understood that the management of the Paonta Sahib Gurdwara is being allocated the fort area in which they are planning to build a large Gurdwara covering almost the entire area, which will totally obliterate the heritage aspect of this creation of the initial Sikh state. This fort is perhaps one of the few remnants of an original ruin which has not yet been decimated in name of modernity or religiosity. This heritage is not only an heritage of the Sikhs, but of the entire Indian nation as the spirit created by Banda Bahadur led on to the next fifty years of Sikh struggle after which they were able to occupy the entire Punjab, establish the Sikh state and stop foreign invasions for all times to come.

It is prayed that this heritage of the Sikhs as well as of the Indian nation be preserved and maintained as such and reminders of the glorious history of the community not allowed to be obliterated.

It is suggested that:

- The Himachal Pradesh Government be requested to stop all or any attempts to change in whatsoever manner the present ruins of the Lohgarh and Sitaragarh area.
- As a site of historical importance the site is of archaeological importance and as such may be preserved and looked after by INTACH/Archaeological Survey of India.
- Preserving its originality this location can be developed into a park, and by providing necessary limited access, could be developed into a place of pilgrimage and homage to that great Sikh, Banda Bahadur.
- The only surviving tower in Sadhaura (below) should be preserved by the Haryana government by acquiring it from its present occupiers.



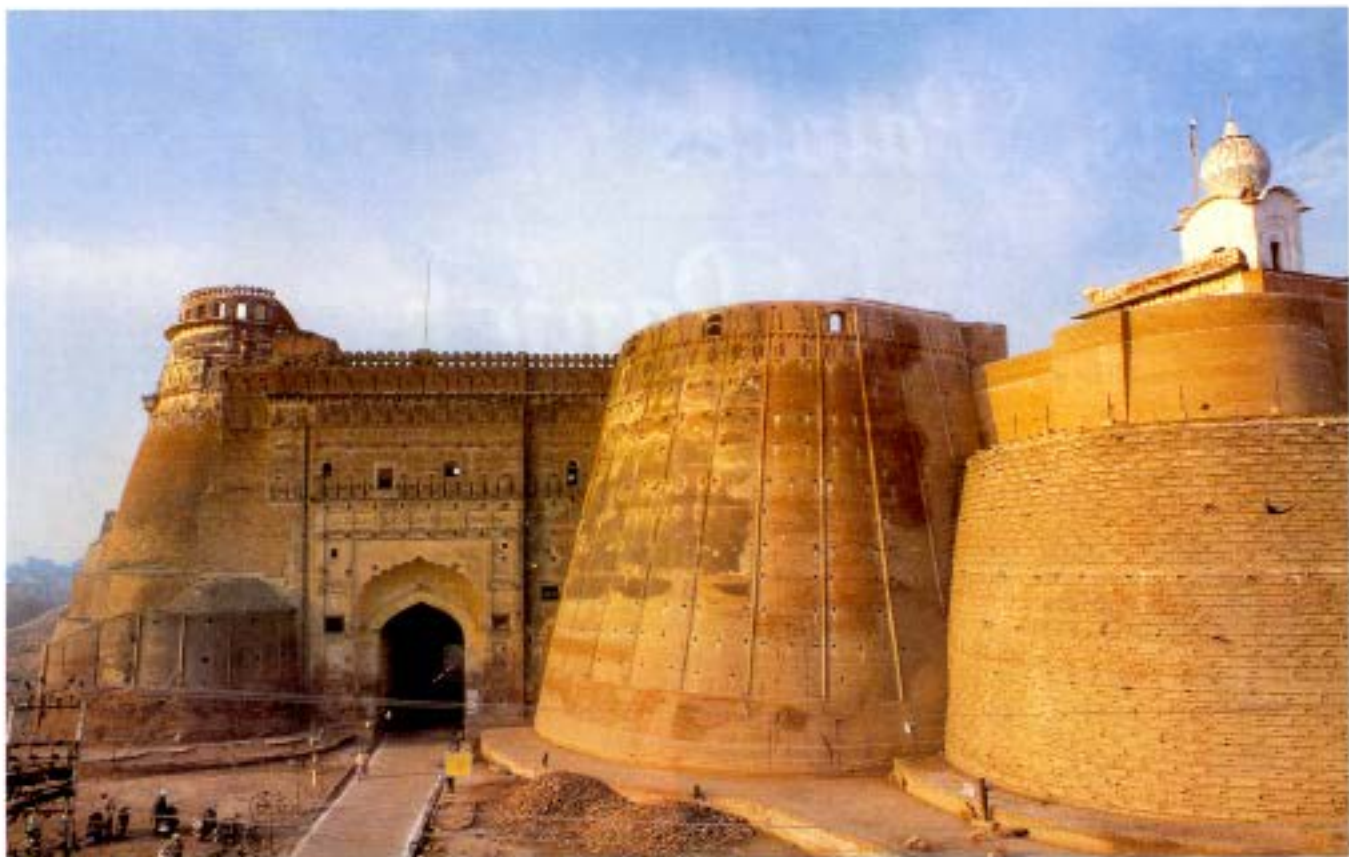
Forts, Palaces and Havelis of Panjab

The Foreword to this book, published earlier in 2005 by the National Institute of Panjab Studies from New Delhi, is by Dr Manmohan Singh in his capacity then as President of the Institute. The first four books in the first phase of the Series were launched on the birthday of Guru Nanak Dev in November 2001 at Rashtrapati Bhavan, and in view of the encouraging response, the Institute initiated the second phase, another set of four books, including that on the Forts, Palaces and Havelis of Panjab.

As before, the crisp and learned text by Dr Mohinder Singh is complemented by fine photographs taken by Sondeep Shanker, while there are others whose efforts are acknowledged. However, apart from single photographs of the Lahore Fort, the haveli at Gujranwala and an overview of Naulakha also in Lahore, the forts, palaces and Havelis in Western Panjab are not included and therein lies a misnomer in the book's title.

The two Panjabs are divided by an artificial and arbitrary line on ground, drawn by a visiting foreigner but has intrinsically been one for all time, which it remains in spirit, it presently wracked by politics. So, the non-inclusion of historic buildings in that half of Panjab tells only half the story.

But what a story ! The Panjab has been cradle of one of the world's earliest civilisations, going back to 3000 B.C., but the geographical location of this land has meant continuous invasions and epic battles with ravaging hordes, which necessitated building of forts for defence of the realm and palaces for royalty and havelis for chiefs and ruling elite. The massive forts of Delhi, Agra, Rajasthan, Central India and the Deccan dwarf those of the Panjab, to be sure, but the latter have been bulwark in the defence of kingdoms and misls during the last many centuries.



Main entrance of the Bhatinda Fort. Gurdwara built in the memory of Guru Gobind Singh's visit to the place is also seen in the picture.

The Panjab has faced massive challenges since the 6th century BC when, according to recorded history, militant tribes began to invade the subcontinent of India. Darius, the Persian King, who ruled from 522 to 486 BC, was the earliest known invader who entered today's Panjab and conquered this land, as is evident from his coins and other remains recovered from various parts of the undivided Panjab. After a brief span of local rule, Panjab went under Alexander of Macedonia who occupied the area upto the western banks of the river Beas. Then emerged the Mauryan Empire and Panjab became one of its most invaluable possessions but after the Mauryan Empire weakened, Panjab was again subjected to intermittent invasions by the Saikas, Huns and Kushans. Over the aeons these communities, both indigenous and foreign, not just ruled Panjab but also changed its demography and Panjab developed into small republics which over a thousand years later, was to influence India's modern democratic system of governance.

These frequent invasions and conflicts for territorial power resulted in the raising of armies in the Panjab with fortified buildings and for secure residence of the rulers and various chiefs. These

fortified structures had provision for both residences as also defence fortifications. With passage of time, rulers and their courtiers and chiefs sought more luxurious dwellings which resulted in the building of palaces and havelis. Time has obliterated most of these early forts which were built of mud and stone, either on hill-tops or surrounded by water bodies. Many a fortress was abandoned for tactical reasons and thereafter neglected, without maintenance or repair. Some palaces and havelis survived longer because these were properly built using bricks, stone ashlar or other compact media bound by a kind of mortar.

Most of the significant and impregnable forts of the undivided Panjab were built around its north-western frontiers (now in Pakistan), although eastern Panjab, including areas which are now in Haryana and Himachal, too have a number of these. Eastern Panjab also boasts a number of majestic palaces and some magnificent havelis. Except for the forts that housed palaces of the ruling princes, most of these lost their strategic and military importance after annexation by the British in the 19th century.

After India became an independent nation and a democratic national government was established with

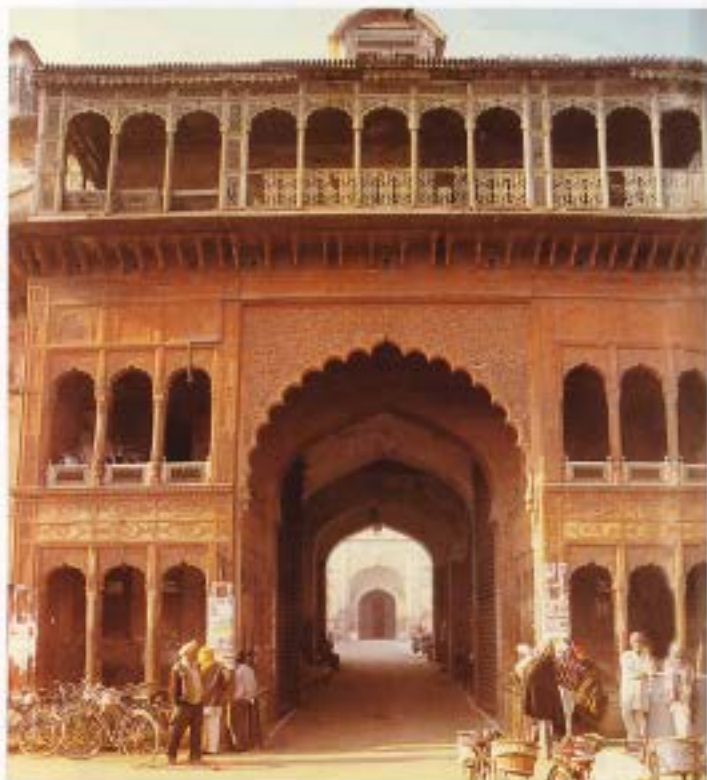


Main entrance of the Bahadurgarh Fort.

merger of the princely states, such forts and palaces as also havelis of chiefs slowly lost their glory, and most were relegated into becoming army or police training centres or government offices, consequently with maintenance and upkeep being hopelessly neglected.

It was during Maharaja Ranjit Singh's rule (1799-1839) that Panjab's sovereignty was re-established and a great empire set up with Lahore as its capital. Then began a new epoch, with construction of numerous imposing palaces and havelis being built in Panjab. A political event then turned to be of special significance in the manner of future architectural growth. The Maharaja and the British had signed a treaty in 1809 under which Ranjit Singh was checkmated from crossing the Sutlej and linking with the independent Sikh princely states of East Panjab, as these had then become "British protectorates".

The rulers of these independent principalities thereafter built magnificent palaces and gardens on the designs of famous palaces in India and



Main entrance to the Quila Mubarak at Patiala.



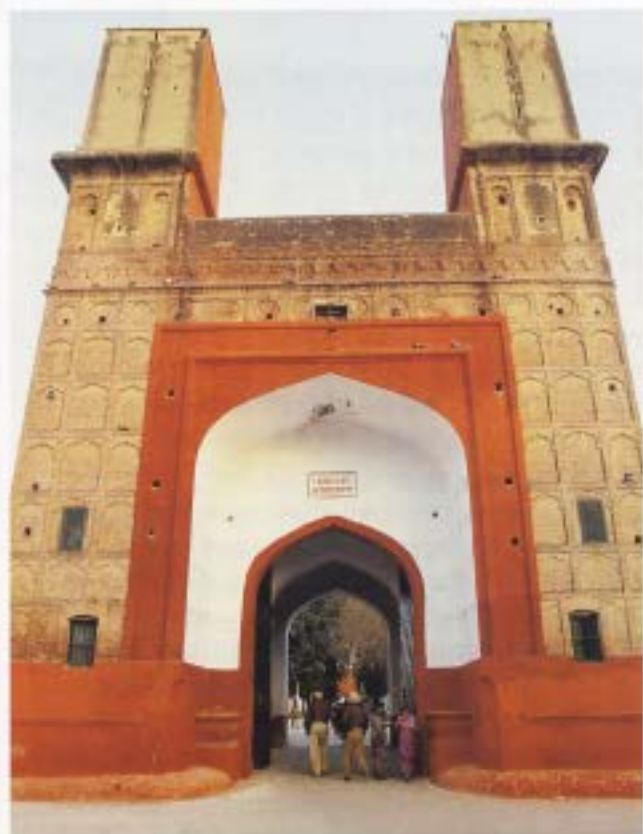
Portion of Quila Mubarak, Patiala, built in French style for Queen Florence. Photo: Mona Mohinder Singh



The Moti Bagh Palace at Patiala.



*Gobindgarh fort is in dire need of restoration.
Photo: Dr. Balwinder Singh*



Lahori Gate of the Phillaur Fort.



Side view of the Jagatjit Palace at Kapurthala.



Remnants of the haveli of Sham Singh Attariwala, one of the most faithful Generals of Maharaja Ranjit Singh who died defending Maharaja's empire during the first Anglo-Sikh War in 1846.

Europe as in the case of Jagatjit Palace at Kapurthala, copied from the original at Versailles in France and which came to be popularly dubbed "Paris of the Panjab".

Patiala, capital of the erstwhile princely state founded by Baba Ala Singh, has been well known for its forts, palaces and gardens. The old Motibagh Palace, Rajindra Kothi and Quila Mukarak are some of the best known, architecturally and culturally attractive edifices of the glory and grandeur of the princely century in Panjab.

Bhatinda boasts the oldest fort in the Panjab, but is regrettably in utter neglect as are the Bahadurgarh Fort and Quila Mubarak at Patiala. The haveli in Gujranwala where Ranjit Singh was born and historic rooms in Lahore Fort are most dilapidated and unfortunately now in another country. Ram Bagh, built as a summer palace by Maharaja Ranjit Singh in the holy city of Amritsar, also remains without restoration in spite of the fact that the Panjab Government spent huge funds in celebrating the bi-centenary of Maharaja Ranjit Singh's rule in 2002.

Phillaur Fort is the only exception to such general neglect and indifference, perhaps because, in 1890 it was converted into a police training school by the British-Indian government.

The Gobindgarh fort at Amritsar, which was under "occupation" of the Indian Army since the partition of India, was built by the Bhangi Chief, Sardar Gujjar Singh and is situated outside the Lahori Darwaza. Ranjit Singh had further fortified this, fitting artillery at various strategic points, with a triple line of defences, including a deep and wide moat around the outer wall. The guns included the famous *Zam Zam* (made famous by Kipling in a later period) which was later moved to Lahore and is now grandly displayed on the Mall of Ranjit Singh's former capital city.

Amongst the most historic havelis is that of Sardar Sham Singh Attariwala, the famous General whose father, Sardar Nihal Singh started construction of the haveli, situated in 50 acres around Attari village near Amritsar and completed in 1830. There are other historic havelis in Panjwar, near Tarn Taran and Fatehgarh Churian, representing some of the finest craftsmanship of the time.

While there are a number of sarais, havelis, forts and palaces in Panjab which can be subject of conservation to attract tourists and Panjabi NRIs, not much has been done in this direction. Recent initiatives taken by the Kapurthala Heritage Society, the Patiala Heritage Society and INTACH have brought about some renewed hope.

The book under review has endeavoured to record, with illustrations, some of the over two hundred historic structures which have been listed by the team. Details of some historically important forts, palaces and havelis have been provided so that readers interested in conserving the past can have an idea of the rich heritage of this land of the five rivers. 📖

Forts, Palaces and Havelis of Panjab

Text by Mohinder Singh

Photographs by Sondeep Shankar

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Panth Rattan Gyani Sant Singh Maskeen

After enduring very difficult times following partition of the country, Gyani Sant Singh Maskeen was to become perhaps the most visible, honoured and respected religious scholar in contemporary Sikh times, to be seen and heard on television throughout India and transmitted worldwide. Tens of millions of devoted viewers watched his Gurbani Kirtan and katha, the power of his voice, appeal and charm equally influencing those well versed with the scriptures as well as those less educated.

His style of katha was unique, modern, innovative and scientific. The biggest impact was on the manner Maskeenji would bare the shortcomings, deceptions and hypocrasies of the self-styled living Gurus, false saints and babas, pradhans and various secretaries of Gurdwara Committees and, of course, politicians of all hues.

Jathedar Akal Takht honouring Maskeen ji.



Gyani Sant Singh Maskeen: 1934-2005.

As Maskeenji wrote in his book 'Desh-Videsh de Gurdwarean da Parbandhki Dhancha ate Parcharak Sharenee', his becoming a preacher was ordained:

"The love for Gurmat was inbuilt and I felt secure that my destiny was in the hands of God. It was my good luck to meet Baba Balwant Singh Nirmal who encouraged me to start doing katha. I could hardly imagine that this would become my profession and the "rewards" were immense, not monetary, I earned Rs.1.25 at a time, not even enough for a tonga ride to the next destination. I would walk over thirty miles on foot to do katha and some invisible power kept me going, with inspiration

from the Sangat. With the grace of Guru Nanak and Guru Gobind Singh, I remained in "chardikala".

A simple and humble person, he was thus given the nickname "Maskeen" by Baba Balwant Singh and this was to become his personified identification.

Maskeen ji with fellow pracharaks.



In 1957 he returned to Alwar in Rajasthan where the family had settled after the partition of India. Born in 1934 to Sardar Kartar Singh and Mata Ram Kaur in village Kal Marwat in the district of Bannu in the north western frontier province of undivided India, he got married but continued his Gurmat preaching, establishing some Gurdwaras around Alwar and managing some schools whose expenses he would himself bear. Gurmat Samagam would be held in Alwar every year on the first days of March, attended by many thousands from India and abroad, who would stay at the Gurdwara premises where Maskeenji had 50 rooms built for visitors.

In the past half century, Gyani Sant Singh Maskeen travelled extensively throughout India and abroad, preaching Gurmat, carrying the message of Guru Nanak. He visited major towns of Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, Dubai, Qatar, Bahrain, Kenya, Tanzania, Nairobi, Uganda, Fiji, Australia, New Zealand, Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand, Hong Kong, the Philippines, Japan, England, Germany, France, the Netherlands, Belgium, Austria, Denmark, Sweden, Switzerland, America and Canada.

A distinguished scholar and outstanding philosopher, his Katha Vachak was unique, explaining writings of the Sufi saints alongside the Gurbani. He was proficient in several languages, including Persian, Urdu, Punjabi, Hindi, Brij Bhasha and others used in the Guru Granth Sahib. Maskeenji would also quote with reverence from the Vedas, Gita, Quran and the Bible.

Gyani Sant Singh Maskeen with S. Khajinder Singh and some prominent personalities of the Sikh Panth at Guru Singh Sabha, Greater Kailash II, New Delhi.



Maskeen ji at the Guru Nanak Dev ji Chasma, Sultanpur (Afghanistan, 1975).



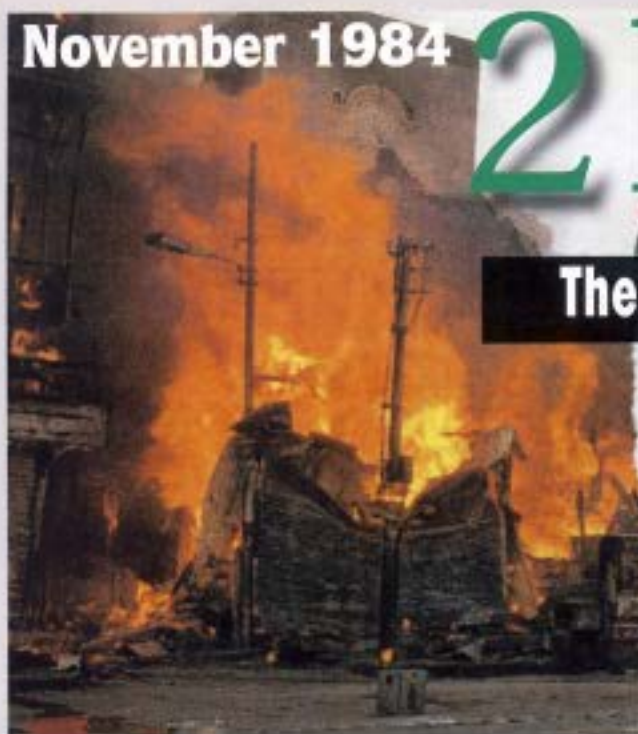
At Jalalabad (in Afghanistan) which Guru Nanak visited in 1520.

His prolific writings resulted in a large number of books published including *Guru Chintan*, *Guru Jyoti*, *Teeja Netra*, *Chhatha Pad*, *Pad Pradarshan*, *Ghat Dharshan*, *Prabhu Simran*, *Shabad Guru Surat Dhun Chela*. He wrote numerous articles on Sikh history, the Gurbani of Bhai Gurdas, *Dasam Granth*, writings of Bhai Nand Lal, Sufi saints and many other philosophers of the world.

The revered Panth Rattan Gyani Sant Singh Maskeen has left this fantastic legacy behind, passing away suddenly on 18 February 2005. His inspiration will continuously show the light to the millions of his followers. ☪

November 1984 **21** Years later... ... and counting

The collective shame of India



Q When is a riot not a riot? When is a massacre not a massacre? When is a mass murderer not a mass murderer? And when is public outrage to be muted – if not entirely suspended?

A When the Congress is the culprit. And when the victims are Sikhs.

That, at least, seems to be the attitude of much of our so-called secular establishment. The publication of the Nanavati report into the 1984 Delhi riots should have served to remind us of the horrors of that bloody week. It should have led us to recall how completely the administration failed and how innocent Sikhs were murdered in front of their own children.

Instead, the secular response to the report has been curiously low-key. It was a long time ago, we are told. What is the point in raking up old memories? Justice Nanavati doesn't conclusively blame anybody anyway, does he? And anyway, all secularists must unite to fight Hindu fundamentalism, so let's not get sidetracked by an old riot.

There is something terribly sad and shameful about these responses. Listening to them I had some sense of why secularism has fallen into such disrepute. It has become a flag of convenience for anybody who wants to oppose the BJP. And we have forgotten that all communal violence – no matter who it is directed against – is equally bad.

It wasn't always like this. Those of you will long memories will remember the horror with which most educated people reacted to the riots in 1984. Then, they became a Great Secular Issue in much the same way that

the Gujarat riots later became a defining issue for a new generation of politicians.

Certainly, it was impossible not to be outraged by the massacres. They took place in the immediate aftermath of Indira Gandhi's assassination. Anecdotal evidence suggests that the early violence was spontaneous, sparked off by public anger against Sikhs and by simmering Hindu resentment at the Punjab violence. Then, somebody spread a rumour that Sikhs were distributing sweets to celebrate Mrs Gandhi's death. Even though there was no substantiation to this story, small time local Congress leaders gathered their followers and went in search of Sikh homes to burn.

What happened next is the subject of some dispute. Eyewitnesses claim that they saw senior Congress leaders – Jagdish Tytler, Sajjan Kumar, H.K.L. Bhagat and Dharamdas Shastri – either leading the mobs or organising the violence. Naturally, the leaders have since declared their innocence, but there is little doubt that some of their followers were involved.

It did not help that the police force failed. The Delhi Police disappeared from the streets of the capital and Sikhs were denied the protection they needed to save their lives. The administration delayed calling in the army and, in the interim, hundreds of poor Sikhs living in the resettlement colonies on the other side of the Yamuna were murdered. In a pattern that would be repeated in Gujarat nearly two decades later, the mobs resorted to extreme cruelty: fathers were killed in front of their daughters, women were raped in full public view and, in some cases thugs drove electric drills into the heads of defenceless Sikhs.

By the time the riot was over – actually, I don't know why we call it a riot, it was a massacre – three things were clear. One: the Congress was involved. Two: the police and the administration did nothing to protect the Sikhs. And three: there was an unforgivable delay in calling the military.

The dispute was over other issues. What was the level of Congress involvement? Were people like Bhagat and Tytler really involved? Did the policemen run away because they were scared? Or was it because they did not want to act against workers of the party that was in power? And why did it take so long to restore order? Was it because the government was in a state of chaos

The stain that will not go away

Try as it might, the Congress party cannot erase from public memory the terrible crimes that were committed on its watch against Indians of the Sikh faith in the aftermath of Indira Gandhi's assassination 21 years ago. Over four fateful days, more than 3,000 Sikhs were hunted, humiliated and massacred in an organised killing spree carried out with the active involvement of the police and Congress leaders and with the tacit approval – if not worse – of those in charge of the country at the highest level. After all, the massacres took place not in some dark and distant corner of the country but in New Delhi – the very seat of political power and a place where the reins of national security and law enforcement have always been tightly held. Rajiv Gandhi, who had just taken charge as Prime Minister following his mother's death, might not have authorised the 'retaliatory' carnage but his moral equivocation and questionable pronouncements do not allow charitable inferences to be made. Long before Narendra Modi invoked a version of Newton's Third Law to justify the 'retaliatory' killing of Muslims in Gujarat by Sangh Parivar-led mobs in 2002, Rajiv Gandhi had declared that the earth is "bound to shake" when a big tree falls.

Actually, in many ways, the official apathy and inaction that followed the 1984 carnage has been as much a blot on India as the original killings. After initially refusing to file charges, the police sabotaged the investigation and prosecution of the cases that made it to trial. The Nanavati Commission report documents this disgraceful story but is incomplete and imprecise in crucial respects. Nevertheless, Congress men who are inclined to ignore its findings on the role of Jagdish Tytler and Sajjan Kumar should ask themselves whether they would look the other way if the Nanavati-Shah commission in Gujarat were to come up with a similarly caveated indictment against Modi. If the party is sincere about coming to terms with its past, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and Congress president Sonia Gandhi must respect public sentiment. After 21 years, pressing criminal charges against Messrs Tytler and Kumar might pose quite a legal challenge but there is no reason why their presence should be tolerated in the party, much less the government. Ms Gandhi has already issued a public apology for the 1984 massacre but now the time has come to turn those words into action: a sincere effort must also be made to re-examine all the 1984 massacre cases that ended in acquittals so that proper prosecutions are launched and the guilty punished.

From: *The Hindu*

following Mrs Gandhi's assassination? Or was there a more sinister design? Was it true that Arun Nehru, the Congress strong man of that era, had said, "Let Delhi burn for three days"? Had Rajiv Gandhi's administration allowed the massacres to go on because they tapped into a vote-rich Hindu backlash?

Over two decades and many commissions of inquiry later, we have some answers. Yes, senior Congress leaders were involved. There may not be enough evidence to prosecute Tytler, but Justice Nanavati suggests that he played "some role". About Bhagat, the report is vague: no purpose is served in investigating him further because of his advanced age and declining health. Sajjan Kumar and Dharamdas Shastri seem to have had some involvement.

On the more substantive issue of whether the administration allowed Delhi to burn, all the commissions have been unanimous: yes, it did, but this was because of incompetence and negligence, not because of any sinister design.

If there is a parallel, it is with the 1993 Bombay riots rather than with Gujarat. In Bombay too, the police failed to protect Muslims. And the local administration failed to ask the army to restore order till it was much too late. Then too, there was political workers involved – except that they belonged to the Shiv Sena which was in opposition, and not to the ruling Congress.

In the Eighties, nobody was afraid of saying this. But Indian politics has now become so polarised between the so-called forces of secularism (i.e. the Congress and the Left) and the so-called communal elements (the Sangh parivar), that every event is now reassessed through the prism of this polarisation. So Congress supporters and communists are willing to forget the horrors of 1984 lest they weaken the secular case against Narendra Modi and the mass murderers of Gujarat.

But the truth is that a murderer is a murderer: a massacre is a massacre. A victim is a victim – regardless of whether he is Hindu, Sikh or Muslim. When somebody comes to kill you, it does not matter whether he does so in the name of Hindu fundamentalism or Congress extremism.

If we forget the murders of 1984 and allow those who committed them to get away with it, then we lose the moral right to criticise Narendra Modi or to ever speak out against communal violence.

It saddens me that the secular establishment has forgotten basic morality. Its failure to stand up for the victims of the 1984 massacres shames us all.

Vir Sanghvi, the highly respected managing editor of Hindustan Times, the Indian capital's most respected newspaper, wrote this article, a day after the 339-page Nanavati Commission report and the Government's action taken report (ATR) had been tabled in Parliament on 8 August 2005.

10 commissions, panels probed '84 riots

Since the 1984 anti-Sikh riots that followed assassination of the then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, in which over 3,000 persons were killed, the government had appointed 10 commissions and committees from time to time and these are their "results":

Marwah Commission was appointed in November 1984. Ved Marwah, then Additional Commissioner of Police, was assigned the job of enquiring into the role of the police during the carnage of November 1984. Marwah had almost completed his inquiry towards the middle of 1985 when he was directed by the Central Government not to proceed further as the Misra Commission had been appointed by then. Complete records, namely the handwritten notes of Ved Marwah, which contained important information, were not transferred to the Misra Commission.

Misra Commission of Enquiry was appointed in May 1985. Justice Rangnath Misra, was a sitting judge of the Supreme Court of India, who submitted his report in August 1986 and the report was made public six months thereafter in February 1987. In his report, Justice Misra stated it was not part of his terms of reference to identify any person and recommended the formation of three others committees. There was only one term of reference to this commission, i.e. whether the violence was organised?

Kapur-Mittal Committee was appointed in February 1987 on recommendation of the Misra Commission to inquire into the role of the police, which the Marwah Commission had almost completed in 1985 itself when the government asked that committee wind up and not proceed further. After almost two years, this committee was appointed for the same purpose. This committee consisted of Justice Dalip Kapur and Mrs Kusum Mittal, retired Secretary of UP. It submitted its report in 1990. Seventy two police officers were identified for their connivance or gross negligence. The committee recommended forthwith dismissal of 30 police officers out of 72. However, till date, not a single police officer has been awarded any kind of punishment.

Jain-Banerjee Committee: This committee was recommended by the Misra Commission for recommending registration of cases. It consisted of Justice M.L.Jain, former Judge of the Delhi High Court and Mr.A.K.Banerjee, retired IGP. The Misra Commission held in its report that a large number of cases had not been registered against them. This committee recommended registration of cases against Sajjan Kumar in August 1987, but no case was registered. In November 1987 many press reports suggested not registering cases in spite of the recommendation of the committee. In December 1987, one of the co-accused along with Sajjan Kumar, namely Brahmanand Gupta filed a writ petition in the Delhi High Court and obtained a stay against this committee. The government did not oppose the stay. The Citizens Justice Committee filed an application for vacating the stay. Ultimately, the writ petition was

decided in August 1989 and the High Court quashed the appointment of this committee. An appeal was filed by the Citizens Justice Committee in the Supreme Court.

Potti-Rosha Committee was appointed in March 1990 as a successor to the Jain Banerjee Committee. This committee also recommended registration of cases against Sajjan Kumar.

Jain-Aggarwal Committee was appointed in December 1990 as a successor to the Potti-Rosha Committee. It consisted of Justice J.D.Jain, retired Judge of the Delhi high Court and D.K.Aggarwal, retired DGP of UP. This committee recommended registration of cases against HKL Bhagat, Sajjan Kumar, Dharamdas Shastri and Jagdish Tytler. This committee was wound up in August 1993. However, the cases recommended by this committee were not even registered by the police.

Ahuja Committee was the third committee recommended by the Misra Commission to ascertain the total number of killings in Delhi. This committee submitted its report in August 1987 and gave a figure of 2,733 as the number of Sikhs killed in Delhi alone.

Dhillon Committee headed by Gurdial Singh Dhillon was appointed in 1985 to recommend measures for rehabilitation of the victims. This committee submitted its report by the end of 1985. One of the major recommendations of this Committee was that the business establishments, which had insurance cover, but whose insurance claims were not settled by insurance companies on the technical ground that "riot" was not covered under insurance, should be paid compensation under the directions of the government. This committee recommended that since all insurance companies were nationalised, they be directed to pay the claims.

However, the government did not accept this recommendation and as a result insurance claims were rejected by all insurance companies throughout the country.

Narula Committee was appointed in December 1993 by the Madan Lal Khurana government in Delhi. This committee submitted its report in January 1994 and recommended registration of cases against Bhagat, Sajjan Kumar and Jagdish Tytler.

Nanavati Commission was appointed by a unanimous resolution passed in the Rajya Sabha. This commission was headed by Justice G.T.Nanavati, retired Judge of the Supreme Court of India. The commission submitted its report in February 2004 and said there was "credible evidence" against the Union Minister Jagdish Tytler that he "very probably" had a hand in organising attacks on Sikhs and recommended the government take further action as may be found necessary. The ATR report, while exonerating Tytler, said, "a person cannot be prosecuted simply on the basis of probabilities".

A Quiet Rage: reported by new generation media persons

Every afternoon, Vikramjit Singh takes leave from the computer firm that employs him in Nehru Place and heads home to help his mother Gurbaksh fill up water from a tanker. The street they live on, unlike the rest of East of Kailash, does not get piped water. Vikramjit isn't sure why, has never asked.

The 25-year old learnt early in life that not all questions life throws up comes with neatly tagged answers. If there were answers to be had, other questions would be top of the mind. Why, for instance, were his father and grandfather hacked to death in 1984? Why did his mother have to educate him and his sister by working as a Grade IV employee in UCO Bank? Why did relatives cheat them of compensation? Why did he have to quit studies after Class XII?



All the questions were born on that terrible night of 1984, when a mob broke into their Gandhinagar residence and murdered the two elder male members of the family. Gurbaksh and her mother-in-law managed to smuggle out Vikramjit and his sister through a backdoor and fled to a relative's house in West Delhi. There they stayed till the army came in.

"At first I used to string beads for a local firm for a living", remembers Gurbaksh. The UCO Bank job happened only in 1990. Simultaneously, the family faced the rigours of filing FIRs, queing up for compensation, acquiring a house, building a home. Unable to bear seeing his mother trying to make both ends meet on her meagre earnings, Vikramjit gave up studies after Class XII, only recently acquiring a BA (Pass) degree from Delhi University and subsequently a job with a computer firm.

"If my father had lived, I would not have had to see my mother addressed in an indignified manner by her superiors at work. Our relatives would not have

Nanavati Commission confines report to Delhi

The Justice Nanavati Commission, which had the mandate to probe afresh 1984 anti-Sikh riots across the country, has confined its observations only to Delhi even though it had received 2557 affidavits from all across the country, of which over 40 per cent were from outside the Capital.

The terms of reference of the commission clearly stated that it would "inquire into the causes and course of criminal violence and riots targeting members of the Sikh community which took place in the NCT of Delhi and other parts of the country on 31 October 1984 and thereafter."

Justice G.T.Nanavati in the report has justified confining observations to the Capital by stating that "no fresh material or statement was received with respect to the incidents which had happened in other parts of the country and as no grievance has been made that no proper inquiry was made earlier with respect to those incidents or that no proper action has been taken against the officers and policemen found guilty, this commission has thought it fit not to refer to the material which was produced before the Justice Mishra Commission with respect to those incidents".

"The commission has also thought it fit not to record any fresh findings with respect to those incidents", the report stated.

The National Commission for Minorities chief, S.Tarlochan Singh has said "This is just a one city report. More than 3000 persons were killed in Delhi and similar numbers across the country. But the commission has confined its findings only to the Capital". He said several other places like Kanpur, Ranchi, Bokaro, Bhillai, Meerut, and other cities in Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh witnessed anti-Sikh riots.

Significantly, of the 2557 affidavits filed, 1041 affidavits had been filed by persons living *outside* Delhi, which is a clear indication that many riot victims were seeking justice from the commission. According to official figures, in the three-day anti-Sikh riots across the country 2733 persons were killed in Delhi, 127 in Kanpur, Uttar Pradesh and 78 in Bokaro, Jharkhand.

Beyond the Call

Amongst the more than 4000 Sikhs murdered by mobs between 31 October and 3 November 1984, were 28 defence personnel in uniform. These officers and men were either travelling in trains, or at their homes, and in the case of Flt. Lt.Maninder Singh, on his motorcycle heading for work at Palam airport. All of them in the uniform of the armed forces of the country they were sworn to defend, even "Beyond the Call of Duty". How did the Government announce their deaths? Or were these officers and men merely added to the grim statistics?

[Flt.Lt.Maninder Singh was a highly qualified test pilot and shortly proceeding to France for conversion to Mirage 2000 bi-sonic fighters].

cheated us of more than a lakh of the compensation money", smoulders Vikramjit.

"I do not care what happens to the politicians when the Commission report comes out. I never saw them and they do not know of me. The people who attacked us, my mother says, were our neighbours. But that was then... Now all I want is my mother to get some rest after these 20-odd years", Vikramjit says.

His mother has always advised him to avoid nursing hatred towards specific communities. Now, he says, *gussa aata hai*, but only when he sees his mother working even after suffering a stroke. Politics? Terrorism? Vikramjit has no time for all that.

Siddhartha Sarma

Gurpal Singh Kalsi is a worried man. At this time there might be other 26-year-olds who are as worried, but chances



are his concerns are a world away from the romance-career-travel thought cycle of his contemporaries.

Gurpal has been taking care of his family—his mother, younger brother and sister since he was 16. Twenty-one years ago, all four earning members of Gurpal's family were killed. Worry has been almost a constant companion since then.

But money is not the primary of his worries. Nor is the erratic water supply at the DDA flat his family has occupied for more than 10 years now. It is the authorities' habitual harassment of local youths at the slightest hint of Sikh-related trouble that worried Gurpal.

"In 1996, the police picked up my uncle Maha Singh—he was a student of Class X at that time—on some pretext and beat him senseless", alleges Gurpal.

Protests his mother, "If we were going to be following the

Action not taken

The UPA government's response to the Nanavati Commission Report on the anti-Sikh riots of 1984 and its *Action Taken Report* have once again exposed the political and moral infamy of the Congress party. The Action Taken Report has betrayed its desperation to save the skin of leaders like Jagdish Tytler, Sajjan Kumar, Dharam Das and H.K.L. Bhagat against whom the commission has pointed fingers. The UPA government's insistence that since the Nanavati Commission has not found clinching evidence of their complicity in the riots, they could not be held guilty, is absurd! When the report has spoken of "credible evidence", does the government need a video-clipping, to convince it about the guilt of these leaders who were seen leading murderous mobs following the assassination of Indira Gandhi? The government is under intense pressure from both the Opposition and its own allies. In fact it looks increasingly isolated and even vulnerable. The Congress leadership apparently, at last, reluctantly agreed to take some damage control measures after the Left made it clear that it may even vote against the government at the end of the adjournment motion debate on the issue. If both the UPA and the Congress find themselves on the back foot, they have only themselves to blame. In the cataclysmic aftermath of Mrs Gandhi's assassination, the entire Sikh community was pronounced guilty and punished for the crime of a few individuals. Rajiv Gandhi had virtually justified the massacre of the Sikhs by grandly proclaiming that after the fall of a large tree, the earth was bound to shake. This cruel callousness combined with the pain of *Operation Blue Star* understandably alienated the Sikh community. A year ago, the Congress succeeded in winning back the confidence of a large section of the Sikh community by installing the first Sikh Prime Minister of the country. By apologising for the 1984 carnage, Congress president Sonia Gandhi tried to apply a balm to the collective wounds of the Sikhs. The Nanavati Commission Report has provided her with an opportunity to atone for the sins of her partymen by making some sacrifices. There is neither political pragmatism nor moral justification in not sacking leaders who spearheaded hate crimes against innocent citizens of the country and brought eternal infamy to the party.

From: The Asian Age

path of violence and hatred, why would we be trying to lead this honest existence?"

Since 1984, Surjit Kaur has been working as a peon with the New Delhi Municipal Corporation to support her three children. The youngest of them was born seven months after her husband was burnt alive.

Gurpal himself started working as a driver when he was 16, saving money in his mother's name till he could buy his own vehicle to drive. In these ten years, he has sponsored his brother's computer education and an ongoing college degree.

"I am very busy, I want to secure a job with the police for my brother", he says, standing before a mirror in a tiny but scrupulously clean room, tying his turban. "As for myself, there's no time to dream. I'd be happy if I could get myself a permanent job as a driver.

Neha Sinha

*"Everybody says I look just like
my mother
Everybody says I'm the image of
Aunt Bee
Everybody says my nose is like my
Father's
But I want to look like me".*

Her nine-year-old granddaughter Kuljeet Kaur's poem shares wall-space with images of the Gurus in Baksheesh Kaur's two-room apartment, twin reminders of the faith and optimism that saw her family through its darkest hours. Dressed in white, stark in the dingy surroundings, she listens silently as her son Harpal recounts the night of 31 October 1984.

"They dragged out my father—he had retired by then from the army as havildar-major—and killed him. My 21-year-old brother Harkirat was up on the terrace, he saw the murder and cried out. So they went up and killed him too", remembers Harpal, 35. His mother, with the curious resignation of the very old or the very helpless, adds, in a whisper, "teen tukde kar diye".



Carnage condoned

Like the other Commissions/Committees before it, the Nanavati probe into the slaughter of Sikhs in Delhi in 1984 has done little more than confirm the horror stories and suspicions of those terrible times, but has yet again stopped short of nailing politicians publicly perceived as prime movers of organised outrage. Playing around with terms like "probably" or even "very probably" is pointless in an atmosphere which makes a mockery of morality, and the government and Congress party lost no time in defending Jagdish Tytler and Sajjan Kumar – both of whom had earlier been denied tickets for Lok Sabha polls. Legal technicalities would be cited in support of their rehabilitation, but the truth is the party attached greater value to their vote-catching capacity than the principled position it had appeared to take. To expect either of them to now bow out of public life would be to admit ignorance of contemporary political functioning. If "shame" entered the picture, which politician would remain active: That is what the Nanavati Commission and the (No) Action Taken Report cynically confirm.

The latest report, like its forerunners, conveniently limits its condemnation to local officials – the lieutenant governor, police commissioner and his team but ducks the key question of whose instructions the majority of them were implementing. To be fair there were stray exceptions. The LG of the day has made no secret of how he received no backing from the home ministry and it is inconceivable that PV Narasimha Rao's lethargy was not authorised by those with more clout. While fresh evidence was hard to obtain by an inquiry launched 16 years after the riots, the politics of the probe cannot be discounted. It was set up by the NDA to satisfy its Akali partners, but submitted its report when that coalition had been voted out of office. Had it not laboured close to five years, there is reason to suspect its findings might have been angled differently. The judiciary and its advocates would protest that contention, but the ground reality remains that commissions have always been sensitive to shifts in the political will. They should not be, alas our judges are not made of "sterner stuff" though some of them are decidedly ambitious. Political, judicial and administrative arguments over 1984 are ceaseless. Time and nature have already "accounted for" some of the most guilty, the others will never be able to discard the stigma. The victims will continue to re-live the nightmare. But that's not the total fall-out of the Nanavati probe and the government's inaction – at a time when Sikh militancy is showing signs of revival—the whitewash could make many seek other means of justice.

From : The Statesman

The other family members fled in time to escape the carnage, but were refused shelter by almost every neighbour in their Laxminagar locality. Finally, 50 of them found refuge with a washerman in an adjoining street. "For three days, we huddled together in one room, till we were rescued by the army", remembers Baksheesh Kaur.

Apart from the death of his father and brother, Harpal recalls little of those days. "But the image of bodies lying in the streets is something that has stayed with me", he says.

Putting behind those memories, burying the searing grief, Baksheesh then had to lead the family in the painful task of reconstructing their lives. They moved in with a son who had largely escaped with riots in his South Delhi residence; later, they shifted to the DDA flat in East of Kailash, where they now reside.

By the time they managed to get their share of compensation—Rs 3.3 lakh—eight years had passed by. Harpal had had to give up his studies to support his family; today, he drives taxis and does other odd jobs.

Just as life seemed to be coming together, calamity struck again. In 1992, Baksheesh's son Harbhajan—Harpal's elder by two years—was shot dead in an encounter with the police on the outskirts of Delhi. "He was with a friend, who was a militant. Harbhajan was caught in the crossfire and paid with his life", says Harpal Singh.

Forgiveness should not come easily to people like Baksheesh, but it does. "I hope the people who incited the mobs get punished, but I bear no hatred towards anybody anymore. I just wish no one has to through what I went through", she says.

Siddhartha Sarma

On Wednesday afternoon, Sadora Singh – fondly called *mama* – walks around frenetically. He is visibly harassed and is shouting at anyone he meets. He lost his entire family in the anti-Sikh riots of '84 and the horror

of watching them being murdered has robbed him of all sense.

He is just one of the many Sikhs who suffered the brutalities of the carnage following assassination of the then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. Gathered outside the Parliament Street police station, riot victims were demanding immediate action against those named in the Nanavati Commission report. They were also demanding payment of long overdue compensation the government had promised to the victims. The anguish of the victims was palpable even as they vowed that they would not let matters rest till the guilty have been booked.

The common sentiment doing the rounds was that Sajjan Kumar, Jagdish Tytler and H.K.L. Bhagat should be hanged and – ominously – in case the government doesn't take the necessary steps, the survivors are more than willing to take matters into their own hands. "How could the rioters get their weapons without government help. Tytler claims he sat near Indira Gandhi's body for eight hours – but the riots happened for three days"? asked an irate protester.

Pradhan Babu Singh Dukhiya, who was heading the protesters, said: "We do not believe in committees. It's all politically manipulated. How is it possible that the police could not be mobilised in three days when our people were being butchered"?

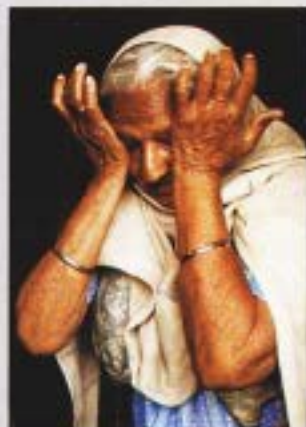
His indignation is affirmed by the heart-rending stories narrated by the widows. Shanti Devi bares her heart while relating her experience. "My husband was chopped into three pieces before me. My house was burnt. My neighbours have been looking after me since. The government has done nothing".

Kalwant Kaur has her own share of woes. "They burnt my husband alive. I have been supporting my family by stitching and knitting. Now that my children have grown up, I don't know how to arrange for their weddings. Where is the compensation we were promised"?

Half-hearted steps taken by the government to re-settle the displaced families has come under lot of flak.

One-room houses allotted to the survivors are barely big enough to accommodate the families and since no ownership papers have been given, there is a constant fear of being evicted. With not much to look forward to, the victim can do little than wait and watch as the Central Government decides the fate of those indicted in the Nanavati report.

Neha Lalchandani



Truth & Reconciliation

Why India should face up to the past, not bury it

It is logically – and morally – impossible for India's secular parties, the Congress and the Left, to condemn the role of the Narendra Modi regime during the 2002 Gujarat carnage, while winking at Delhi's anti-Sikh riots of 1984. The UPA government's position – summarised in the action taken report (ATR) which accompanies the main 339-page Nanavati enquiry volume that was tabled in Parliament – is inadequate. The ATR takes a narrow legalistic position on the 1984 violence by listing convictions and acquittals. Thus, when the enquiry says there's evidence to show that Jagdish Tytler, now a legislator and minor minister in the UPA government, 'very probably had a hand in organising attacks on Sikhs', the ATR argues that innocence or guilt is not probabilistic, but has to be proved beyond reasonable doubt. No cases were filed against Tytler. Ergo, he walks. Sajjan Kumar, another incumbent legislator from Delhi, fares equally well: The ATR shows that in every case he's listed, Kumar has been acquitted. The Congress is relieved and the Left is tongue-tied for once. The BJP should be elated: this way chances are slim that culpability for Gujarat riots will ever be nailed on Modi and his henchmen. But the Nanavati report and the ATR have exposed serious issues about how we deal with state-endorsed crimes. They also show a way forward.

In crimes where local administrations, police and politicians are involved, it is pointless to look for clear-cut judicial outcomes, especially for cases whose trials have run cold. Police refuse to register complaints, files go mission, witnesses are tough to find or turn hostile in court. Any retrial of 1984 will, doubtless, find people like Tytler and Kumar innocent once again. The only way forward is moral and morality and in this case, good politics. India should also set up a truth and reconciliation commission, akin to what South Africa did. There, victim and oppressor can face each other and talk about what happened. Through such encounters, the truth will emerge. That will make way for reconciliation. Remember, Congress president Sonia Gandhi eloquently apologised for the 1984 riots in 1998. With Manmohan Singh, a Sikh as prime minister, some of the reconciliation has taken place. It is time to face up to the past, not bury it.

From: The Times of India

The Pogrom of November 1984

As against the 3870 persons that are listed as killed in the November 1984 anti-Sikh carnage in Delhi, the Delhi Police registered cases for only 1419 murders, which has meant that no cases have been filed for 2451 murders.

The Government later admitted the deaths at 2733 before the Misra Commission. Even taking this "official" figure, the cases of 1314 killings are yet to be registered. The police has failed to register cases regarding these deaths even though full particulars were available with the government.

The Sikh Forum has detailed information in regard to each person killed in the following format:

Name of the person murdered: Jaswant Singh

Age: 40 years

Address: 13/41 Trilok Puri

FIR/D.C.No.: D.C.No. 198028 of 14.11.1984

Date of death: 3.11.1984

Reported by: Vidya Kaur

Relationship with the reporter: Husband

DAMNING STATISTICS

Area	Police Station	Number murdered
Trilok Puri	Kalyan Puri	369
Preet Vihar	Shakarapur	84
Yamuna Vihar	Bhajanpur	89
Himat Puri	Kalyan Puri	106
Gandhi Nagar	Gandhi Nagar	43
Shahdara	Shahdara	282
Nand Nagri, Sunder Nagri	Seema Puri	163
Nangloi	Nangloi	44
	Nangloi	104
Rani Bagh	Punjabi Bagh	18
	Najafgarh	81
	Sultan Puri	354
Janakpuri	Janakpuri	22
Mangole Puri	Mangole Puri	131
	Delhi Cantt.	369
	Tilak Nagar	64
	Sabzi Mandi	37
Jahangirpuri	Adarsh Nagar	35
	Karol Nagar	47
Miscellaneous		95
List submitted by Delhi Administration		235
Supplement list of Kalyan Puri		32
Miscellaneous		54
Supplement list of Shahdara		290
Nand Nagri		35
Supplement list of West Delhi		63
Supplement list of Trilok Puri		50
List submitted by SGPC Amritsar		149
Miscellaneous		24
Supplement list of East Delhi		70
Additions from the list submitted by SGPC		106
Additional names to be added in the three set of lists already Submitted		70
Miscellaneous		117
	Total	3870

The Demon within

Latent Communal Virus in India:

The example of Bidar 1988

The violent incidents in the town of Bidar on the north-eastern tip of Karnataka during mid-September 1988, which left at least six Sikh students dead, about 100 injured and loss of property worth nearly Rs. 62 lakhs, has indicated the increasing vulnerability of members of the minority communities to mob frenzy in any part of India that can be triggered off by communal elements at the slightest pretext.

A two-member team of the Delhi-based *Nagrik Ekta Manch* which toured Bidar and other neighbouring areas on a fact-finding mission from 27 September to 1 October 1988, witnessed aftermath of the violence and interviewed a cross-section of people, both

killings. The team felt that part of the responsibility would have to be borne by the local police which not only failed to stop the miscreants right at the beginning, but is also known to have turned a blind eye, if not actually connived, at the violence in some places. Like in Delhi during November 1984?

The team also found that local elders of the political parties, including the ruling Janata Party



Hoarding at site outside Bidar where some Sikh students were waylaid and murdered in September 1988.



The Guru Nanak Hospital at Bidar serves the population of this town and neighbouring areas.

Sikhs and non-Sikhs, local representatives of the political parties as well as police officials and district administrators. The team found that a simple fracas generated by an accumulation of factors of a purely non-communal nature was overnight transformed into an issue of Hindu-Sikh conflict with the minority Sikhs at the receiving end of a meticulously devised plan of looting, arson, physical assaults and savage

as well as the Congress (I) and the BJP, tended to acquiesce in the communal violence by repeatedly stressing certain allegations against the Sikh students (most of which after enquiries were found to be either baseless or exaggerated) and by remaining consistently reluctant to condemn the horrible killing of the six Sikh students. Instead of playing the responsible role of maintaining communal

harmony, they appeared to have fallen prey to the then spreading communal virus that has tended to brand every Sikh as a belligerent delinquent, if not a suspected terrorist. The team also noted the accumulation of tensions among the local people generated by an unfamiliar life style followed by a group of outsiders (both Sikh and non-Sikh students of the Guru Nanak Engineering College who come from a different cultural background). In an atmosphere already surcharged by suspicions against the Sikhs in general (fostered to a large extent by the biased media coverage of events in Punjab) such tensions against the outsiders escalated into hostilities directed selectively against Sikh members of the community. The Nishaan Sahib on top of the Janawada Gurdwara some 15 kilometres away from Bidar was removed and torn by some miscreants who also desecrated the Gurdwara. Earlier the same day



An elderly Sikh who migrated to Bidar after the 1984 riots.

the Sikhs had gone to the Gurdwara under police escort to hoist their flag.

The historic past of Bidar, to a large extent, explains the concentration of Sikhs in this city. During his extensive travels (*udasis*), Guru Nanak visited the Deccan area and was believed to have stayed near the town, the site of the present Gurdwara. One of the first *panj piaras* Sahib Chand, also hailed from Bidar. Given these historical connections, Bidar became

an important pilgrimage for Sikhs from all over the country.

In addition to the descendants of the baptised Sikhs of the south – known as 'Dakhni Sikhs' – Sikh migrants came from the North and settled down here, first as soldiers for the local landlords, who later became a part of the Nizam's irregular army or *Fauj-e-bequaida*. During the post-Independence period, as elsewhere, Sikhs migrated to Bidar and built up flourishing trade and commercial activities, including hotels, automobile repair shops etc. Given both the historically rooted connections and its image as a 'safe' place, following the 1984 killings of Sikhs in the north, many Sikh families chose to send their sons to study at Bidar. Bidar has had a amicable Sikh-Hindu relations, and even during the worst days following Indira Gandhi's assassination, there were no attacks on Sikhs in Bidar.

S.Joga Singh, a Sikh businessman who functioned from Hyderabad, set up the Engineering College in 1980 in the northern part of the city. Besides the College, there is a polytechnic, a public school and a hospital, all run under the Joga Singh's auspices. The College was earlier managed by the Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee, also headed by him. Later



Many Sikh businesses have been run in Bidar.

in 1987 he set up *The Guru Nanak Jhiven Foundation Trust* which replaced the Prabandhak Committee in running of the institutions.

Of the 1300 odd students of the Polytechnic and the Engineering College, the number of Sikh students varied every year between 40 to 47 percent, never exceeding 50 percent at any stage. The majority of the students are from north India: Punjab, Kashmir, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan followed by boys from Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka. ☺

The Quinsteinnal Warrior-Saint: Lt. General Jagjit Singh Aurora



Perhaps the most enduring image of India's military success since 1947 is this photograph of Lt. General Jagjit Singh Aurora with Lt. Gen. AAK Niazi at the surrender ceremony in Dacca, December 1971.

Lt General Jagjit Singh Aurora was born in February 1916 in the village of Kalle Gujran in Jhelum district of the Punjab (now Pakistan), his father being a public works engineer while his mother's family came from Burma.

During the many decades of his Service with the Indian Army, he served with his unit of the 2nd Punjab Regiment also in Burma and later saw action in the Uri-Poonch area of Kashmir in 1947-48. As a General Officer he commanded the 2nd Infantry Division in Upper Assam and later XXXIII Corps in North Bengal before taking over as the Army Commander of Eastern Command at Calcutta. This was a

glorious culmination of his military career when under his command the Indian Army and Mukti Bahini fought and won the lightning battle for Bangladesh in December 1971 which astonished even legendary military commanders like Moshe Dayan of Israel.

General Jagjit Singh Aurora sought neither fame nor credit for the most decisive victory the Indian Army had won after the country's Independence. That telling moment was captured for posterity in a now famous black-and-white photograph of the surrender ceremony on 16 December 1971, at Dacca, as the capital of the then East Pakistan was called.

General Jagjit Singh Aurora, flanked by Indian Army, Navy and Air Force officers, is looking at Lt. General A.A.K. Niazi of the Pakistani Army as he signs the surrender document, with a borrowed pen. There is no smile or smirk on the victorious Aurora's face – just the straight lines of a professional soldier.

General Aurora himself quietly served out his tenure as the GOC-in-C of the Indian Army's Eastern Command and then faded away, seemingly into oblivion.

It was a measure of the man that he did not hesitate to speak his mind out. It was this mindset that perhaps enabled General Aurora to opt for the unconventional while planning the Bangladesh operation. The Indian Army's normal methods, be it by training or tradition, had been the set piece battle. General Aurora realised that he had a maximum of a fortnight to get to Dacca, and he decided to dump the conventional.

Out went established tactical concepts and in came mobile, flexible thrusts that would be carried out with determination and dash. "Forget the highways, go with the byways".

The Indian forces, said the General, would have to throw the enemy into such confusion that before they recovered, the Indian Divisions would begin converging on Dacca.

That's exactly how it happened. "I'm surprised Niazi didn't even think of defending Dacca". General Aurora modestly said in an interview in December 1999. Even during the interview, he attempted to turn the spotlight away from himself as was evident from this telling comment:

"Nowhere in history did an army go in and come out without taking advantage (of the land and its people)".

While the Army Chief, General Sam Manekshaw soon became a Field Marshal, Lt General Jagjit Singh Aurora retired without receiving any recognition from a thankless politburo in 1973 and thereafter devoted his life for social causes. After the terrible events of 1984, he formed The Sikh Forum to restore the dignity and confidence of the Sikh citizens of India. He was responsible for bringing together various Human Rights Groups and formed the Citizen's Justice Committee

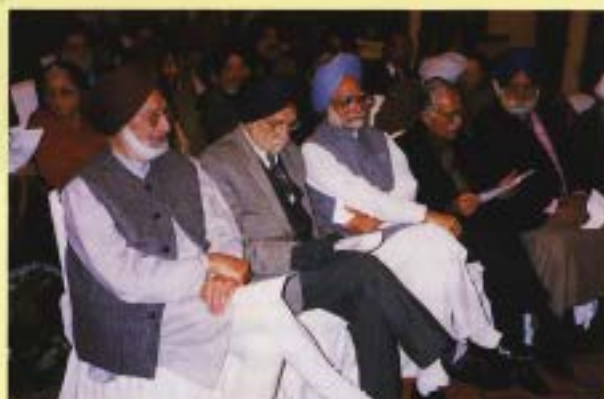
which fought all legal cases for victims of the riots at Delhi, Kanpur and Bokaro. But for his personal example, there would have been large scale demographic changes in the country, bravely stemming intended migration of Sikhs from Delhi and other parts of India to the Punjab, which could have had unimaginable consequences.

As he articulated, "The Sikh Forum is here to stay so long as Indian democracy survives". Under his leadership and direction, material assistance for rehabilitation and vocations were provided to 810 families, while wherewithal provided to 940 widows in Delhi alone. The Sikh Forum sponsored education for 824 orphans, and job assistance was provided to many widows as also pursued cases for compensation against property destruction.

From 13 April 1986, the Sikh Forum began publishing its fortnightly Gazette which also organised national level seminars on democracy, communalism, the Punjab problem and Sikh affairs, being committed to "minority rights", civil liberties, equality for women, democratic value and environmental protection. General Jagjit Singh Aurora was outspoken when he addressed the Rajya



The General in ceremonial uniform.



At the launch of Nishaan in April 1999, Lt. General Jagjit Singh Aurora sits next to Dr. Manmohan Singh, destined to become the Prime Minister of India in 2004.

Sabha five years after the ill-conceived and disgracefully executed Operation Bluestar. Moving a revolution on ways to bring about an end to the terrible situation in the Punjab, he said that Operation Bluestar had no military strategy, had led to immense loss of life and damage to the Golden Temple which had created a permanent scar in the minds of the Sikhs. Operation Woodrose was an even bigger failure, with some 10 Divisions of the Indian Army imposing virtual martial law in the Punjab with the excuse of it being a "sensitive border state".

The Government of India did not, but posterity will certainly bestow the honorific *Quinsteinnal Warrior-Saint* upon Lt General Sardar Jagjit Singh Aurora. ☞



Many ochre afternoons ago, in November 2003, a 27-year-old Sikh sat on a low stool, acoustic guitar on lap and spoke in grave tones about Raj Singh, an impoverished Punjabi farmer who had committed suicide. When Rabbi Shergill performed Raj Singh at its first performance, the 100-odd listeners in that dim Mumbai auditorium mourned Singh's death.

But Rabbi remained an unsung hero until he and his now hit single, Bulla ki Jana, were packaged in a self-titled album and released exactly a year after that five-minute debut. Some months and one music video later, the bespectacled Sikh who neither looks nor talks like a pop star (probably, his biggest USP), has sold over 100,000 CDs and tapes.

Rabbi's take on the 18th century Sufi poet Baba Bulle Shah's verse, composed six years ago on the same musical scale as Mast Qalandar, is a chart-buster. "It's

incredible to see a Sikh with a guiter," says composer AR Rahman. "Bulla is a great track, and I think he should stick to this sound and not distort it in future albums."

Rabbi went off to Brazil to perform at the World Social Forum, and his latest fan, Dev Anand, wants him to sing in his forthcoming film Prime Minister.



Dr. Mohindar Kaur Gill, Rabbi's mother, was formerly the Principal of Mata Sundari College at New Delhi.

Ask that other Punjabi bestseller Daler Mehndi about Rabbi and he says: "I've heard only Bulla. Nowadays people just add a Western twist and call it Sufi," says Mehndi who thinks the new competition does have a melodious voice.

When we meet, Rabbi's dressed in all black, turban to pyjamas. Unfussy about clothes, he usually sports a three year-old white kurta hand-picked by his mother, a former principal of Delhi's Mata Sundari College, who's written 110 books of poems. "People do doctorates on her", he

says. Ask the man who made Bulle Shah a household name whether he would ever use his mother's poetry in his music, and he makes a face. "A young guy is always repulsed by his immediate environment", he muses.

Yet the hangover of hour-long childhood debates on the Vedanta with his late father Giani Jagir Singh, a rice farmer and kirtan singer in Chak Mishri Khan in Punjab, still lingers. "My father was an intellectual banyan tree, a scholar and a preacher, but I never heard him hum a tune at home", he remembers, "I will never again feel the same love that I felt for that man".

Both parents didn't bat an eyelid when he sat around at home for two years during 1997 and 1998 composing jingles for local producers like *Nova Glee* and Polar fans.

Nor could one do much when he was denied an American visa thrice after he was selected for the Berklee College of Music at Boston and the Guitars Institute of Technology in California. "My mother just wanted me to be successful at something", laughs Rabbi, who wears his academic record as proudly as his Ralph Martin guitar strap—the singer graduated with a BA in philosophy, failed the first year of B.Sc, moved on to management school and dropped out after a year.

Twenty shows on, Rabbi's most outrageous concert memory is the impromptu lip-lock with a Greek fashion designer during a New Year's performance in Goa. Later, his strumtease at an MTV concert in Mumbai included a reggae version of this most wanted track. And when the women went crazy, Rabbi's eyebrows almost touched the bottom of his white turban. Just for a second he had an is-that-me-they-rooting-for look. Until he pointed his fretboard to the sky and slipped back into his showman's skin.

Rabbi may not be centrefold stuff, but he's wicked. "Even in college, I was the most engaging man, I was a rock'n'roller and a poet", he laughs.

Back then, the Arts student at Delhi's Khalsa College wrote ballads for beautiful women. Like the time he picked up Ishtihar, Shiv Kumar Batalvi's Hindi poem, translated it into Punjabi and set it to music to woo a student from the neighbouring Hansaraj College. "She was unassailable, so stunning. I fell in love with her but was too shy to tell her", he says. So he sent her an anonymous note with the poem and a tape with the caressing ballad that's now on his debut.

"I can't go up to a girl and tell her I like her", says Rabbi, who's written three songs for five of his women. Picking up his Taylor, he strums a song about a woman who makes him wait incessantly. "I have a hole in me, I'm incomplete," says Rabbi about why he flits from woman to woman. "I love all of them", adds the singer, who's currently dating a Mumbai student.

He's made notes on men, too. Gill Te Guitar is a piece dedicated to schoolmates Balla, Aru (who introduced him to Springsteen) and Sangha. "They're all intellectual, software types", he explains, "I balance their lack of creativity, and they make up for my lack of financial acumen".

One year ago he dragged himself to Mumbai, complete with two volumes of Sikh history by Gyani Gyan Singh and *The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying*. "I hated the chaos here", he says like most Delhiites, "But now I realised that this is the only place where people respect ideas". He around with a small circle that includes Anand Surapur, his record company *Phat Phish's* think-tank and his shadow at most concerts.

"For the most part, I shut up". Shuts up and sits in his Khar residence (he prefers his Delhi home in East Patel Nagar since his room there is thrice the size) waiting for inspiration to strike. "I was always looking



for something to depress me, and then I would write," he says. There was enough fodder for brooding—the demise of his father four years ago and unsuccessful relations. "I was lovesick, and it was hard to find love in Delhi because women's lives revolve around their parents".

Director Pooja Bhatt ID'ed Rabbi's angst in his *Ek Geet Hijar Da*. "There's a lot of longing in the song which is not in stock nowadays", says Bhatt who tried, unsuccessfully, to include the song in her film *Paap*.

Rabbi's as rooted as Raj Singh. He hasn't forgotten the time he borrowed Rs.50,000 to record *Bulla's* demo and was pushed around by a hotshot Delhi producer. He still remembers his first guitar, which had a sticker that said *Yankee Doodle*.

Raj Singh is likely to make it into his next album, which he wants to called *Ballo*. Named after another beautiful muse? "Yeah, she's a lioness", he grins, "The youngest of my four sisters, and my most favourite person on the planet.

Someday, he'll probably sing gurbani kirtans just as his father did. But for now he wants to fill stadiums. ☺

Lalitha Suhasini

[From: *The Sunday Express*]

Interviewing Rabbi Shergill

His *Bulla ki Jaana* is the rage among music lovers. Rabbi Shergill lyricist and singer, is the antithesis of the popular Punjabi musician. His music, a combination of rock and dhol, defies to be pigeonholed. The songs in "Rabbi" his album, dig deep into the rhythms and sorrows of the Punjab to be the perceptive voice of a troubled society. Shergill spoke with the Vasundhara Sanger about his music and its politics:

Q How did you become a musician?

RS I was born in Delhi but my roots lie in rural Punjab that my dad (who was a preacher) left almost 45 years ago. I went to a school where everyone else's father was a businessman. I was living in a north Delhi locality where everyone was a shopkeeper. Despite being the son of two highly educated people (mother was an academician) I felt that our way of life was an ugly secret not to be revealed to an urban crowd. But in college I became aware of my cultural roots. This new found identity internally elevated me from my peers. The genesis of my music lies in my formative years. Over the years, other influences added to it.

Q When did you realise that music is what you really want to do in life?

RS The clarity of becoming a musician came in September 1987 when Bruce Springstein visited India. I decided to be a rock star and learnt the guitar. As I was already aware of poetry and blessed with creativity I began to write songs. I read the Mahabharata, Swami Vivekananda, books by Leo Tolstoy and Ernest Hemingway. And I would listen to classic rock like U2, Dire Straits. I was exposed to a lot of Sikh literature and gurbani. But I was also exceptionally lonely. All of my music happened because of loneliness.

Q Your songs are political? Do you subscribe to any ideology?

RS My mind was bereft of politics when I sang, *Bulla ki Jaana* "I know not who I am". The song is basically about a search for something in this world. My political beliefs emerged later and they juxtapose with social consciousness. I do not subscribe to any 'isms', but have always questioned things and wondered how they can be improved. This album is an ode to an India from the perspective of middle-class India. I feel there's a great divide between the urban and the rural. Middle-class India needs to form a relationship with rural India; rural India is underdeveloped. Otherwise, why would a Punjabi (villager) risk his life as a stowaway or swim in shark-infested waters to seek employment in a foreign land? I don't see an American doing that to come to Punjab. My identity is that of a displaced son of a displaced father. I like the city, but in my songs I am crying about not having been in my village, Chak Mishri Khan, in district Amritsar.

Q Is there a Sufi influence in your music?

RS I am not a Sufi singer. There's just one song inspired by the Sufi saint and poet Bulle Shah in my album.

However, being a Sikh includes being a Sufi. Baba Nanak wouldn't have disagreed with Bulle Shah

Q There's the imprint of poet Shiv Batalvi in the song "Ek kudi jeda naam mohabbat" and a hint of Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan.

RS I like Nusrat's energy, his wildness. That's very Punjabi! And I was attracted to the living-on-the-edge life of Batalvi. I must be love-sick like Batalvi. And I was very sensitive to rejection. I think I liked sadness. Batalvi made my cry and he was the only person I could connect with.

Q Where did you come across Jugni, the wandering female form?

RS Jugni is a metaphor for a happy young woman who is travelling from one city to the next, singing about the life she sees on the way. My Jugni travels and sings about the plight of the people in Kashmir, the search for something amidst chaos in Mumbai, and in Punjab she laments the displacement of educated people who dispose of their lands to go abroad in search of jobs. It's a contemporary, sensitive portrayal.

Q You have kept a distance from stereotypes of Punjabi music. The *Balle Balle*, one thought, is where the money is. Why did you shun the genre?

RS The sheer monotony of *Balle Balle*, which is for the pre-pubescent person. Where is the forum for anyone who wants to write thought provoking lyrics? The Punjabi music I was exposed to was so different. I was listening to Abida Parveen and Jagjit Singh version of Shiv Batalvi. Where was the reference of this side of Punjabiyat? I would like Sikhs to be viewed in a different way. Sikhs have patronised fine arts and literature. But the present image of a Sikh is that of being industrious but not too intelligent. Partly, the media is to be blamed for either making us look comical or projecting us as super achievers. I would like to be viewed as a normal Sikh. The Sikh is also to be blamed for it, as he laughs at himself easily. And I crave for reforms. I'd like to see genuine development and less of displacements.

Q Is there a conscious effort to sound different from other musicians?

RS I always liked driving myself to the extreme. And like to go where no one has ventured before. Also, a sense of purpose has given me the courage to do what I want and that makes me different from others.

The Marathon Man: Baba Fauja Singh



Baba Fauja Singh is a living legend. Adorning billboards in cities like London, Toronto and New York, he has proved that "Impossible is nothing". Defying his age, the 93-year-old has smashed several world records and entered the *Guinness Book of Records* as the world's oldest and fastest 90-plus marathoner.

This slender man, a great grandfather, with a flowing white beard and saffron turban has been in the news ever since he took to running marathons four years ago.

In 2004, at Toronto, he had all major international dailies featuring him on this sports pages after he set the world record for a nonagenarian marathoner.

After living for the first 81 years of his life in a Punjab village as a marginal farmer, he moved to England about 12 years ago to live with one of his sons.

In England, being homesick, speaking no English and having endless hours to pass, he tried to find solace in the passing of his youth – running – that fulfilled him mentally and physically.

Initially, he ran from one gurdwara to another and then graduated to taking part in short distance races of five or 10 km. In 1999, after a break of over half a century from the sport, he lined up for his first *Flora London Marathon* at the age

of 89. He took six hours and 54 minutes to reach the finish line and the following year clocked the same time to set a world record for a 90-year-old.

Calling himself a "late developer", he states that his talent blossomed at an age when his peers had taken to the walking stick.

Fauja Singh does not just run for himself. He was in New York in 2004 to run for "Sikh identity" as the community had become a target of hate crime after the September 11 attacks. Recently, he was in *Chamkaur Sahib* to participate in a special marathon organised to mark the tercentenary of martyrdom of the Sahibzadas.

One of his goals, he says, it to promote understanding of Sikh culture. He completed his world-record run on the same day that Sikhs in Toronto held a parade to celebrate the 400th anniversary of the installation of *Guru Granth Sahib*.



Baba Fauja Singh at Chamkaur Sahib in December 2004.



Baba Fauja Singh being honoured in Washington DC, July 2004.

Fauja Singh does not run for money either. Whatever he gets in prize money he hands over to charitable organisations like *Bliss*, which works for the welfare of premature babies. "It's the very old helping the very young", says the legendary Baba.

He also runs for the *British Heart Foundation*. And the *People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA)* has been using him as a symbol of vegetarianism. "Fauja Singh: Age 93/Champion International Marathon Runner/Father of Six/Grandfather of 13 - Vegetarian", reads an advertisement on a bus queue shelter in Toronto, where he clocked 5 hrs 40 min to set a world record in 2003.

In 2004, he was called upon to run with the Olympic torch procession through the streets of London on its round-the-world tour.

His diet includes grains, green vegetables, yogurt, tea and ginger. He avoids fried foods, including Punjabi delicacies like *samosas* and *parathas*.

Doing his daily workout without fail, including a jog-cum-walk of 8-10 miles, and staying relaxed are the secrets of his success.

He takes "nutrition balls", made from groundnuts, herbs and spices mixed into a paste with water for breakfast. After having walked for up to an hour to activate his joints, he takes plain yoghurt and two glasses of water.

Till midday, he carries on walking and jogging



The much younger, a "mere" seventy-year old Gurnam Singh participates at the 70th Rural Sports Festival at Kila Raipur near Ludhiana, in February 2005.



Major Singh Nihang, captured in full flow by Sayeed Ahmed, was one of the daredevils who gloriously went 'faster, higher, stronger' at the Kila Raipur "Olympics".

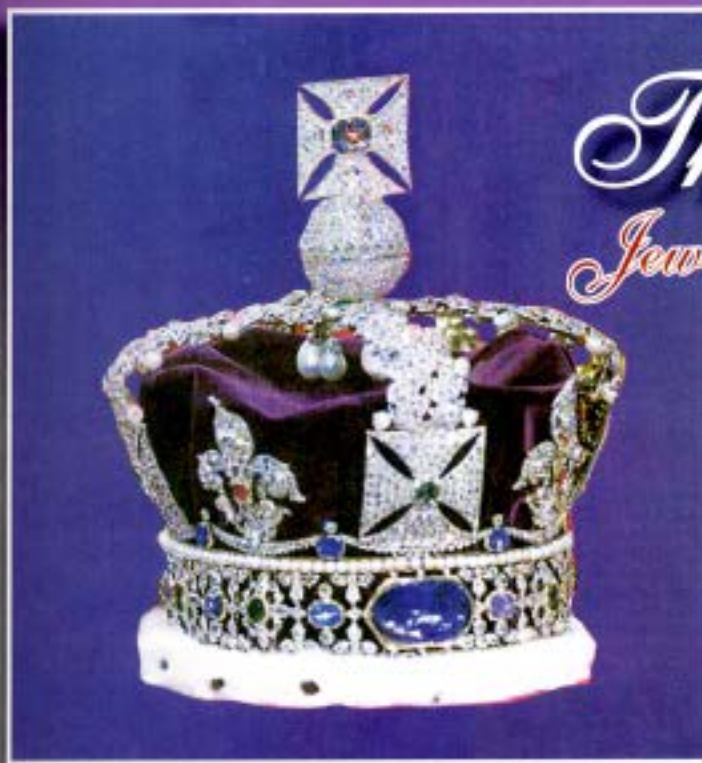
- to the gurdwara, running errands for neighbours, meeting friends - without stopping to rest. Lunch consists of dal-curry and one chapatti with a glass of warm water.

"Ginger in curries is good as it keeps your joints flexible and fights colds. If I get hungry I snack on dried, crumbled chapatis mixed with sugar and eaten as a sort of breakfast cereal. A golden rule is never to overeat", he says.

Fauja Singh also meditates for about 15 minutes daily. He takes a warm bath to relax and massages his muscles with baby oil at night. He spends his Sundays with his coach, Harmander Singh and runs as fast as he can for an hour with the man who is half his age.

Baba Fauja Singh wants to stay active long enough to be oldest man to complete a marathon. The record currently belongs to a 98-year-old Greek, Dimitrion Yordandis. 🌟

Prabhjot Singh
From: *The Tribune*



The Jewel in Britain's Crown.

The Kohinoor: Jewel in the British Crown

**But, is it Sikh
or Indian
or Pakistani
or Afghani!**

The British government have planned to display at the Natural History Museum in the heart of London, a replica of the original uncut Kohinoor, as it was taken away from the young Maharaja Duleep Singh. Inevitably this will rekindle controversies surrounding this historic treasure.

Soon after taking possession, the British re-faceted the 181-carat Kohinoor diamond to 106 carats in 1852. According to historians, replicas in themselves need not worry anyone, for there are a number of replicas of the Kohinoor all over the world. These duplicates are made by the Diamond Trading Corporation, which made copies of 51 world-famous gems, with unrivalled precision, using laser technology. It is unthinkable to have a major display of diamond replicas without including the Kohinoor! In fact, in India too there have been such exhibits. At the former summer palace-museum of Maharaja Ranjit Singh in Rambagh Gardens at Amritsar, there is a copy of the famous Kohinoor.

The matter really is whether there are any chances of India getting back the famed diamond? It is also pertinent to state that Pakistan too feels that it has a greater right over the diamond than has India, as it was taken from the minor Maharaja Duleep Singh who ruled from Lahore after Maharaja Ranjit

Singh passed away in 1839. In fact, the British seem to be taking some shelter behind this controversy to ensure that the diamond is never returned to the subcontinent.

In June 2000, as informed by the Rajya Sabha member Kuldip Nayar, the British High Commission in India had expressed that there was "ambiguity over the ownership of the diamond". More ominously, there were hints whether the Kohinoor rightfully belonged to India at all! A spokesman of the British government pointed out that the Kohinoor had first been in the possession of Mughal rulers in Delhi for 213 years, then with rulers in Kandahar and Kabul for 66 years, then with the Sikhs in Lahore and finally with the British, now for over 150 years.

Kept at the Tower of London, the Kohinoor is set in the Maltese Cross of the coronation crown made for Queen Elizabeth (late Queen Mother) in 1937. The Kohinoor (106 carats) is valued much higher than any other diamond equal in quality and size in the world and there is little chance of this being given back by the British. According to gemologists, its reserve price, if sold in an international auction could be more than \$ 10 million. A few years ago, the 69 carat Taylor Burton diamond (smaller than the Kohinoor) was sold for \$ 3 million, whereas the 137 carat Premier Rose

diamond (larger than the Kohinoor) was sold for more than \$ 10 million.

A few years back, the famous betting firm of Ladbrookes in London declared that the bets were 1:100 against the diamond going back to the subcontinent. The odds came down 1:50 if India and Pakistan were to jointly demand this from Britain.

Then again, in case a joint demand was made by India and Pakistan and the British conceded, where would the diamond be kept? As per international convention, it would have to be on display six months in India and six months in Pakistan. The security requirements would require stupendous effort and expense, and it would be impossible to cover the cost with any entrance fees charged from visitors. Indian authorities have hardly been able to keep the Nizam of Hyderabad's jewels – our national treasure – on permanent display, owing to the cost involved in providing adequate security.

Compounding the problem is that within India itself, there are many claimants to the treasure and they are prepared to go to court for it. In 2002, even the Jagannath temple in Puri had staked its claim on the Kohinoor, stating that prior to Maharaja Ranjit Singh taking possession of the diamond, it was the temple's property ! Its lawyers now claim that they have documentary proof that Maharaja Ranjit Singh had bequeathed the diamond to the temple before his death in 1839. For this, the temple lawyers quote from a letter preserved in the National Archives of India. This letter was written by the British Political Agent to Ranjit Singh's Court (dated 2 July 1839) and addressed to T.A.Maddock, the officiating Secretary to the Government of India. It says: "During the last days of his illness, Ranjit Singh is declared to have bestowed to charity, jewels and other property to the supposed value of 50 lakh. Among the jewels, he directed the well-known Kohinoor diamond to be sent to the temple of Jagannath".

In 2001, Kunwar Mit Pal Singh, who claims to be one of the Maharaja Duleep Singh's direct descendants, stated that his family had received a letter from the Secretariat of Queen Elizabeth II. The letter signed by Deborah Bean, the Queen's chief correspondence officer, stated, "The Queen has taken notice of their earlier comments on their royal legacy and other articles, including the Kohinoor diamond". Bean had apparently written that she had been instructed to send Mit Pal Singh's letter to UK Foreign Secretary Robin Cook "so that he may know of your approach to Her Majesty on this matter and may consider the points you raise".

Other individuals have surfaced both in Britain and in India, staking their claim to the diamond. They state that they are descendants of Duleep Singh. Beant Singh Sandhanwalia staked a claim in 2004, saying he was a descendant of Duleep Singh's cousin. And William D.Forbes, a retired Scottish Surgeon who migrated to Canada 40 years ago, has recently also said that he too is the heir to the priceless jewel, claiming to be the great-grandson of Maharaja Duleep Singh.

Whatever happens and wherever the Kohinoor may be, this jewel in the crown will remain forever !



*The Kohinoor, worn by young Maharaja Duleep Singh.
[Painting by George Beechey]*

Increasing Relevance of Guru Granth Sahib to Life in the 21st Century*

We entered the 21st century on a note of smugness in human ability arising from rapid scientific achievement. Computers doubling their capacity every 18 months or so; near instant communications, and rapid developments in the field of medicine have been giving hope for the conquest of long feared killer diseases.

Communism had been defeated; the world seemed a safer place. 9/11 changed all that. We all know that when a large building is demolished in an inner city development, we see familiar surroundings in a new and wider perspective. As James Wolfensohn, chairman of the World Bank, observed at the time, the terrorist destruction of New York's twin-towers in September 2001 dramatically opened America's eyes to the real world in which we live. It may have come as a surprise to the USA, but many of us have long been aware of the existence of gross inequalities, irrational anger and the fragile nature of peace in the world of today.

In former times, religious bigotry and the pursuit of power were responsible for horrendous conflicts in many lands. Today, perverse use of scientific discovery and human ingenuity, have shown that a few individuals can create the sort of destruction that once required vast armies.

A couple of years ago, I did some work for Amnesty International, looking at genocide and human rights abuse in a number of different countries; abuse which often involved unbelievable depravity. It wasn't only the details of abuse that I found sickening, there was also the growing realisation that those who we learn to trust are often the perpetrators: police and soldiers, and previously friendly neighbours. Why do people behave in such ways?

The sobering conclusion is that our human family has only a thin veneer of civilisation that differentiates us from those we formerly called savages; a veneer that is all too easily shed at times when we are persuaded to see others as lesser beings, or, even more absurdly, claim that God will overlook, or even approve the torture and murder of innocents, if we say we did it in his name.

Where once we were mesmerised by our undoubted cleverness, today we are becoming increasingly aware of the downside of our disregard of moral imperative. In our greed, we have created inequalities, destroyed much of our environment and polluted our food supply. In our arrogance, we have also harmed our social environment by disregarding religious teachings of responsibility and concern for others, in a blinkered pursuit of personal happiness. The results are hardly

surprising: recurring conflict, family breakdown, increasing crime, including mindless violence against children and the elderly, a greater dependence on alcohol and drugs and a general blurring of moral standards. The reality of human nature, and the evidence is all around us is that we humans do not come with preloaded software of right, wrong and responsibility. Decent responsible behaviour has to be taught and learnt. But who should do the teaching?

Governments are powerless to move society to more responsible living. At best they can legislate to define the boundaries of what is unacceptable. But, as we all know, powerful pressures of *manmukh* (ungodly) living mean that these boundaries are constantly changed in a negative direction. In recent years we have seen relaxed curbs on drinking and the use of drugs and a lowering of the age of consent. A recent statistic shows that university students now spend considerably more on drinks than on books.

Throughout history, religious leaders up to the time of the Gurus, tried to move society back towards more responsible (*gurmukh*) living, but conflicting claims of 'our way' being the only way to God, made religion a cause for conflict, rather than a way to peace and responsible living.

Guru Nanak rejected the idea that God was some sort of superhuman being in both image and temperament, with human attributes and passions that led him to choose favoured nations and religious paths. The Guru taught that the one timeless God of all was beyond the laws of birth and death and above human emotions like pleasure, hate and envy. Guru Nanak's deep spirituality, couched in humanity and common sense, endeared him to those of different religions. His teachings transcended the religious rituals of the day, raising religion to a higher, yet more accessible plane of spiritual and ethical guidance for all humanity. His teachings and those of successor Gurus contained in the Guru Granth Sahib, are not trapped in the social norms of his day, but transcend them to give guidance for all people at all times. As we have seen, today's world is suffering in its pursuit of a mirage of material contentment. The Guru's message is that there are no quick fixes. The only way to individual contentment and greater peace is through balanced and responsible living. It is in relaying and elaborating these teachings that the Guru Granth Sahib helps us distinguish between the true and the false, and the important and the trivial, to give meaning and hope to our strife torn world that has lost its sense of direction. Let us look briefly at some key aspects of this guidance.

The Nature of God

The *Mool Mantar* or opening lines of the Guru Granth Sahib make clear that there is one timeless Creator of all that exists, the Ultimate Reality, beyond birth and death and human emotions and passions like fear and enmity. The *Mool Mantar* then goes on to state that an understanding of God can only be obtained through His grace. This grace is equally open to all human beings. We can all obtain it through following a *Gurmukh* direction in life; that is through spiritual reflection and responsible living. Verses in the Japji Sahib that follow the *Mool Mantar* help us understand what constitutes *Gurmukh living*.

The Nature of the Universe

Guru Nanak contemplated the origin of the universe while reflecting on the infinite nature of God. The use of figurative language in the Guru Granth Sahib to describe the origin of the Universe, is remarkably similar to today's scientific understanding.

*Through uncountable ages,
Complete darkness pervaded
Over utter vacancy
There were no worlds, no firmament,
The will of the Lord was all-pervasive.
When He so willed, He shaped the Universe in
endless space
Above, below and around it.*

GGs P 1035

The Position of Women

At a time when women were regarded as lesser beings without civil rights in much of the world, Guru Nanak emphasised their full equality, a position which women in the Sikh community have enjoyed ever since. The Guru taught:

*Of woman are we conceived. Of woman we are born,
To a woman man is betrothed and married
Why should we consider woman cursed and condemned
When it is women that give birth to rulers and kings.*

Courage

The following *shabad* reminds us of the need for courage in the face of adversity:

*Though my body be crippled with disease
Though the relentless stars bring endless misfortune
on me,
Though bloody tyrants fill my soul with terror
Though all these miseries be heaped together on my head.
Even then my Lord, I shall praise Thee.*

GGs P. 142

“Thought for the Day”

Broadcast on BBC Radio 4

To an estimated 3 million listeners in the UK

I must say that, as a Sikh, I found it a little disconcerting to read a piece in the Times a couple of days ago, in which Dr Rowan Williams, the Archbishop of Canterbury, firmly declared that no one comes to the Father except through Jesus. When asked about Muslims going to heaven, he did however concede the possibility of ‘God’s spirit crossing boundaries’. I’m not sure if that is a yes or a no; but at least Muslims are in with a chance!

The Sikh scriptures, 400 years old today, take a different view and maintain that there are no rigid boundaries between faiths, and that God is not in the least interested in our different religious labels, but in how we serve our fellow beings, and how we cherish and value the wonder of Creation.

Guru Arjan Dev, the main compiler of the Sikh holy Granth, included in it not only teachings of the Sikh Gurus, but also verses of Hindu and Muslim saints to show that no one religion has a monopoly of truth. Earlier, the Guru showed his respect for Islam, by asking a Muslim saint Mian Mir, to lay the foundation stone of the famous Golden Temple, which has doors on four sides to emphasise the welcome to people from different spiritual and geographic directions.

Today, and for the rest of the month, Sikhs throughout the world, will be celebrating the first reading of these scriptures in Amritsar 400 years ago; teachings that emphasise: respect for other faiths and a balanced and socially responsible attitude to life. A early celebration has already been held in the unlikely venue of the White House in Washington, and, later this month, among the many celebrations in the country, there will be a major commemoration in London’s Royal Albert Hall.

My problem with all such celebrations is that we easily forget the significance of what we are celebrating. And we Sikhs are no exception here. In our celebrations we can easily forget that Guru Arjan Dev, the compiler of the Sikh scriptures, gave his life in the cause of religious harmony. Today, Sikhs have a clear obligation to work as catalysts for greater inter faith understanding, and help show that different religions are not rigid barriers between people, but gateways to a greater understanding and enrichment of life itself. Having said that, the one certainty is, the following this talk, I’ll get another letter from a concerned lady in Devon, reminding me of the terrible fate in store for me for not wearing her religious label.

Dr Indarjit Singh

Honest Living

*What is the use of rich food and fine clothes
When the truth does not dwell within us.*

GGG P. 142

Justice

*The limits of man-made justice are recognised:
The final vision of justice besides God's
Nor any creature of the Universe;
But with God alone.*

GGG P. 144

Principles before factions

*I am of God's faction: He is my mainstay.
I am of no other group besides God's
All human powers men make pacts with
Are subject to death and decay.
I am of the Lord's faction.*

GGG P. 366

Contemplation in every day life

How often do we hear arguments like how can a busy housewife find time for prayer and reflection. The poet Namdev provides an answer- an early description of multi-task working!

*A boy gets paper and makes a kite, he flies it high in the air,
And though he is talking in a lively way with his friends,
He keeps his mind on the string,
While the child is asleep in its cradle,
Its mother is busy inside and outside the house
But she keeps her mind on her child.*

GGG P. 972

Equanimity

The ninth Guru, Guru Teg Bahadur, reminds us of the need to preserve an even keel against the emotions and passions of life.

*Neither cast-down in sorrow; nor over-elated in joy;
Aloof from the negative influence of pride, greed and covering;
See such a man as the very image of God.*

GGG P. 1426

Equality

The poet Kabir criticises the absurdity of race and caste.

*The Lord first created light;
From the Lord's play all living creatures came,
And from the Divine Light all creation sprang.
Why then should we divide human creatures into
the high and low.*


GGG P. 1349

The Guru Granth Sahib is a remarkable treasury of wisdom and inspiration. It is important to understand that it's teachings are universal and not the exclusive property of Sikhs. The guidance of the Guru Granth Sahib is for all people at all times, an important antidote to the self-obsession and blurred morality of today.

It is the responsibility of every Sikh to live true to these teachings. But there is also a greater responsibility. As the Guru taught us, Sikhs are duty bound not only to swim clear of *manmukh* currents in the ocean of life, but also to help others do so.

Sadly, today some would have us move in the opposite direction. In an increasing number of gurdwaras, the Guru Granth Sahib is increasingly becoming the focus of elaborate rituals that border on deliquescence. When Guru Gobind Singh said '*guru manio Granth*', he was referring to the teachings contained therein, not to the physical paper and ink.

Some say that the Guru Granth Sahib will become polluted if it is taken outside the gurdwara. One large gurdwara in London has further distanced itself from Guru Nanak's mission by saying that even discourse on the Guru Granth Sahib should not be permitted outside the sanctity of a gurdwara.

What would our Gurus have thought of such thinking. They did not stay within the confines of gurdwaras. They took their teachings to people of all faiths, traveling on dusty roads to distant lands. They met and talked to usurpers, thieves and others urging them to more honest and responsible living. It would be absurd to argue that the Gurus became polluted by such contact. We are duty bound to follow the example of our great Gurus in making the healing balm of Gurbani freely available to a wider world. 

Dr Indarjit Singh



*Talk given at the Royal Albert Hall in London, to mark the 400th anniversary of installation of the Adi Granth of Sri Harmandar Sahib in Amritsar.

Japji Sahib

The Song of the Soul

A new book
On the scene
Another attempt
To translate perfection.

I hesitate
Disappointment will reign.
Every translation
Has left me cold.

Japji Sahib
The Living Truth.
The moral compass
That guides my life.

I walk away
Without regret.
Japji Sahib and I
Have a special bond.

But the universe operates
In mysterious ways.
I receive this book
From a satsangi.

I read the preface:
"This English rendition of Japji Sahib
is like the moon to the sun.
It is only a tiny reflection of
the Divine Beauty of the original."

I smile;
I'm intrigued
This will be
My weekend read.

Saturday afternoon
In my sun room
I settle in
With this book.

I read the Mool Mantra
I'm confused
This is foreign
To my way of thought.

Enough — I've read enough
I shut the book.
My eyes close
The sun warms my bones.

"One Spirit Beyond
Moves within the Creation —"
These words
Ebb and flow
And melt
My judgemental mind.

I feel serene
My eyes rest on the book
Once again
I attempt to read this book.

I read the preface
I'm filled with love
The author's humility
Touches my heart.

I read the Mool Mantra
Tears roll
I connect
With the words.



Pauri 1
"You sit in silence
To find silence
But silence never comes..."

"Surrender yourself
And walk the Way
Of Spirit's Will."

Pauri 2
"Nanak,
If you understand
The Will of the Divine,
Your ego will have
Nothing to say."

Pauri 4
"In the Amrit Veyla,
The still hours before sunrise,
Our True Spirit
Becomes known
As we meditate upon
Your Greatness."

Pauri 9
Nanak,
Those who surrender themselves in
Love
To the Divine
Continually blossom and bloom."

Pauri 12
"Such is
That True Spirit
Within me
That makes me become
Pure, clear and sweet."

Pauri 15
"And that is what it means
To be a Sikh of the Guru,
A seeker of Divine Wisdom,
Who walks from the darkness of ego
To the light
Of your own purity and spirit."

Pauri 21
"Find the sacred bathing place
Within your own self
And wash off
The filth."

Pauri 24
"How many veils
Like this
Do we have to go through?"


Pauri 28
"May being centered
In the centre of your being
Be the ashes
That cleanse you."

Pauri 30
"But the created
Can't see the Divine
At all."

Pauri 37
"The Divine remains
In a state of contemplation
Seeing and enjoying it all."

Tears are rolling
My heart is overflowing
Ek Ong Karr Kaur
You've touched my soul.

This is not a translation
Neither a transliteration
This is the essence
The essence of Japji Sahib.

 Inni Kaur

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