

NIS

I/2017

N

AARA

Guru Gobind Singh

350th Prakash Parv

The Wondrous Life

The Heritage

The Legacy

Infinite Reverence

Chitrak 12



Prakash Utsav 2017
at Akal Takht Harmandir Patna Sahib
350th Birth Anniversary
Celebrations



श्री गुरुगोबिन्द सिंह जी महाराज
की 350वीं प्रकाशपर्व



BIHAR
TOURISM
Blissful Bihar

Contents

Issue 1/2017

2 Editorial
The Immortal Guru Gobind Singh
 Dr. Trilochan Singh



5 The Wondrous Life
 Dr. Trilochan Singh



20 The Heritage of Guru Gobind Singh
 Prof. Harbans Singh



24 Childhood at Patna
 Prof. Harbans Singh



27 The Miracle at Vaisakhi
 Prof. Parminder Singh



32 Zafarnama
 The Epistle of Victory

34 "The Path of Righteousness", described in
The Bachitar Natak
 Dr. Jasbir Singh Grewal



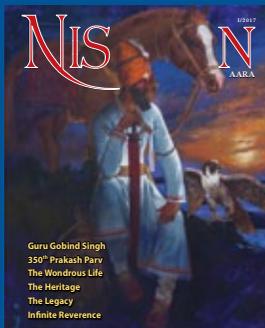
38 The Legacy of Guru Gobind Singh
 Dr. IJ Singh

42 A Tentative Understanding of Guru Gobind Singh
 Paramjit Singh Bawa



51 An Infinite Reverence
 350th Prakash Parv of Guru Gobind Singh at Patna

62 The International Sikh Conclave 2016



Guru Gobind Singh, the Tenth master
 Painting by: Chitrak

Editorial Director
 Dr IJ Singh

Managing Editor
 Pushpinder Singh

Joint Editor
 Bhayee Sikandar Singh

Editorial Board
 Inni Kaur
 Monica Arora

Distributors
 Himalayan Books
 17 L, Connaught Circus,
 New Delhi - 110001

Editorial Office
 D-43, Sujjan Singh Park
 New Delhi 110 003, India
 Tel: (91-11) 24617234
 Fax: (91-11) 24628615
 e-mail : nishaan.nagaara@gmail.com

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

Associated with
The Chardi Kalaa Foundation
 San Jose, USA

Printed by
 Aegean Offset Printers

Please visit us at:
www.nishaannagaara.com

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

The Immortal Guru Gobind Singh

Never were talents of the highest genius of the most exalted kind, more profusely bestowed upon a single human being or prophet, or worked out to greater purposes of excellence, than in Guru Gobind Singh. He was gifted with a clear mind, a vivid imagination, a profound spiritual insight, and his soul was ablaze with a fervent moral passion and fiery determination to fight for truth, freedom and human integrity. Guided by the highest moral and spiritual ideals, imbued with the soul of excellence, the glow of poetry, and the fire of imagination, he yet knew how to make all these noble qualities the instruments of his sagacious will and the dictates of his conscience.

The prodigious capacity and power of his light and wisdom which he brought to bear on rejuvenation of art, literature and culture, on the directions of his battles against tyranny of Brahmanism, destructive feudalism, and Mughal imperialism, produced astonishing results. It would require the historical insight of a Thucydide, directing the pencil of a Tacitus, to vividly portray the life and character of a saviour with the sword like Guru Gobind Singh, though, modern idiom even in his hands would probably have proved inadequate to the task. Enduring of fatigue, patient of hardship, unwearied in his search for peace, extending his hand of friendship to all lovers of truth and freedom, be they Hindus, Muslims or Christians, relentlessly fighting treachery, cruelty, falsehood and tyranny, no difficulties could deter him, no dangers daunt him and no obstacles



could impede his fight for freedom and truth. His was a constitution of iron, that is why he perhaps called even God as *All-Steel : Sarb-Loh*, the fiery ardour of which rendered him almost insensible to physical suffering and enabled him to brave and face the most terrible calamities of human life.

Guru Gobind Singh's mind was a towering Himalaya of supreme wisdom from whose teeming caverns there flowed mighty rivers of songs and poetry, prayers and meditations, philosophic reflections and historical truths, in whose placid depths he set the reflected image of all the noblest aspirations of man and all the tragedy and grandeur of human drama. His imagination was a seraph which sounded all depths and measured all 'eights. It touched the intangible, it saw the invisible, it heard the inaudible and it gave body and shape to the inconceivable. It gathered gems from all mines, gold from all sands, pearls from all seas and songs from all battles of *dharmā*, fought in our ancient history of India.

Guru Gobind Singh bequeathed to mankind a literary, historical and philosophic estate which time cannot destroy. He breathed into the nostrils of heavenly Muse the breath of new immortality. He sang of his God and soul. He sang of creation and the rise and fall of civilisations. He sang of the wars of *dharmā* and the heroes of the glorious past of India and he also sang of the figurative gods and goddesses of Indian mythology. He sang of the lovers and martyrs of truth. The fever of the age, the misery of the people, the degradation of the country and its culture, the mute appeals of the oppressed became the problems of his life which he solved with the pen, the sword and the creative genius of an olympian mind. Guru Gobind Singh's soul was a resistless flood that deluged everything that came into contact with it, with glory, strength and spiritual glow. His mind was like prism that reflected and reduced to elementary components whatever passed through it.

In all the thoughts and actions of Guru Gobind Singh we find dynamic transvaluation of values. Old values crumbled in his hands to be remoulded and reshaped into new forms and with a new life. Spiritual values formed the keynote of his outlook and yet he defined spirituality and religion in revolutionary words. He repeatedly points out that religion does not consist in turning unceasingly towards the veiled stones, nor in approaching all altars, nor in throwing one's self prostrated on the ground, nor in raising one's hands before the habitations of gods, nor deluging the temples with the blood of the beasts, nor in heaping vows upon vows, but in beholding the Light of God within a peaceful soul, in dedicating one's mind, heart and soul to the service of humanity, which is the highest manifestation of the spirit of God.

*Ascetics who eat dirty food
Are no better than filth eating swines ;
Yogis who pride in besmearing themselves with ashes,
Are no better than donkeys and elephants
That bespatter themselves with dust.
Recluses who retire to the grave yards
Are no better than jackals howling in the crematory,
Solitaire monks who live in remote monasteries
Are like owls living in deserted houses.
Anchorites waste life in vows of silence ;
In what way are they better than the deer
Who lives and dies in silence in the forest?
What avails giving five calls in the name of religion
The jackal cries time and again the bitter cold night
Without enlightenment and divine knowledge
The fool sinks into the pit of hell,
How can one attain divine wisdom
Without faith, love and devotion*

Guru Gobind Singh : *Akal Ustav*

For Guru Gobind Singh, humanity was identity of the human race. All men are of human clay. There is absolutely no difference, here below at least, in predestination. Everyman experiences the same darkness before birth, and lives through the same sorrows and joys of the flesh, and ends in the same ashes after life. Nothing pained Guru Gobind Singh more than the artificial and foolish differences created by bigoted divines and pious fanatics between the God of the Hindus and God of the Muslims and between the culture of the Hindus and the culture of the Muslims. This incurable ignorance possessed the hearts of our people and has been the major cause of the sufferings of our country for the past over three hundred years.

*Even in error deem not the God of the Hindus
To be other than the God of the Muslims ;
Worship the ONE God,
Recognise the One Enlightner,
All men have the same human form
In all men blazes the same divine light*

Guru Gobind Singh : *Akal Ustav*

Guru Gobind Singh firmly believed that not only were the Indians one in mind and spirit but that entire humanity was one community and human history is a meaningful process, a significant development, with many economic and political upheavals disturbing its surface; but below, in

the depths, it is a truly majestic drama (*Bachitar Natak*). He sets down, as the purpose of his own life, to watch and play his destined role in the majestic drama of the human world : *dekhan ayio jagat tamsasa* .

The destiny of the human race was to become one community in the love and worship of God and Truth.

The Arabs of Arabia

The French of France

The Kureshis of Kandahar

Meditate on Thee

The Marathas and the Maghda people

The Dravidians and the Talinganians

Concentrate their mind on Thee

The Chinese and the Manchurians

The Tibetans of Tibet

All contemplate Thee

Guru Gobind Singh : *Akal Ustav*

Guru Gobind Singh was convinced that all anti-social and anti moral forces are ultimately defeated. Truth always triumphs over falsehood. Freedom always asserts itself over oppression and tyranny. Intellectually and spiritually the world is bound together in a web of common ideas of truth, goodness and freedom. Humanity's ultimate realisation of itself and the world can be attained only by an ever increasing liberation of values that are universal and human.

Guru Gobind Singh was verily a prophet of the people. Sixty years before Rousseau wrote his social contract and over 150 years before Marx formulated his Manifesto, Guru Gobind Singh gave the most illuminating reasons for turning against the proud and privileged classes and espousing the cause of the downtrodden, the cursed, the enslaved, who for centuries had no religion, no social freedom and no worthy place in society. He said :

*All the battles I have won, against tyranny,
And I have fought with the devoted backing of these people
Through them only have I been able to bestow gifts
Through their help I have escaped harm
The love and generosity of these Sikhs
Have enriched my heart and home ;
Through their grace I have attained all learning ;
Through their help, in battles, I have slain many
enemies;
I was born to serve them, through them I reached
eminence*

*What would I have been without their kind and ready
help ?*

There are millions of insignificant creatures like me.

Guru Gobind Singh : *Dasam Granth*

Guru Gobind Singh was the first prophet in world history to identify himself completely with the will and destiny of the people and to give them a place higher than the highest. He not only inspired them with a new consciousness, but in the Punjab, he has laid the foundation of an invincible spirit which has not allowed any invader or aggressor thereafter to dare destroy the freedom and culture of this land.

The India which imbibes the spirit of Guru Gobind Singh, will ever live in freedom, harmony, glory and preparedness, without the slightest fear of any aggressor. The India which turns its back to the noble ideals of Guru Gobind Singh will sink into disunity, fear and slavery. The India of Guru Gobind Singh's dream is yet to be born. In the cultural world, Europe is Christ, the Middle East is Mohammed, the Far East is Buddha and India of the future, if fortunately it has a glorious and resplendent future, will certainly be symbolised by the spirit and philosophy of Guru Gobind Singh.

Dr Trilochan Singh

Dr Trilochan Singh's life was dedicated to the sadhana (spiritual discipline) of scholarship committed to spread the light of the message of the Sikh Gurus as contained in the Sikh scriptures. He established command over Sikh history, philosophy, theology and scriptures and the fruits of his intense labours and researches have come to us in the form of well-researched biographies of Guru Nanak, Guru Har Krishan, Guru Tegh Bahadar, authentic translations of Adi Sri Guru Granth Sahib and Dasam Granth and twenty books in English and over 200 learned research papers on the same subjects.

In his mother tongue Punjabi, he wrote much on literary criticism and produced remarkable translations of classical writings of Plato, Confucius, Spinoza, Vivekananda, Tagore and Dr Radhakrishnan. His first-work, 'The Sacred Writings of the Sikhs', a UNESCO publication of which he was the chief translator and editor (Allen and Unwin) published in 1960, was the first real presentation in English of the hymns of the Sikh Gurus and medieval saints and bhaktas. It stimulated great interest of the western scholars in Sikhism. Dr Trilochan Singh was the first scholar to present the true lives and times of Guru Nanak, Guru Hari Krishan and Guru Tegh Bahadur.

The Wondrous Life

In this essay, Dr Trilochan Singh traces the wondrous life of the Tenth Master, whose father Guru Tegh Bahadar began his missionary journey to the eastern part of the sub-continent towards the end of 1665, and his family's sojourn in Patna where his son Gobind Rai was born.

Besides his wife, Mata Gujari, his mother, Mata Nanaki, and his brother-in-law Kirpal Chand, all the ministers of Guru Tegh Bahadar's Darbar accompanied him to the East, prominent amongst whom were Diwan Mani Das, the Prime Minister; his brother Sati Das, a great Persian scholar; Bhai Dayal Das, the Household Minister (*gharbari*) and Bhai Gurditta, the high priest. The tour to the East had been financed by the *sangats* (dioceses) of Dacca, Patna, Benaras and Allahabad. Just before he left the Punjab, Nawab Saifud-din of Saifabad (presently Bahadurgarh near Patiala), a very devoted friend of Guru Tegh Bahadar offered him a fine Mesopotamian horse for his personal use, a chariot for the holy Mother, a fine royal tent, bullocks and camels to carry leads and costly utensils for the Guru's kitchen (*langar*).

Camping every fifteen miles and stopping for some days at every historical place of pilgrimage which were sanctified by the earlier visit and presence of Guru Nanak, Guru Tegh Bahadar passed through Kaithal, Kurukshetra, Banibadarpur, Kadamanakpur, Delhi, Mathura, Agra, Etawah, Fatehpur and reached Allahabad (Prayag) in early February 1666. Here was the conception of Gobind Singh, a historical fact which is described by Guruji thus: "God commanded me to go to the earth. My mind was fixed on the lotus feet of the Lord: I did not like to come. God reasoned with me and sent me into the world with a mandate: *I have cherished thee as My Son and send you to establish the Path of Truth. Go into the world, establish virtue and keep the people away from evil.* When my father (Guru Tegh Bahadar) came to Triveni (Allahabad), he bestowed gifts in boundless charity and performed humanitarian acts of piety. There at Allahabad my Light manifested into human form" (my spirit descended into my mother's womb).

After a month's stay at Allahabad, Guru Tegh Bahadar moved on to Benaras, Sasram, Gaya, Rajgriha and reached Patna just before the monsoons. As soon as the rainy season was over, Guru Tegh Bahadar left

for Dacca, leaving his family at Patna under the care of Bhai Dayal Das, his household Minister, who was also appointed Archbishop over all the dioceses in UP, Bihar and West Bengal. Here at Patna, the place known to ancient history as Pataliputra, and sanctified by the footprints of Lord Buddha and Guru Nanak, Gobind Singh was born on 26 December 1666 (*Posh Sudi 7, 1723*).

The child was named Gobind Das, which transformed to Gobind Singh when he created the Khalsa Brotherhood, every member of which was surnamed as 'Singh' (lion). From his childhood, young Gobind was treated as the new Prophet and Mankind's Saviour not only by his parents and disciples but by many eminent Muslims and Hindus. The aged Sanskrit scholar Shiv Dutta worshipped him as the living image of Krishna. Nawab Rahim Bakhsh and Karim Bakhsh gave as gifts, a garden and land to the young prophet who playfully bestowed his love and light on all those who met him.

Shah Bhik, popularly known as Bhikhan Shah of Thaska near Thanesar, had seen in his vision that a great prophet was born at Patna. He then went East to Patna and bowed down before young Gobind, placing before him two small pots of sweets, one symbolising Hindus, the other symbolising the Muslims. He wanted to know whether young Gobind was the prophet of the Hindus or of the Muslims which the Saint expected would be indicated by accepting one of the pots. Gobind Das placed his hands on both of them indicating that he would bestow equal love and friendship upon both the faiths. He was born not to divide but to unite the two great religious traditions, for bridging the gulf.

Raja Fateh Chand Maini and his wife Kishori Devi built a spacious house for Gobind Singh which was completed in 1668. Paidi Bai, Gobind Singh's first nurse was blessed and thanked by Guru Tegh Bahadar along with others for her tender care of the child-prophet.

Guru Tegh Bahadar returned from his missionary tour of Assam, Bengal, Orissa early in 1671. By now it was clear that Aurangzeb hated the Hindus everywhere, except for those in the army and in his harem. In 1669 he had given orders to demolish all the schools and temples of the "infidels." A wave of terror soon spread all over the country and Guru Tegh Bahadar was anxious to get back to the Punjab. So, early in 1671, Guru Tegh Bahadar left Patna with an advance party to make adequate arrangements for the speedy and comfortable travel with rest camps for his son Gobind and rest of the family. He arrived at Anandpur with his family a few weeks before the annual gathering of *Vaisakhi*.

The Brahmins, being custodians and teachers of the Hindu faith, scriptures and traditions had become special targets of Aurangzeb's policy of forced conversion. Helplessly, they looked all around for a

saviour and protector of their faith and the freedom to worship. Shivaji and the Rajputs were fighting heroic battles in the central parts but no one dared come to the north and face Aurangzeb himself. Soon, five hundred leading Brahmins from Kashmir, Kurukshetra, Benaras and Hardwar then came to Guru Tegh Bahadar under their leader Kirpa Ram, a Saraswati Brahmin from Mattan, forty miles from Srinagar.

Guru Tegh Bahadar was deeply moved by their terrible plight. Like his predecessors, he did not believe either in idolatry or in the Sacred Thread and Brahminism, but upheld the right to worship God in one's own way. When he expressed the view that some great man must go to Aurangzeb and either urge him to change his policy or must lay down his own life for the freedom of worship for all, thus save Hinduisim from extinction, his nine-year-old son Gobind stood up to proclaim that "who is greater than thee father



In this painting, a deeply troubled group of Kashmiri Brahmins under the leadership of Pandit Kripa Ram reach Anandpur to meet Guru Tegh Bahadar. In the wake of mass conversions to Islam being ordered by Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb, these Brahmins are meeting the Guru and with folded hands explaining their predicament. On hearing their plight, Guruji was lost in deep thought when his son, the young Gobind Rai clambered onto his lap and enquired the cause of his father's worry. On being explained the situation, young Gobind remarked, "They can be saved only if a great soul can offer himself for martyrdom - and who is greater than you?"

who could perform such supreme sacrifice; pity these Brahmins and do all that can be done to protect them.”

The rest of the story is told by Guru Gobind Singh himself in his autobiography:

*When I was mature enough,
To shoulder duties and responsibilities.
My father left for Heavenly Home;
He sacrificed his life.
For protecting the rights of the Hindus,
To wear their sacred thread and frontal marks;
In this Kali Age of ignorance
Guru Tegh Bahadar performed a supremely heroic deed,
He gave up his head without uttering a word of sorrow
For the sake of righteousness (dharma)
He did this great heroic act:
He readily gave up his head
But did not give up his conviction:
(In the freedom of worship for all)
He refused to perform miracles,
A cheap way of fooling people.
Real prophets of God are ashamed
Of displaying their occult powers*

Guru Tegh Bahadar was martyred in Delhi along with three disciples: Mati Das, Dayal Das and Sati Das without uttering a word of regret. A Muslim fakir who witnessed the execution prophesied: “The Sultan has not done well. Such things would lead to great rebellion, and Delhi would become entirely desolate.”

Historians who never take the trouble of referring to the original and more reliable sources of history, are prone to make bland statements about the life of Guru Gobind Singh after his father’s martyrdom. Some say that he brooded to avenge his father’s death and others say that he retired into a forest and lived a life of seclusion. He did neither! Although he was only nine years old yet his training to accept his worldly responsibilities was complete, “He had received the best practical education that the time could give and ran through the whole of Persian, Sanskrit, Epic and historical literature.” For ten years, 1675 to 1685, Guru Gobind Singh devoted himself to creative activities of educating and inspiring his people with literary activities, philosophic awakening, spiritual enlightenment and military preparedness based on his father’s directive principle: *Fear no one and strike fear in no one*. It is during this period he composed his famous

work, *Jaap* (‘The Meditation’) and started rewriting the lives of Indian heroes, repeatedly stating that Lord Krishna and Lord Rama, were not *avatars* of God but were the greatest heroes of Indian history, who devoted all their lives fighting tyranny, oppression and evil. Unfortunately, Hindu poets and scholars emphasised only the esoteric side of these heroes, painting them as romantic *avatars* and not as fearless fighters for dharma in the social and political field.

Enriching national culture

Even as Aurangzeb expelled poets and musician from his court. Guru Gobind Singh welcomed them all to his Darbar at Paonta Sahib and some 52 renowned poets, scholars and musicians came to him, were given full freedom to write what they wrote, in any language and to translate or recreate any classic, on any subject. Whenever a scholar completed any work, he was richly rewarded. He gave sixty thousand rupees to a poet as reward for translating the *Karna Purva* of *Mahabharata*. He gave the Persian works of Bhai Nand Lal Goya the status of canonised Sikh scriptures.

Every Sikh was expected to know Persian, the court language and literary language of the Muslims; Braj Bhasha (Hindi) the literary language of the Hindi speaking people, and Punjabi, being mother tongue of the Punjabis. All letters, transactions, edicts (*Hukamnamas*) were actually written in chaste Punjabi. The influence of Persian and Arabic was accepted as a historical fact, and Guru Gobind Singh enriched both his Hindi and Punjabi works with elaborate use of Persian and Arabic. According to Guru Gobind Singh, the future Indian culture and national language were to be artistic blends of all classical languages such as Sanskrit, Persian and Arabic, along with provincial languages. Of course, the mother tongue was to have its own important place. Guru Gobind Singh solved the language problem in his country where poets and scholars of all languages and creeds worked together, a problem which the rulers of present India have not only failed to honestly solve this practically but with successive change of Government, the confusion only worsens.

Unprovoked attacks by Hindu Rajas

In 1685 or thereabout, Medni Prakash, the ruler of Nahan, had invited Guru Gobind Singh to his state. Guru Gobind Singh accepted the invitation and camped at what is today Paonta Sahib, on banks of the



Guru Gobind Singh ji's succession to the divine throne at the tender age of nine followed his father's martyrdom in 1675. On Baisakhi day, Gobind Rai sat on Gurugaddi. New clothes and decorated pagri, along with weapons added to his radiance. Young Gobind Rai was very mature for his age and observed all rituals on 'ascension' to the 'throne'. After consultations with his uncle Kripal Chand, return gifts in the form of horses and weapons were offered to the devotees.



Jamuna. It was at Paonta Sahib that he wrote the major portion of his *Krishna Charitra*. He completed verse 982 in the year 1744 in the month of *Sravan*, and the last verse in the *Sravan* month of the year 1745 (1688).

While he was at Paonta, Ram Rai came from Dehra Dun to meet him and complained that his *masands* (hierophants) were becoming overbearing and had started disregarding his orders. Soon Guru Gobind Singh received messages from Ram Rai's wife that the *masands* had burnt Ram Rai alive while he was in trance and her own life was in danger. Guru Gobind Singh sent fifty armed Sikhs under the leadership of Bhai Mani Ram (later Mani Singh), Bhai Daya Ram and Nand Chand to punish them. Their leader Gurbakhsh had confronted them with 200 armed men, but Bhai Mani Ram and Bhai Daya Ram engaged them in mortal combat, killed many while the rest surrendered. Punjab Kaur was then appointed head of Ram Rai's mission.

At Paonta Sahib, Pir Buddha Shah of Sadhaura soon came and not only befriended the Guru but offered 500 Pathans for service in his army. The Hindu Rajas of Shiwalik Hills, led by Bhim Chand of Kahlur and Fateh Shah of Srinagar, had secretly planned to attack his city-state, Anandpur. It was a supreme irony of fate, that the Hindu Rajas, and the Hindu population of this area were the first to attack Guru Gobind Singh although he had sacrificed his own father to death to protect their faith. From 1688 to 1701, these Hindu Rajas were the continuous source of trouble and aggressive attacks on Guru Gobind Singh. They also tempted the 500 Pathans and bribed them to desert Guru Gobind Singh just days before the battle. On the 18th *Asvin* 1785 (1688) only a month after he had completed the *Krishna Charitra*, the combined forces of over sixteen Hindu Rajas marched to Paonta Sahib to attack but Guru Gobind Singh was fully prepared. Pir Buddha Shah came with his four sons and seven hundred soldiers to assist the Guru. After a terrific battle, the enemy was routed. Two brave sons of Pir Buddha Shah laid down their lives for the Guru's cause and their tombs were built on the highest hill opposite the shrine at Paonta Sahib. Every pilgrim to Paonta today reveres their heroism. Here too at Paonta, Guru Gobind Singh's eldest son Ajit Singh had been born some two years before the battle.

Even after defeating the combined forces of these sixteen Hindu Rajas, Guru Gobind Singh did not occupy any of their territory. He could, if he had desired, easily

have occupied six states to carve out a kingdom bigger than that of Shivaji's in the South but that was not his mission.

Two years later, Mughal forces attacked the rulers of Kangra and Bilaspur. When they sought help, Guruji readily forgave them and helped drive out Imperial forces. However, the Hindu Rajas repeatedly returned the goodwill and military support of Guru Gobind Singh by their most insidious treachery.

Prince Muazzam

Prince Muazzam, who as Emperor came to be known as Bahadar Shah, was styled as Shah Alam in his father's lifetime but on 4 March 1687, was arrested with all his family and personal staff for suspected contumacy with Abdul Hasan, ruler of Golconda and kept in rigorous confinement for seven years. It was most probably just before this arrest that Bhai Nand Lal, his Mir Munshi was compelled to take refuge at Anandpur, where he became the 'Poet Laureate' of Guru ji's darbar and an outstanding apostle of the Sikh faith.

Shortly after his release, Prince Muazzam was sent with a large army to attack Guru Gobind Singh. The Hindu Rajas and the Governors of Lahore and Sirhind had complained that their collective might had failed to uproot the Guru. When the Prince entered Punjab, Bhai Nand Lal Goya requested him to first investigate charges before he made any attack. The prince sent his ablest administrator, General Mirza Beg but who, finding that Guru Gobind Singh was innocent, punished those who turned against him or had deserted him. Thus, the Prince once more disobeyed his father's orders in not attacking Guru Gobind Singh. Aurangzeb was very angry and sent four of his Senior Generals with a large army but the Emperor's envoys also supported Prince Muazzam's policy of friendship with Guru Gobind Singh and instead turned against enemies of the Guru.

This new imperial of tolerance and friendship with Guru Gobind Singh resulted in some years of peace which the Guru devoted to creative activities, including works such as *Akal Ustat* and *Gyan Prabodh*.

Immortality

Guru Gobind Singh has bequeathed to mankind such literary, historical and philosophical estate which time cannot change. He breathed into the nostrils of the heavenly muse the breath of a new immortality. He

Gurdwara Paonta Sahib today



sang of God and the soul. He sang of creation and the rise and fall of civilisation. He sang of the wars of dharma, of the heroes of the glorious past in India and of the figurative gods and goddesses of mythology. He sang of the lovers and martyrs of truth. The fever of the age, misery of the people, degradation of the oppressed became problems of his life which he solved with the pen, the sword and his godlike spirit. Guru Gobind Singh's mind was a restless flood which deluged everything with glory, strength and spiritual glow. He desired that his Sikhs should develop all sides of their personality. He developed all sides of exuberance of his powers without losing himself in their multiplicity.

He vehemently preached against hypocrisy, idolatory, and the worship of personal gods. He believed in the philosophy of Light and the religion of Love:

*To the East and West
Wherever one seest,
He pervades as Supreme Love*

– Jaap

In *Akal Ustat*, Guruji gives his conception of religion and God

*The Arabs of Arabia
The French of France
The Kureshis of Kandhar
Meditate upon Thee*

Naming all people from Manchuria to Rome, all worship the same God and the difference in their forms of worship are mainly owing to their different cultural environments. In *Gyan Prabodh*, Guru Gobind Singh reveals the progressive ethical evolution of religion in India in four stages, but unfortunately a great portion of this monumental work was lost in the Sirsa Nadi and we have only 336 verses with us.

Enriching Language

Guru Gobind Singh wrote in Persian, Hindi and Punjabi: there no other poet in India who wrote in over 250 types of *chandās* (forms of poetry). His poetry gives us the impression that as Indian civilisation and culture advances, the mutual influence of languages on each other must increase, and the future national language will be one which has the capacity to absorb words from all Indian languages. An eminent linguist and scholar had rightly said that if ever India develops a national language which appeals to Indians of all states, it will be the Hindi language written by the Sikh Gurus. The present puritan trends to drive out all words of Persian, Arabic or non-Sanskrit origin are bigoted attempts to provincialise the national language and is bound to end as miserable failure, as all dogmatic puritanisms end. Such was Guru Gobind Singh's deep passion for synthesis and integration that he wrote some verses in which each line is in a different allied language. He fortunately has given us the dates of some of his compositions which indicate



In 1699, the Guru sent hukmanamas (letters of authority) to his followers, requesting them to congregate at Anandpur on the day of Vaisakhi. Then, addressing the congregation from the entrance of a small tent pitched on a hillock (now Keshgarh Sahib), he said that the Guru needs something from his Sikhs and drawing his sword asked, "From the disciples of Guru Nanak Devji, who will come forward and sacrifice his head for protection of the religion and break the shackles of slavery? I need a head!" No one answered his first call, nor the second, but on the third invitation, Daya Ram (later known as Bhai Daya Singh) came forward and offered his head to the Guru. Guru Gobind took the volunteer inside the tent and returned to the crowd with blood dripping from his sword. He then demanded another head. One more volunteer came forward, and entered the tent with him. The Guru again emerged with blood on his sword. This happened three more times. Finally, the five volunteers came out of the tent in resplendent uniforms and unharmed. Guru Gobind Singh thereafter poured pure water into an iron bowl and adding patashas (sweeteners) stirred it with double-edged sword (khanda) accompanied with recitations from Adi Granth. He called this mixture of sweetened water and iron as amrit (nectar) and administered this to the five men. These five, who had volunteered to sacrifice their lives for their Guru, were given the title of the Panj Pyare (five beloved ones) by their Guru. They were the first (baptised) Sikhs of the Khalsa: Daya Ram (Bhai Daya Singh), Dharam Das (Bhai Dharam Singh), Himmat Rai (Bhai Himmat Singh), Mohkam Chand (Bhai Mohkam Singh), and Sahib Chand (Bhai Sahib Singh). The numerical Five has great significance in Indian philosophy as it depicts the five elements. Depicted in this painting are Guru Gobind Singhji with his five warriors on their steeds as a backdrop.

that even shortly before various acts of aggression, he was writing on philosophy, history and even psychology. To him, philosophy was the search for truth and transcendent God, while history was the captivating drama of unraveling the life story of Immanent God. That is why he called his historical works, including his autobiography, as *Bachitar Natak* (Spectacular Drama).

The New Order

Then, on 30 March 1699, at the annual Vaisakhi (New Year Day) gathering when teachers and disciples from all dioceses in India ranging from Dacca to Kabul were

present, Guru Gobind Singh gave a call for a follower to sacrifice his head, for his faith. When one such person stood up, he was taken to a distant tent from which the Guru came with his sword dripping with blood. He asked for another head and then another. Thus when five of them had offered themselves for the supreme sacrifice, the Guru came out and announced the foundation of a New Order, calling the five chosen ones as the Five Beloved Ones (*Panj Pyaras*).

Guru Gobind Singh performed baptism of *Charan Pahul*, He baptised the Five Beloved Elects with the double edged sword, reciting five compositions now of the Gurus, three of which were his own. The five

compositions form the morning prayer of the Sikhs. The Guru then sought Holy baptism from the Five Elect, thus bestowing any five members of the Khalsa Brotherhood full authority to baptise disciples and collectively act as the Guru's personality.

Guruship was thus institutionalised into a collective responsibility guided by the Divine Word. To this new Holy Order the Guru gave his own personality of unshorn hair, with turban as crown. He gave it his own sword as secular and spiritual sovereignty (*Miri* and *Piri*). He gave a strict moral code which was more important than any symbol.

There is much misunderstanding and ignorance about the place of unshorn hair as part of the personality of the Khalsa. The foremost thing that should be borne in mind is that the Khalsa is a spiritual holy order which does not renounce family or society. It is not a military or a secular organisation. The personality of the Sikh with his hair intact reflects his outlook of life just as the clean shaven head and ochre robe of a monk or woolen robes and clean shaven head of a Sufi *darvesh* reflects that particular outlook of life.

Such are called the *sanyasi* ideals (order of monks) or the *rishi* and *kshatriya* deal, the first symbolised by the clean shaven head and the ochre robe of the monk, while that of the *rishi* and *kshatriya* ideal is symbolised by hair and the sword. Dr S. Radhakrishnan writes "His *svadharma* or law of action require him to engage in battle. Protection of right by acceptance of battle, if necessary is the social duty of *kshatriya* and not renunciation. His duty is to maintain order by force and not become an ascetic by shaving of his hair."

"O thou best of men," says the author of Mahabharata (*Udyog Parva*), "there are only two types who can pierce the constellation of the sun and reach their sphere of Brahman. The one is the *sanyasin* who is steeped in yoga and the other is the warrior who falls fighting in battle." Guru Gobind Singh combined holiness of the *rishi* with the social and political responsibility of the *kshatriya* and gave to the world the Khalsa ideals which come very near Plato's ideals of the Philosopher-King. A Sikh who lacks spiritually and does not live according to the ethical code of Guru Gobind Singh, ceases to be a Khalsa. A Sikh who is too worldly and shuns social and cultural responsibilities also ceases to be a Khalsa. States the Guru, "The Khalsa is the living image of my spirit. I will eternally abide in the spirit of the Khalsa."

It was the Brahmin Keshav Datta who seriously objected to Guru Gobind Singh's attempt to raise the moral and spiritual status of low caste people as higher than that of Brahmins and Kshatriyas. Guru Gobind Singh answered the learned Pandit's discomfort in this manner:

*All battles I have won
With the loving grace of these people
Their undying love and faith
Has been my sole protection
All the glory, my home and heart enjoys
Are their precious gifts
Through their efforts and help
I have acquired, knowledge and wisdom
It is with the help of these people
I have always defeated my enemy
For them was I born,
Through them I have attained glory and greatness
When am I without their loving support
There are millions of creatures like me on earth.*

Guru Gobind Singh wrote this of the people 150 years before Marx was born and 60 years before the world had heard of Rousseau and Voltaire. So strong was his faith in what is now understood as democratic ideals, that when military dictatorship was expedient and even necessary, he left "the care of the flock as well as of his Army not to a single person but to the entire community. He placed his faith in the collective wisdom of the people and not in the devotion of a favourite disciple."

Perfidy of the Hill Rajas

Still continuing their perfidious and treacherous attitude, the Hindu Rajas now planned to counter Guru Gobind Singh by surprise attacks. The first attempt was made by two chiefs Balia Chand and Alam Chand, who tried to ambush Guru Gobind Singh while he was out hunting. Two members of the Guru's party Udai Singh and Alam Singh faced the treacherous attack, both Chiefs were severely wounded and their murderous attack repelled.

The perfidious Hindu Chiefs then sought the aid of the Imperial Forces which Aurangzeb sent on the condition that they bear all the cost of the military expedition against Guru Gobind Singh, to which the Hill Rajas readily agreed. Dina Beg and Painda Khan offered to fight Guru Gobind Singh in single combat.



During 1700, the deceptive hill Rajas proposed that Guru Gobind Singhji leave Anandpur for a while. The Guru, aware of their treacherous wont, still agreed and left for Nirmoh, a village situated a mile from Kiratpur. As expected, Raja Ajmer Chand and Raja of Kangra launched a two-front attack. Fierce battles ensued in which the Sikhs were ultimately victorious. Meanwhile, the Imperial Mughal army attacked simultaneously but inspired by the Guru, the Sikhs stood faithfully and fought back valiantly. When Wazir Khan gave an order to his troops to make a sudden assault and seize the Guru, he was protected by his son Ajit Singh and other brave warriors, who stopped the advance of the Imperial forces and inflicted heavy losses in the fight that continued through the night. On the next day, Guru decided on retiring to Basali whose Raja had frequently invited him to his capital. The Guru with his troops crossed over the river and reached Basali. Daya Singh and Ude Singh soon requested the Guru to return to Anandpur. After staying a few days at Basali, he marched back to Anandpur and inhabitants of the city were overjoyed to have him again amongst them. The ruler of Anandpur, Raja Ajmer Chand thought it most wise to pursue peace and sent his family priest with gifts for him. Other hill Rajas also followed Ajmer Chand's example and sought good relations with the Guru. The scene where hill chiefs are seen paying homage to Guru Gobind Singhji is depicted with Guruji patiently listening to their promise of peace despite being aware of the hatred in their minds.

Guru Gobind Singh accepted the challenge and killed them in a hand to hand fight. The Hill Rajas and their armies then fled.

The Hindus Chiefs finally planned a combined attack by all the 22 hill states. They sent an ultimatum to Guru Gobind Singh either to surrender or fight it out. Guru Gobind Singh told them that he would fight anyone who attacked him. Joined by Jagat Ullah, the leaders of Gujars and Rangas, the hill Chiefs began desperate attacks. Ajit Singh, the Guru's sixteen-year-old son, Udai Singh and Bachittar Singh, sons of Bhai Mani Singh distinguished themselves in battle with prodigious feats of valour. The hill Chiefs fought with desperation, the battle raged for many days. Jagat

Ullah, Raja Kesri Chand of Jaswal and Raja Ghumand Chand were all killed. The battle ended with the Guru's victory. Thereafter, the Guru confined himself and his armies to Anandpur City.

Defeated in open battle, the Rajas now resorted to treachery. A message was sent to the Guru to the effect that if he left Anandpur the Rajas vowed not to trouble him any more (*see painting in this page*). Guru Gobind Singh knew that the reactionary Rajas were completely untrustworthy but in order to put them in the wrong he accepted the condition. The Guru came out in the open and camped at Nirmoh. The Rajas tried to ambush the Guru but were quickly driven away. They then acquired help of the Imperial Army from Sirhind. Guru Gobind

Singh fought them and then retreated to Basali for strategic reasons. After mustering his men, he fought a fierce battle at Basali which he won and came back to Anandpur.

The Hill Chiefs knew that it was not possible to defeat Guru Gobind Singh or to capture him. They paid large sums of money to two Imperial Army officers, Said Beg and Alif Khan to attack Guru Gobind Singh while he was camping at Chamkaur. But when Said Beg saw Guru Gobind Singh, he was so deeply influenced by the Guru's magnetic personality, that he immediately crossed over to the Guru's side with as many men as he could. This break up was seen by the Hill Chiefs and Alif Khan, who seeing no chance of success, beat a hasty retreat. The Sikhs pursued the fleeing enemy to a distance and then returned to Anandpur. Some Chiefs were exasperated by the repeated treacherous conduct of the Hindu Rajas and were determined to teach them a lesson. They fought with impetuosity and drove the enemy out of their territory.

On receiving repeated appeals from the Hill Chiefs to send strong Imperial forces, Aurangzeb sent Said Khan and Ramzan Khan. Most Sikhs had at the time gone home for the harvest season and Guru Gobind Singh had a comparatively small force. The tough battle lasted for a few days but Said Khan soon left the battle field. Tradition has it that he was related to Pir Budhu Shah and had heard wonderful things about Guru Gobind Singh. Now after seeing the Guru he was so overpowered by the spiritual glow around the Master that quietly went away, even though the Mughal Army had compelled the Guru to vacate Anandpur. Maimu Khan another Muslim devotee of Guru Gobind Singh, also fought valiantly on his side: the Imperial Army was defeated. Aurangzeb was now seriously disturbed by the situation.

Seige of Anandpur

The Hindu Rajas led by Ajmer Chand of Kahlur and his father Bhim Chand personally went to Aurangzeb and stirred wrath of the Emperor by telling him that Guru Gobind Singh claimed to be the *Sacha Patshah* (True King), who sat on a raised platform, a prerogative of the Emperor, and was "corrupting" both Hinduism and Islam. Aurangzeb then ordered a large army under Wazir Khan of Sirhind and Zabardast Khan of Lahore to proceed against the Guru. All the Hill Chiefs, except the Raja of Nahan, joined the Imperial forces.

Guru Gobind Singh divided his army into five commands each of which was posted at a fort. His eighteen-year-old son Ajit Singh was stationed in Kesgarh fort with five hundred soldiers under him. Sher Singh and Nahar Singh commanded the Lohgarh fort. Udai Singh and Alam Singh commanded Agampura, while Mohakam Singh was posted with 400 men in Holgarh. Daya Singh commanded the northern ramparts while the Guru himself remained in Anandgarh fort.

As the Imperial armies approached in massive numbers, Guru Gobind Singh ordered his artillery to discharge their cannons. The battle raged with ferocity. Daya Singh and Udai Singh came out of their forts and gave a terrific fight to the Imperial army who lost about nine hundred soldiers. Unable to fight the Sikh armies in the open, the Imperialists then laid siege to the city and stopped all ingress and egress. The Sikhs then planned night attacks, came forth from their defensive positions and took the enemy unawares. The Mughal Generals tried to storm the citadel in utter distress and desperation but the Sikhs brought forth bigger guns, named *Baghan* (tigress) and *Bijai Gosh* (roaring victory) which fired creating havoc amongst the enemy. As supplies were constantly dwindling, the Sikhs resorted to desultory sallies to seize supplies from the enemy. The siege lasted for about seven months but the Guru's army was reduced to starvation levels, still refused to surrender. Some Sikhs of Majha found life in the fort extremely miserable, could not endure the hardships. When they made up their mind to desert the Guru, they were asked to sign a disclaimer, which they did and left the fort.

Eventually, a messenger arrived with an oath signed by Aurangzeb upon the *Quran* assuring the Guru that if he came out of the fort, permanent peace would be negotiated on honourable terms. The oath of the Emperor was further supported by signed oaths by all the Generals of the Mughal army and the Hill Chiefs. Guru Gobind Singh did not trust these assurances but his mother and disciples counseled him to meet the Emperor. On 7 December 1705, Guru Gobind Singh came out of the fort. The enemy had retreated beyond Kiratpur. As soon as Guru Gobind Singh reached Nirmoh, the enemy attacked them, but Udai Singh and Ajit Singh fought them to a halt. Guru Gobind Singh took a defensive position in a small barn surrounded by a mud wall.

The Imperial troops continued pursuit of the Guru. At this stage, the forty Sikhs who had earlier deserted the Guru returned to die for the Guru's cause. A brave young lady Bibi Bhago led them to the battlefield. All the forty died in the battle at Muktsar, Bibi Bhago was wounded too. One of the forty, Maham Singh was dying when Guru Gobind Singh asked him to seek any blessing. "Master!" said Maham Singh, "tear our disclaimer and make us all your own." Guru Gobind Singh, blessed them all as they passed away.

The Battle Of Chamkaur

The epic battle of the forty Sikhs, led by Guru Gobind Singh's two sons Ajit Singh and Jujhar Singh is told by the Guru himself in his letter to Aurangzeb, the Zafarnama "If I had not believed in the false oaths

taken on the *Quran* by you, I would not have crippled my army which is dearer to me than my very life. What could forty Sikhs do against the treacherous attacks of lakhs of highly equipped soldiers of your army? These forty dear ones fought until the last man. Your commanders, who had taken the oath, attacked us from the rear with arrows, bullets and swords. In this desperate situation I too was compelled to take up the sword and fight. Like a swarm of flies the clamorous hordes of your black-stoled armies attacked us from all sides. Whosoever came near the wall received but one arrow from my bow and fell, but those who did not attack us received no injury from our hands. When I saw Nahar Khan coming forward to fight, he was shot by my arrow. The Pathans who boasted of their prowess retreated in terror. Then another Afghan commander



Two wealthy Rohila Pathan merchants Gani Khan and Nabhi Khan used to visit Guruji quite often to sell horses. Guruji had bought many horses from them. At Machhiwada, they discovered that Guruji was at Bhai Gulab's house and immediately went for darshan. However, they were disturbed to see his condition with no trappings of family, royalty, gaddi, horses, and so on. He sat with a peaceful countenance like a fakir and the pathans were moved to tears. They immediately suggested, "It is not safe here. Put on a blue robe like a fakir and we will escort you to Malwa and look after you. We are ready to even lay our lives down for you". To this, Guru Gobind Singh ji replied, "O men! have patience. Everything happens according to God's orders".

advanced like a sweeping tide. With the swiftness of an arrow and the suddenness of a bullet he attacked, made assault after assault, some wisely and some with desperate madness. He conducted many stormy attacks, received many wounds and after killing two Sikhs was himself killed. The entire battlefield was deluged and red with blood. In the terrorising twang of the shooting arrows even the bravest seemed for a moment unnerved. Even the boldest lost his presence of mind. What could mere moral courage do when forty half-starved Sikhs were fighting against countless hordes? The lamp of the earth (the sun) drew down its veil and hid itself. The queen of the night (the moon) rose gracefully in all its splendour. He who trusted your oath on the *Quran* taken with God as witness was graciously protected by the same God. No injury whatever came to my body. God protected me even when I left the hillock in the thick of the night fighting my way out."

Both the sons of the Guru, Ajit Singh and Jujhar Singh were martyred in battle. When only five Sikhs were left with him, three of them Daya Singh, Dharam Singh and Man Singh accompanied Guru Gobind Singh in his bid to cut through the enemy lines to safety, while Sangat Singh and Sant Singh were left in the defence.

Tired and fatigued by the ordeals and hardships of the battle Guru Gobind Singh reached Macchiwara forest where he rested under a tree. His companions were separated from him. But, as the Guru said,

*Go, tell the Beloved Lord
The condition of His yearning devotee,
Without Thee, rich covering are an agony to me:
And to live in the comforts of our households
Is like living with snakes !
Our pitchers have become like pikes on which men are
impaled,
The Cup we drink from has an edge like a dagger;
O Beloved, Thy turning away from us,
Is like the knife of the butcher.
With the Beloved in heart, a mattress of straw would
please us
Without Him, in rich houses, we are burned alive...*

Guru Gobind Singh was surrounded by Mughal armies who were searching for him all over the forest. At this difficult moment he took shelter with two Muslim devotees Ghani Khan and Nabi Khan

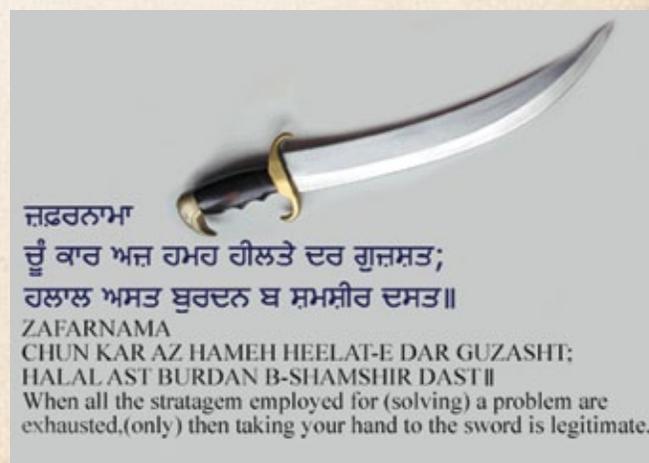
who disguised him as a Muslim Pir and carried him reverently to safety in a *palki* (palanquin).

Guruji had been fighting the Mughals but had profound faith in Muslims who were God fearing. The Hindu Rajas had been responsible for nearly all his miseries but he maintained a deep respect for Hinduism and its ancient cultural traditions. The Guru believed that the ultimate unity between various religions and ideological cultures is on never losing faith in the essential truth of all and never condemning a faith, philosophy or cultural for the folly of a few political or religious representatives of that faith. The heart in which the true light of Islam shines can never have any bitterness. Such was the Guru's unshakable faith. Many Muslims stood with him in his battle against cruelty and despotism. Even if the Hindu Rajas treacherously betrayed him and fought against him, his faith in profound achievements of Hinduism was not shaken. There is no other example in history of such a philosophical outlook and the invincible spirit.

Epistle of Victory

Guru Gobind Singh received the news that his mother and younger sons Zorawar Singh and Fateh Singh had been betrayed to the Nawab of Sirhind by his Brahmin servant, Gangu, who had them mercilessly killed. When asked, "Where are my four sons," Guru Gobind Singh said "What matters if four are dead, thousands of your children, the Sikhs, live."

Guru Gobind Singh then addressed two letters to Aurangzeb. It appears that Aurangzeb had now expressed regret and blamed his commanders for the treacherous attack and was willing to relent. But Guru Gobind Singh wrote, "You are neither sincere in your faith, nor do you ever practice the virtues of religion.



You neither recognise any God nor do you have any inward respect for Prophet Mohammad. Outwardly you hypocritically pretend to be religious. Inwardly you are atheist and utterly devoid of Islamic practices. If you had even the slightest regard for your religion, you would not have waived even a bit from your oath. But you, O Aurangzeb, who profess belief in one God and the *Koran*, are utterly devoid of belief both in God and the *Koran* and at heart you do not have an atom of faith in them. If you had the slightest faith in God you would have at once come to me personally but you did not come because your intentions were impure. I have been fighting for the last many years against the hill Chiefs and Hindu Rajas who are idol worshippers. I am a believer in one God and a disbeliever in idol worship. What reason did you have to attack me? Ideologically you have betrayed your own cause. This is the strange irony of these selfish times."

"If your Majesty comes here personally, the sincerity, integrity and veracity of my actions will become quite clear to you. I have received your written and verbal message, the proper thing for you to do now is to carry out all that you have promised to do. The *qazi* who brought the letter assured me on your behalf that you actually hold me in great reverence and are prepared to act upon my advice. If there is any truth in this you should come here and show it by your actions. You need not be afraid to come here for fear of any untoward incident as all the Berar people of this area are entirely under my influence. As a mark of respect (to the house of Guru Nanak) you should make a present of a horse and a thousand gold coins and as a royal gift I will permit you to rule this area on condition of peace."

Last Days in the South

Because of Aurangzeb's sickness and old age, Guru Gobind Singh agreed to travel to the south while Aurangzeb moved northwards. Guru Gobind Singh was near Baghaur in Rajasthan when the news of Aurangzeb's death reached him. At this time Prince Muazzam sought the Guru's help in the battle of succession against his usurping brother Mohammad Azam which the Guru readily offered.

According to Sikhi Pothi (*Travels of Guru Tegh Bahadar and Guru Gobind Singh In Malwa*) Guru Gobind Singh had earlier expressed his desire to go to the South to establish an apostolic centre. When one Sikh sarcastically remarked, "Why go to that hellish place,

the Deccan," Guru Gobind Singh tenderly remarked, "Do not speak in such a way about the Deccan. It is dear to me and I have work to do there."

So to the South the Guru went according to his previous plan. Bahadar Shah accompanied him. Sometimes the Guru and Bahadar Shah marched together but occasionally they moved separately keeping contact through letters and couriers.

In September 1708, Guru Gobind Singh reached Nanded where he met a Yogi of the Ogharnath cult named Madho Das who tried to overpower the Guru with his occult powers. But all his powers now failed and his own mind was overwhelmed. When baptised as the Khalsa, he came to be known as Banda Singh. Guru Gobind Singh had received news about the oppression and cruelty perpetuated by Nawab Wazir Khan of Sirhind and sent Banda along with some of his leading and experienced apostles to Punjab protect the poor and punish the evil ones.

At Nanded, Guru Gobind Singh established his fourth Pontific Capital, now known as *Takhat Hazur Sahib*, which he expected to be the major Centre of Sikh Faith in southern India. On 18 September, a young Pathan Jamsaid Khan, presented himself with some special credentials in the congregation of Guru Gobind Singh. Either his parents were known to Guruji or he bore a special message from some eminent Muslim friend of Guru Gobind Singh, and was shown all respect generally shown to the messengers of prominent personalities. According to the custom of Royal Darbar, he was given five gold coins for his service.

On the day of his arrival, Jamsaid Khan showed great respect and reverence for Guruji and no one was in the least suspicious about his real motives. Because of the special audience given to him and the intimacy with which he spoke to Guru Gobind Singh, he began to be treated as a special visitor whom Guruji had permitted to freely move about.

However, on 20 September 1708, just when the congregation had dispersed, this Pathan went unchecked into the Guru's retiring room, bowed reverently before the Guru showing his intention to depart. Guruji blessed him and was about to move away when the man bowed for a second time but with the sole intention of striking his long contemplated treacherous blow. Guruji parried the first attack by stepping aside. By the time Guruji unsheathed

his *kirpan*, the Pathan had struck the second blow, followed in quick succession by a third. Guru Gobind Singh quickly despatched the Pathan with a fatal blow but was himself seriously wounded. The wound was cleaned and bandaged and the Emperor's surgeons were sent for. The Royal surgeons, one of whom was an Englishman, stitched the wound with great efficiency and skill. After fifteen days, the wound was completely healed.

However, on 6 October 1708, Guru Gobind Singh announced his intention of leaving the world. He then placed five pice and a coconut before the *Adi Granth* and crowned it as the Eternal Guru of the Khalsa Panth, to perform all duties which physical personality of the Guru necessitated. On 7th October, hymns were sung and food was distributed to all visitors all day, by night fall Guruji breathed his last after delivering his last sermon.

When Bahadar Shah came to know about passing of the Guru he sent a *Matmi Khilat* (robe of reverence). When his ministers suggested that Guru Gobind Singh's property which was considerable value should be confiscated, the Emperor remarked, "Guru Gobind Singh was a *darvesh* and did not want any of his goods."

The Wondrous life

In the just forty-two years of his epic life, Guru Gobind Singh's literary, philosophical and military genius was truly wondrous. He established a unique philosophy of life, in war and peace, which can teach our troubled world the art of creating unity in diversity, establishing peace through preparedness and tolerance and building a human society able to understand its past and present, through the eternal values of truth, freedom and justice. Some writers have tried to interpret the entire Sikh Movement as a provincial Punjabi one and the Gurus as Punjabi reformers. This is perhaps an attempt to project some present day narrow views on the super national thoughts of the Gurus, than any serious attempt to explain them. Guru Gobind Singh never wrote anything in his monumental works, and never performed a single act which was provincial in outlook. Of the three *takhats* (Pontific Seats of Authority) which he created, one was in the Punjab and two were in other provinces. Three of the five beloved *Panj Pyararas* were non-Panjabis. Baba Banda, the military commander after him was a Kashmiri. From the Guru's followers in Dacca, Chittagong and Assam

came his war elephants, shields and weapons sent by his Bengali and Assamese disciples. Guru Gobind Singh had called Bengal as 'his spiritual homeland'. His battles and fights for freedom had national significance. We find the words 'Hindustan and Hindustani' in the writings of the Gurus, and not 'Punjab or Punjabis'. This has significance for our national and international aspirations.

One Lord Made Then All

Centuries later, when Dr. S. Radhakrishnan met J. Stalin, the Russian dictator, he asked the Indian philosopher "How will you bridge the wide gulf between the capitalists and poverty-stricken masses in India?" Dr Radhakrishnan answered, "The way Guru Gobind Singh bridged the wide gulf between the Hindus and Muslims."

Guru Gobind Singh's noble role in Indian history, was then quoted :

*The Hindus and the Muslims are all one,
Have each the habits of different environments
All men have the same eyes, the same body,
The same form compounded of the same four elements
Earth, air, fire and water
The Abhekh (formless) of the Hindus and the Allah of
Muslims
The Koran and the Puranas praise the same Lord
They are all one in spirit
The one Lord made them all.*

Akal Ustat 86-116

Images used in this article and the cover were first published in *Nishaan I/2014* as a part of a photo essay entitled 'Mera Gobind', by artist Anup Chitrak. His creations are born out of a deep spiritual pursuit and he paints with faith and inspiration. The medium, colours, canvas are merely a means to an end. Inspired by the Sikh faith, the novelty of 'Mera Gobind' lies in the unique subject, dedicated exclusively to the Tenth Sikh Guru, Guru Gobind Singh ji. 'Mera Gobind' was Gurgaon-based artist AS Chitrak's labour of love, based on five years of exclusive dedication to the subject. Following extensive research of the Granth Sahib and tomes on the Guru, besides submerging into the renditions from the Gurbani at dawn, the artist has produced huge canvases brought alive by rich colours portraying the life of Guru Gobind Singh, the Tenth Master.

The Heritage of Guru Gobind Singh



The painting depicts Guru Gobind Singhji in all his regal glory on his famed 'blue' horse which inspired the title 'The One with the Blue Horse'.

Professor Harban Singh's illustrious and accomplished daughter, Nikki Guninder Kaur, is Crawford Professor of Religious Studies at Colby College at Maine in the USA. She has written a befitting Introduction to her father's book 'Guru Gobind Singh'. First published at the 300th birth centennial of the Tenth Master in 1966, she writes: 'Professor Harbans Singh undertook the writing of the Guru's biography, which provides readers with kaleidoscopic facets of Guru Gobind Singh's boundless humanity and divinity. In order to reach a wide audience, Professor Harbans Singh wrote an accessible book in whose pages we intimately get to see the Guru with his resplendent plume astride his royal-blue stallion, hear his valiant melodies, feel his intense spirituality, absorb his egalitarian ideals, value his arduous battles and recognise his vast metaphysical world view...Through his erudite scholarship and literary sophistication, Professor Harbans Singh has succeeded splendidly in offering a balanced, authentic and inspiring account of the great religious figure of all times. Full attention is given to traditional and scriptural evidence, along with contemporary research. The symbiosis of the historian's objectivity and the devotee's subjectivity is ever alive in Professor Harbans Singh's writing.'

Reproduced here are the first two chapters from this wonderful book, 'Guru Gobind Singh'.

Guru Gobind Singh is nearer to our times than any other of the world's religious teachers and prophets. Not much myth has accumulated around him during the 350 years which part him from our generation. For this reason, he is a better-known historical entity. While this brings deserved attention to his work in the perspective of time and space, the universal nature of his teaching is sometimes not fully comprehended. No image of Guru 'Gobind Singh will be complete without reference to his spiritual revelation.

In his autobiographical account, *Bachitra Natak* ('The Marvellous Play'), the Guru says that, before he started his earthly journey, his unembodied spirit rejoiced in ethereal bliss. As a result of the devotions practised in an earlier life in the snow-washed solitude of the seven-peaked mountain of Hemkunt, he was able to end duality and had attained identity with the Absolute, dispensing with the necessity of being born again. When the Lord, in His Will, commissioned him to come into the world, he was unwilling to depart the divine presence. Says he:

*Then my wish was not at all to come away,
For my mind was fastened on the feet of the Lord Almighty.
But He made known to me His desire.
Thus spoke the Lord:
I bless thee as My son,
And appoint thee to extend the community.
Go and spread dharma,
And restrain the world from waywardness.*

This is a direct and personal attestation of his prophethood. It is, equally, a testament of theistical values. That God is a reality is clearly witnessed.

It is further testified that those who love Him, find Him. Attainable through surrender to His Will and through His grace is complete absorption with the Reality. Also authenticated in the *Bachitra Natak* is the divine descent. The son of God came into the world in fulfilment of ordained purpose—to affirm faith and turn the world from error.

Yet Guru Gobind Singh never claimed divinity for himself. To quote again from the *Bachitra Natak*:

*Whoever calls me the Supreme Being
Shall suffer in hell.
Recognise me as
God's servant only: Have no doubt whatsoever about this.*

He pronounced a curse upon those who should denominate anyone in human form as God. His sovereign pleasure was in being his servant - an instrument for proclaiming His will to the world. He would, he declared, speak unto men as He spoke to him, and not remain silent through any fear of mortals. Nor would he differentiate between man and man on the basis of race or religion. On the equality of men, he always spoke explicitly and emphatically.

In his *Akal Ustat* ('In Praise of the Timeless'), he said:

*There are Hindus and there are Muslims,
and their many sects.
But recognise all mankind as one.
The Lord is the Creator of all, Lord the Beneficent, the Bountiful, and the Merciful.
Know no other besides Him!
Worship the One God,
For all men the One Divine Teacher.
All men have the same form,
All men have the same light!*

Two hundred years before him, Guru Nanak (1469-1539), founder of the Sikh religion, had preached a similar gospel of love and faith. His simple monotheistic creed supported by a set of humanitarian principles of conduct and presented with an artless humility and conviction of which he alone was capable, made a deep impact on India hollowed by conquest and heavily ritualised religious observances. During his lifetime, Guru Nanak had won a large number of adherents to his teaching. This was the beginning of a new religious fellowship which, in course of time, developed the characteristics of a well-defined community. Guru Gobind Singh wrote in the *Bachitra Natak*, "Guru Nanak established this faith in the Kaliyug and indicated the way to holy men. Sin never troubles those who take to His path." Guru Nanak's commission came to Guru Gobind Singh through a succession of Gurus, or Prophet-teachers.

What were the essential ingredients of this inheritance? The message of Guru Nanak provided the central tenet. Hinduism and Islam, contestants on the Indian soil for nearly five centuries, found in it a point of concordance. Guru Nanak's mission, sharing some of its teachings with both, had its own transcendent and dynamic character. Its chief doctrine was "the unity of God, brotherhood of man, rejection of caste and the futility of idol worship." He undertook long journeys to spread his message. From the high Himalayas in the north to Ceylon (now Sri Lanka) in the south and from Assam in the east to Mecca and Baghdad in the west, he travelled arduously accompanied by a Muslim companion, Mardana. His simplicity of manner and the universality of his teaching appealed to the hearts of men. A new way of life opened before those who accepted him as their teacher. The repudiation of caste and ritualism was the first distinguishing mark of the newly developing order. Its members now partook of a living faith which led to the crystallisation of true religious spirit and produced a more enthusiastic and vigorous approach to life.

Guru Nanak anticipated the future trends of the evolution of the Sikh movement. Characteristic from this point of view was his criticism of the social reality of his time. Equally meaningful was his reaction to Babar's invasion of India. His heart was deeply anguished and he described the sorrows of Indians, Hindus and Muslims alike, in accents of intense power and suffering. His poems, preserved in the Guru Granth, the Sikh scripture, are charged with such

intense passion. The literature of that period records no more vehement protest against the foreign invading hordes. Said Guru Nanak:

*Leading the wedding-array of sin,
He [Babar] has descended from Kabul
And demands by force the bride, O Lalo.
Gone are the days of Qadis and Brahmans,
Satan himself reads the marriage services, O Lalo.*

*The Muslim women recite the Qur'an
And in distress remember their God O Lalo.
Similar is the fate of Hindu women,
Of castes high and low, O Lalo.*

And again:

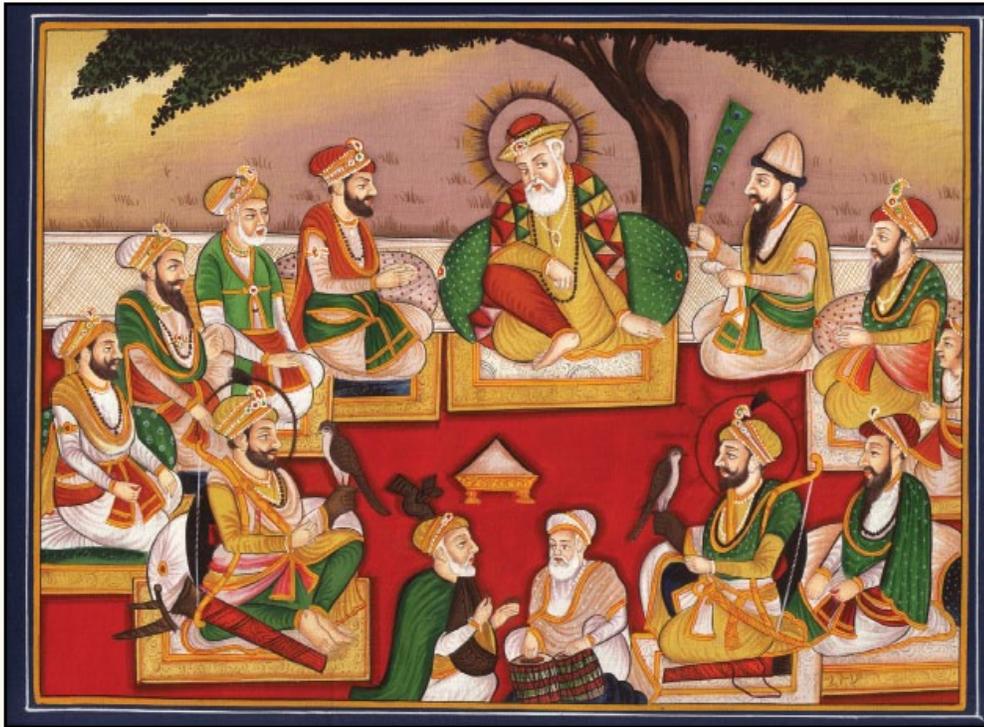
*God took Khurasan under his wing,
But surrendered India to the invader's wrath.
The Creator takes no blame unto Himself;
It was Death, disguised as the Mughal,
That made war on us.
When there was such slaughter, such groaning,
Didst not Thou, O God, feel pity?
Creator, Thou art the same for all!*

Spiritual Inheritors

Guru Nanak appointed one of his followers, Lahina, as his spiritual inheritor. The latter had so truly imbibed the spirit of Guru Nanak's teachings and impressed everyone so greatly by his piety and nobility of character that the Guru chose him as his successor in preference to his own sons. He embraced him and called him 'Angad,' part and parcel of his own being.

Guru Angad (1504-52) carried forward the work of his predecessor and had the latter's hymns as well as his life-stories written in the Gurmukhi script. This was the beginning of religious literature of the Sikhs. Guru Angad strengthened the institution of Guru-ka-Langar, or community meal for which people sat to eat together, forgetting the distinctions of caste. This served as an instrument of a far-reaching social revolution.

Guru Amar Das (1479-1574) contributed to the growth of Sikh organisation by establishing twenty-two *manjis* (dioceses) covering several parts of India and sought the amelioration of the position of women by deprecating the customs of purdah (veil) and sati (immolation of a widow on the funeral pyre of her husband). The Fourth Guru, Ram Das (1534-81), founded the town of Amritsar which then became the principal seat of Sikhism.



Guru Nanak and the nine successive Gurus

Guru Arjan, Nanak V (1563-1606), was the first martyr of the Sikh faith. He was tortured to death for his religious conviction under the orders of Jahangir. His example generated a new impulse for calm suffering and sacrifice which runs undiluted throughout the course of Sikh history, ennobling and animating a great many of its pages. He also gave Sikhism its scripture, the Holy Granth, and a central place of worship, the Harimandir at Amritsar.

His son, Guru Hargobind (1595-1644) taught the use of arms. Seeing how peaceful resistance to oppression had proved abortive, he recognised recourse to the sword as a lawful alternative. Although, no armed conflict took place during the tenure of his successor, Guru Har Rai (1630-61), the discipline that the Sikh order had developed was maintained. The Guru kept royal court, with 2,200 horses in attendance. This in no way impeded his spiritual office which was carried out, consistent with the tradition established by Guru Nanak. In fact, the acquisition of armed strength to repel tyranny and injustice was considered a legitimate religious duty. Sikhism developed this characteristic in the normal course of evolution under the impact of prevailing circumstances.

Guru Har Krishan (1656-64) was a small boy when he assumed the responsibility for leadership and held

Bahadur (1621-75), father of Guru Gobind Singh. The Sikh character and organisation had been moulded by nine successive teachers, each emphasising a particular lesson truly exemplified in his own life, or contributing a new national trait rehearsed under the stress of changing times and environment. It was this rarefied and evolved heritage which Guru Gobind Singh came into when he ascended the throne of Guru Nanak.

The Sikhs have always believed that all the Gurus shared the same light and had the same message to impart. They were anointed beings each transferring his light to his successor and delivering to him the holy commission he had inherited. On this, again, the testimony of the *Bachitra Natak* is categorical. Guru Gobind Singh wrote: "Nanak assumed the body of Angad. ...Afterwards, Nanak was called Amar Das, as one lamp is lit from another...The holy Nanak was revered as Angad. Angad was recognized as Amar Das. And Amar Das became Ram Das... When Ram Das was blended with God, he gave the Guruship to Arjan. Arjan appointed Hargobind in his place and Hargobind gave his seat to Har Rai. Har Krishan, his son, then became Guru. After him came Tegh Bahadur."

[Prof. Harbans Singh's next chapter is on the child Gobind's 'Childhood in Patna']

the charge for a bare three years. Nevertheless, he acted with circumspection and sagacity. What intuitive judgement he brought to the conduct of the community's affairs is evident from his choice of Tegh Bahadur as his successor whom he was able to mention but allusively from his sick bed just before he died. He ignored several near relations in choosing Tegh Bahadur, who, though the least desirable of them all, proved to be the most deserving of the honour.

The line of prophetic succession thus came down to Guru Tegh

Childhood at Patna



When Guru Tegh Bahadur returned to Patna from Assam in 1670, his son Gobind Rai was three and half years old. In this painting, father and son meet for the first time, flanked by Mata Gujri, Gobind Singhji's mother and maternal uncle Kirpal Chand, who experienced spiritual joy at this sweet re-union. The house at Patna in which Gobind Rai was born and where he spent his early childhood is exactly where Sri Patna Sahib Gurdwara is located today.

Guru Tegh Bahadur, Nanak IX, had assumed the hallowed place at a time when the temporal authority in India had passed into the hands of Emperor Aurangzeb. Aurangzeb seized the throne of Delhi expelling his own father, Shah Jahan, who

was held captive in the Fort of Agra. His first few years as Emperor were occupied in consolidating his position, vanquishing his enemies and putting out of his way his brothers one by one. Yet that tour of Guru Tegh Bahadur undertaken in pursuit of his

holy mission did not go unnoticed. Accompanied by his family and some of his devoted Sikhs, he was journeying down from Punjab visiting the Sikh sangats and proclaiming the message of Guru Nanak. As he was passing through the country near Delhi, reports were made to the Emperor, who distrustful of any collective activity, ordered his arrest. Guru Tegh Bahadur was put under restraint and released only on the intercession of a courtier, Kanwar Ram Singh, son of Mirza Raj a Jai Singh of Jaipur, whose family had revered the House of Guru Nanak since the time of Guru Hargobind.

Free to resume his travels, Guru Tegh Bahadur proceeded to the east and visited cities such as Allahabad, Varanasi and Gaya, until he reached Patna. His family could travel no farther. Leaving his wife in the care of her brother, Kirpal Chand and his own mother, Guru Tegh Bahadur continued his eastward journey to Assam to places made sacred by the visits of Guru Nanak and to meet his Sikhs.

The ancient city of Patna, which, under the name of Pataliputra, had been the capital of an old Indian kingdom and had remained the chief city of the land for a thousand years, was yet waiting for its moment of crowning glory and blessedness. The place had been sanctified centuries before by the visit of Lord Buddha who had, it is said, come to reprove the founder, King Ajatasatru, for a sin he had committed.

On 22 December 1666, a light appeared in one of its simple homes. On that propitious day, Guru Gobind Singh was born to Mata Gujari, wife of Guru Tegh Bahadur. Patna was touched with eternal holiness. Great rejoicing took place at Patna, and, when the happy tidings reached there, at Monghyr, on the Ganga, where Guru Tegh Bahadur then happened to be, a number of his followers and admirers from all over India made a pilgrimage to Patna. Among the very first to arrive was a Muslim *faqir* who, seeing the child, declared him to be a divine being.

In the village of Ghuram, in Punjab, another Muslim saint of much repute and piety, Pir Bhikhan Shah, on the day of Guru Gobind Singh's birth, made obeisance to the east instead of to the west. At this his disciples demurred, for no Muslim should make such respectful gestures except towards the Ka'baa. The Pir explained that in a city in the east, the Beneficent Lord had revealed Himself through a new-born babe. He had so paid homage to the Merciful Lord Himself and to no ordinary mortal.

Gobind Das, Servant of the Lord, was the name given to the child who became the object of wonder and adoration for many in Patna. In his handsome face haloed by joyous innocence they read the secret of eternity. Patna itself had been reborn: it was never to be the old city again. Its air was intoxicated with the presence of such lovable a being.

Patna's streets echoed with the prattle and mirth of Gobind Singh as he grew up and started ransacking the place with a group of playmates. His most favourite sport was to divide his companions into two sections and then enact sham fights. He was always the leader in such games. His toys were imitation bows and arrows and his greatest pleasure consisted in leading his companions through mock-manoeuvres and, then, feast them lavishly in his home at the end of a good day's play. Both his mother and grandmother were greatly delighted to see and entertain his playmates. They gave them sweets and pronounced countless benedictions for them. They rejoiced to see Gobind Singh grow up and were always inwardly praying to Akal to be his protector and keep him away from any harm. As a rule, he overstayed his playtime and returned home late. This delayed recitation of the *Rahiras*, the evening prayer. By custom, the *Rahiras* in the Patna Sahib Gurdwara is still read after the usual canonical hour.

Another sport that Gobind Singh loved was to play tricks on Patna housewives and maidens and target their earthen pitchers with bow-pellets. Not infrequently, complaints were made to Mata Gujari. Who can say the victims did not entirely enjoy the fun or that the mother resented having to pacify them and replace the broken earthenware?

For many, just a glimpse of the innocent face of the child was a matter of joy. Pandit Shivadat, a revered old Brahman, deeply learned in ancient lore, discovered in it the culmination of a lifetime's quest. He had renounced an aristocratic home in search of inward peace. He turned a devotee, worshipped his chosen idol and practised many austerities. In the city of Patna he was regarded with much esteem for his pious and devout character. Yet he felt he had not found what he had been seeking. There was a sense of emptiness in his heart and he still seemed to be groping for the path until he happened one day to set his eyes on young Gobind. A new realisation burst forth in his consciousness. He felt he had come

to his journey's end. His one desire now was to permanently treasure the gladness that had been conferred on him. This face was now the focus of his meditations and in it he perceived the visions of the deities he had long adored.

Some days later, as Pandit Shivadat sat in contemplation on the banks of the Ganga, his heart filled with his new-found joy, two visitors came to seek of him a favour. They were Raja Fateh Chand Maini and his wife Vishwambhara, popularly known as Rani Maini, who had known him for many years. They had everything that worldly means could procure, but remained childless. This caused them much unhappiness. A son was needed in the family not only to inherit their property, but also to perform the prescribed rites at the time of their decease to ensure their passage across the regions of the after world. Pandit Shivadat understood the object of their visit and told them that what they sought was within the gift of the heavenly child who dwelt in their own city. He advised them to open their hearts to him.

Raja Fateh Chand and his wife now had a new object of worship. Their love and yearning grew day by day. Once, as the Rani sat in the courtyard absorbed in her reverie, the young Gobind, out on one of his expeditions with his playmates, entered through the gate tiptoe and, twining his arms around her neck, gently called out, "Mother". The word fell like a sweet melody on her ears and her heart was thrilled. She opened her eyes and was dazed to see Gobind Singh standing in front of her. The miracle she and her husband had been praying for had happened. Both of them were overwhelmed with joy and gratitude. Their craving for a son was ended, and they started spending most of their time in meditation and prayer. Their house became the centre of a Sikh congregation. It has been so since then and is today one of the historic Gurdwaras of Patna.

Reaching home, Gobind Singh announced that he had found a second mother. "Then, how will one son play on two laps?" questioned Mata Gujari. "Just as one moon plays simultaneously in two pools," said Gobind Singh.

Several such stories of Guru Gobind Singh's childhood are narrated in an old Sikh text, *Sri Gur Pratap Suraj Granth*. Here is another. There lived a proud Nawab in Patna. He was the local chief

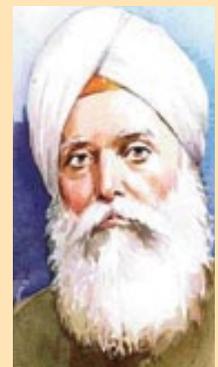
appointed by the King of Delhi himself. Whenever he rode through the town, he expected every passerby to salute him. Seated upon his elephant, he came one day into the street where young Gobind used to play with his friends. The children were attracted by the elephant's jingle bells and collected around the animal out of curiosity. The elephant was caparisoned in velvet and bore costly rings on his tusks. A crowd of people stood respectfully bowing to the Nawab. One of his lackeys turned towards the boys and admonished them to do homage to the Nawab by raising their hands to their foreheads. When Gobind Singh heard this, he said to his band of companions: "Tease and offend the Turk. Grin and grimace at him. He is so haughty." All the children merrily joined in the fun. Much was the Nawab's bafflement and annoyance. But his mahout soothed his anger saying, "They are children, sir. They speak out what comes to their lips. They are too innocent to distinguish between the high and the low."

Among the many admirers of Gobind Singh in Patna were two Muslim nobles, Rahim Bakhsh and Karim Bakhsh. They were so much impressed by the piety he radiated that they made to him an offering of two gardens and some land. This property now belongs to the Sikh Gurdwara at Patna and known as Guru-ka-Bagh.

In the midst of this childhood ministry and merriment, Gobind Singh used to long sometimes for the company of his father Guru Tegh Bahadur, whom he had seen but once when he had stopped over at Patna on his way back from Assam. Great was his joy when the word finally arrived for the family to return to the Punjab.

Professor Harbans Singh

Professor Harbans Singh was an educationist, administrator, scholar and Editor-in-Chief of the 'Encyclopaedia of Sikhism'. He was respected for his contributions to Sikh scholarship and Punjabi literary studies and had a vital and pervasive influence in the field of religious studies, with special reference on Sikhism.



The Miracle at Vaisakhi



Guru Gobind Singh wanted to make the peoples of India strong. By administering baptism, the Guru fired a new spirit into their souls, Revolutionised their life by organising them into A strong regimented force so that they could live With dignity and self-respect and free the country from foreign yoke."

– Sir Gokal Chand Narang,
In Transformation of Sikhism

While astride his blue charger, Neeli, his regal plume setting off his wiry and commanding figure, with the knightly body of devoted and daring Sikhs following him, or in the jungles of Machhiwara, in tattered clothes, barefoot and forlorn, the Tenth Guru's mind was always constantly in harmony with the Akal Purkh, the Greater, never losing his qualities of love and compassion in any situation nor ever giving way to despair.

It is impossible to imagine a genius so comprehensive and versatile, a human being so unique and remarkable as Guru Gobind Singh, whose every action and move in his short but glorious life of 42 years on this planet was astounding and of unparalleled achievement.

Over three centuries ago, Guru Gobind Singh, the Tenth Nanak of the Sikhs, selected "five beloved ones" (*Panj Pyare*) from among over 50,000 Sikhs gathered at Anandpur after testing their mettle through a unique display of dignity, sacrifice and courage.

Baptism of the Khalsa

On that first day of Vaisakh on 30 March 1699, Guru Gobind Singh arranged a congregation of some 80,000 Sikhs at what is today Gurdwara Keshgarh Sahib in Anandpur Sahib to celebrate the festival of Vaisakhi. A huge tent had been pitched on one side.

returned after a few moments with blood dripping from his naked sword, which sent shivers in the congregation. As he demanded the head of another Sikh and again for the third time, the head of another Sikh, many in the congregation had slipped away.



(Gurdwara Keshgarh Sahib, Anandpur Sahib)

Guru ji came out of the tent with an unsheathed Kirpan in his hand and asked the congregation. "Who am I?" the Sangat in the congregation replied, "You are our Guru". Then he asked, "Who are you?" "We are your Sikhs" came the resounding reply !

"I am going to demand something from you, today." "*Hukam Karo Sache Patshah*" (Please order us, True king)

Guru Gobind Singh stated, "I need your sacrifice. Is there a Sikh who can give his head to his Guru." There was complete silence. He called for a head again and when He called for the third time, Bhai Daya Ram stood up. Holding him by the hand Guru took him along into the tent. The sound of a powerful stroke of sword was heard and Guru ji

The Guru called for the head of a Sikh five times and after final act, Guru Gobind Singh came out of the tent along with his Five Beloved Sikhs adoring a new *baanaa* (attire) of *cholas*, which were loose shirts up to knees, turbans and blue waist bands.

The Amrit Ceremony

The ceremony of baptism was simple. In an iron bowl, Guruji stirred water with a two-edged sword, *Khanda*, while reciting Banis from the Granth Sahib. Mata Sahib Kaur had mixed *patashas* (sugar candies) into the bowl to sweeten the elixir. Guruji recited a new slogan in his resonant voice, which has since become the universal rallying cry and greetings of the Sikhs:

“Wahe Guru ji Ka Khalsa Wahe Guru ji ki Fateh”

(Khalsa Belongs To God Final Victory Belongs to God)

According to Prof Puran Singh, the essence of democratic (and socialist and casteless) foundations of Sikh faith was exemplified by the composition of the first five beloved ones, Panj Pyaras, three of whom were from the so-called lower castes in the society. They were Bhai Daya Singh, a Kashatriya (Khatra) from Lahore, Bhai Dharam Singh, a farmer (Jaat) from Hastnapur, Delhi, Bhai Himmat Singh, a washerman (low caste) from Nath Puri, Odissa, **Bhai Mohkam Singh**, a cook (low caste) from Dwarka in Gujarat and Bhai Sahib Singh, a sweeper or Shudra, (the lowest caste) from Bidar in the Deccan.

These five beloved ones were ‘baptised’ by drinking **Amrit** (sacred water) from the same bowl and were bestowed with five **Kakkars** (symbols).

The Five Beloved ones were knit into a unique brotherhood or community of spiritually charged equals, ready to do God’s bidding. This historic happening was the harbinger of a new era of social and political awakening among the consciousness of world social and political thinkers on the need to enact measures to bring all men to an equal level, socially and legally throughout the world.

“Pancho mein Parmeshwer Boley” stated Guru Gobind Singh

Having administered *Khande ki Paol* to the five beloved ones, Guru Gobind Singh, then knelt down and asked the chosen five, the Panj Pyaras, the Khalsa, with folded hands and in all humility, to elevate him to their level: brotherhood of the Khalsa. The Guru was administered Amrit and he received baptism from the five beloved ones in the same manner in which he had baptised them some moments earlier.

This was unprecedented in the annals of world history when a leader and spiritual teacher had begged his disciples to admit him into their exalted brotherhood so making him equal to them.

This revolutionary ceremony electrified the peoples of northern India. Discrimination on account of high caste and low caste were replaced by the spirit of unity, commonwealth and co-operation. This single action, magic touch of the Great Guru Gobind

Singh, is described by the well-known Sikh scholar, Bhai Gurdas:

*“Weh Pargatyo Mard Ugambara Waryam Akela
Waho Waho Gobind Singh Ape Gur Chela”*

(Thus rose a Hero unique, the Warrior exalted,
Hail Gobind Singh, both Leader and Disciple)

According to Principal Teja Singh, the well-known scholar, some 80,000 people took the baptism of Amrit to join the brotherhood of gallant, noble and patriotic warriors, the ‘Khalsa’, fired with the spirit and coming up to the Guru’s expectations:

*Shall make each to fight one lakh and quarter
And only then shall I be known as Gobind Singh*

Sir Gokal Chand Narang has written in his book, *Transformation of Sikhism* that “men who had never touched the sword or shouldered a gun became heroes overnight. Confectioners, washer men, sweepers and barbers all became leaders of warriors before whom the Rajas quailed and Nawabs cowered with terror.” Guru Gobind Singh, through this baptism, had poured his life into the Sikhs and invested them with his own personality.

As further enunciated by Narang, the five symbols, being long hair (*Kesha*), comb (*Kangha*), pair of shorts (*Kachha*), iron bracelet (*Kara*) which the Guru ordained his followers, the Khalsa, to always wear on their person, were identical with what Bhim’s army used to wear in ancient times. Trivikaram Bhat in his Sanskrit novel, *Nala Champa* records that: “It was an amazing coincidence that Guru Gobind Singh prescribed a similar uniform for his followers.”

Narang is of the opinion that Guru Gobind Singh wanted to make the peoples of India resolute. By administering baptism, the Guru fired a new spirit into their souls, revolutionised their life by making them into a strong regimented force so that they could live with dignity and self-respect and freedom. This new order would enable them to face any threats be it from oppressors.

“Guru Gobind Singh appealed to his followers to regard the sword as their mainstay in the world. The country of the enemy, whether oppression of the Mughals or the treacherous Hill Rajas, lay open to their enterprise and the sword would carve the way to power, prosperity, national honour and independence,” further elaborates Narang.

“Guru Gobind Singh”, according to historian Mohammad Latif, “was great as a person, greater as a soldier and as philosopher second to none. He was a disciplined administrator of the world class, a True King when seated on the throne. A matchless poet among the assembly of eminent scholars, a mighty soldier on the battle field and a saintly humble person in the company of the Khalsa.”

Sikhs have been ordained to maintain the five symbols (*Kakkars*) at the time of baptism with Amrit. As per *Gurmat Martand*, Guru Gobind Singh laid down rules for training in the martial arts, taking up arms for self-defence as also for defence of the nation.

Various treatises have emphasised the adoption of the five ‘Ks’: We come across the following about the *Kangha* in *Tankhah Nama*.

“Tie the *Pagri* (turban) after combing hair each morning and evening. Bhai Daya Singh, one of the five beloved ones of Guru Gobind Singh instructed that the *Kesha* should be washed every fourth day, *Kangha* (comb) a must for keeping one’s hair neat and clean.”

According to *Gurmat Martand*, the maintenance of *Kesha* is of utmost importance. Here it would be relevant to cite a tale from Page 228 (Judges 16) from the *Bible* containing old and new testaments, which emphasises that unshorn hair is a source of unusual strength. (The Old Testament).

RK Mukherjee in his book *Ancient India* has that, “Women and men of Rig Vedic times used to sport unshorn hair. A comb was used for cleaning the hair and oil was applied to hair. Ladies used to weave hair into plaits and men coiled them into buns.”

Gur Pratap Soorya records that Guru Gobind Singh blessed his followers with the iron bracelet (*Kara*). As regards the sword (*Kirpan*), Guru Gobind Singh himself clarified in his epistle *Zafarnama*, sent to Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb. The Tenth Guru justified the use of force to fight oppression, tyranny and cruelty.

Principal Teja Singh in his book on *Sikhism* (1983) has written: “Wearing shorts ensured briskness of movement at times of action and served as an easy garment at times of rest, an iron ring on the right arm as a sign of sternness and constraint and a sword by his side as an instrument of defence, an emblem of power and dignity. The Guru created a simple but extremely disciplined warrior.

The Khalsa, who is considered the Akal Purakh ki Fauj (God’s Army), combined the saintliness of the old *rishis* with the sternness and strength of a knight. Thus,

like his predecessors, he kept his hair long, which the world over has been associated with saintliness or intellectual pursuits. A comb was a necessity for keeping hair clean and tidy. These were the forms, which were essential for the Sikhs at the time of baptism.”

According to Professor Teja Singh, “It is quite evident from the history of the Sikhs in the past, and in the present, how effectively these baptism forms with the accompanying vows have steeled them in unity and kept their ideals unsullied even in times of great trials”

According to historian Joseph Davey Cunningham, “Guru (Gobind Singh) was a philosopher and he understood fully how the imagination of men could be sharpened.” He thoroughly realised the hypnotic power of external forms and symbols and knew what inspiration men often received from a change in their outward appearance. This is the secret of the power of pledges and vows, of penances and austerities.”

Significance of this baptism by Guru Gobind Singh was to induce an electrifying force, introduced with certain other ordinance by which the Sikhs stood out as the chosen of the Lord with a mission to fulfill in the world. He made it a rule that all Sikhs should abstain from intoxicants and should always wear a turban, besides maintaining the five symbols.

Guru Gobind Singh prescribed five symbols for his followers because by keeping them always on their person and maintaining them correctly during daily routine would invest in them a new measure of courage, saintly conduct, disciplined and organised life.

Concerning the purity and uniqueness of the Khalsa, Albert Toynbee, author of 20-volume *History of Mankind* said, “Guru Gobind Singh was a great person and it would be difficult to find a purer person than Gobind Singh’s Khalsa.” The essential object of Guru Gobind Singh was to revive and rejuvenate the peoples of India so that they could defend the country’s honour and sovereignty.

Prof. Parmindar Singh

Chairman, Gurmat Prachar Trust, New Delhi

Birth of the Khalsa

*Suddenly on the royal platform
Stood a figure, luminous
In youth, strength and splendour.
His eyes blew divine flame,
A halo surrounded his head.
In his upraised arm, a sharp sword
Belching fire, terrible to behold;
Like a horde of lions immobilised
Before a magician from above,
Seeing him, the numberless men
Fell silent, and bowed their head.*

*Heralded by the flashing sword,
The Son of God opened his lips,
To unveil his inmost thoughts,
And volcanic words erupted:
I wish to plunge this sword
Into the heart of man;
Dharma thirsts for sacrificial blood.*

*A hero issued out and said,
Gem of Gurus! I shall die by Sword,
To quench dharma's thirst,
Thy blessings! Accept my offering !
A Second hero advanced to meet
The challenge. Taking him inside
The Guru made the sacrifice.*

*This ordeal by Guru Gobind Singh
Was the origin of The Khalsa;
The Way of the Illuminated Select.*

*Like the Creator who out of five elements
Built the world, shining Khalsa too
Was founded with five warriors.
Dharma prospered, tyrant's might trembled.
Goddess Freedom smiled.
Vikrami: Seventeen Fifty-six, (1699 A.D.).
In the convened assembly sat
Guru Gobind Singh on regal throne,
A sight for gods.*

*A new life began for Bharat.
The disciples all took dikhsa
A sign of consecration.
And the Guru said: "Dear Ones,
Nectar is the dikhsa you have taken.
You are the strong ones with unshorn head."*

*The pledge of the iron band,
The austere undergarment and the sword,
No king for you. God is your King.
The Rule of Divine Law is the only Law,
The wrong doing your enemy.*

*Guru Gobind Singh's flag fluttered,
High above: the world rejoiced.
The beginning of the end
Of Aurangzeb's tyrannous reign.*

*Poem by Subramaniam Bharati
(Translated by Dr Prema Nandakumar)*

The Epistle of Victory

Zafarnama

When all has been tried, yet justice is not in sight, It is then right to pick up the sword, It is then right to fight.”

Written in exquisite Persian verse, the Zafarnama was a defiant message composed by Guru Gobind Singh, the tenth Sikh Guru, following a series of fierce battles between the imperial forces and Sikh warriors and addressed to the Mughal emperor Aurangzeb. With wisdom and honesty, the Guru indicts the emperor for the moral and spiritual bankruptcy of his empire. These 111 stirring stanzas, which form the core of the Guru's spiritual philosophy, highlight his deep understanding of the true nature of God and His Creation.



The Evocative Translation

In Navtej Singh Sarna's evocative translation, the author brings to life the valiant voice of Guru Gobind Singh and the power of his poetic genius in a passionate disavowal of tyranny that remains ever relevant.

Depending on what a reader is seeking, Guru Gobind Singh's 111-canto, *Zafarnama*, has peels and peels of denotation and understanding to it. The Guru's valiant voice trussed with poetic brilliance can equally hold the interest of a bard with a throbbing heart and a soldier living only by the strength of his word and the sword. So it is to be expected that the book by the Tenth Guru of the Sikhs has been much feted by litterateurs over generations for its sheer versatility.

Author-diplomat Navtej Sarna joined this coterie by dint of his English translation of *Zafarnama*, published by Penguin India in 2011. As did his father, writer Mohinder Singh Sarna, many years ago, into Punjabi. Navtej's fascination, however, travels further. His is the hunger of a product of a largely anglicised education to discern his heritage, to hook up to the roots.

Some edited excerpts from an interview with Sangeeta Barooah Pisharoty:

When one looks at the subjects of your books, the dominant pattern is of Sikh history. Is it a way of discovering your roots?

It is true that three of my books have drawn from Sikh history. You could ascribe it to an abiding interest in one's own heritage and the fact that the relatively short history has a wealth of drama, struggle and adventure.

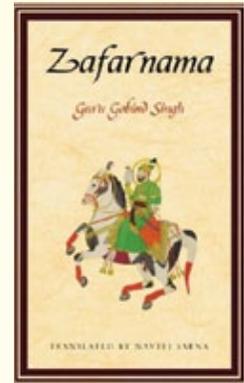
In your introduction, you have talked about the challenges of translating an 18th Century Persian text to present-day English. How did you tackle it finally?

I was fortunate that I did a course in Persian when I was posted in Tehran, and though that knowledge may be rusty today I would not have been able to dream of attempting this project without that background. It helped me know at least that I was on the right track.

Coming to the challenge of the text, one has to counter the distortions that can creep in when a Persian text is transcribed into Gurmukhi script. The historical bias of the copyists or the commentators adds further confusion. Then, of course, the divergence of Indo-Persian from classical Persian, of which I had to be particularly careful when depicting the Farsi version as well as the English transliteration in the book.

Zafarnama has been studied by litterateurs for generations. Did you take help from any of those works?

For the Introduction, I have relied largely on Harbans Singh's *Guru Gobind Singh*, JD Cunningham's *A History of the Sikhs*, Khushwant Singh's *A History of the Sikhs* and Patwant Singh's *The Sikhs*.



For the translation of the book, I relied on the Gurmukhi translation by Bhai Vir Singh and also consulted non-traditional translations of Christopher Shackle and Arvind-Pal Singh Mandair in their 'Teachings of the Sikh Gurus'. When lost, I would turn for guidance to the free translation of it by my father as part of his epic poem in Punjabi, 'Chamkaur'.

Zafarnama stresses on morality against the backdrop of war and mindless murders. How do you interpret this dichotomy?

The immediate context of the *Zafarnama* is the betrayal of an oath sworn on the holy book by the Mughal commanders. This is symptomatic of the lack of moral fibre not only in the conduct of war but also at the heart of governance in the Mughal Empire at that time. *Zafarnama* holds up an uncompromising mirror to Aurangzeb and at the same time spells out Guru Gobind Singh's vision of true God, eternal values, qualities of leadership, valour, honour and so on.

It is written from a moral high. That is why it is called *Zafarnama*, the epistle of victory, even when the Guru had lost men, family, home and hearth — everything of temporal value.

Besides being a work of verse, Zafarnama is also a celebration of fearlessness. What impression has this exercise of translation left on you?

It has been an exhilarating experience. I have revelled in the rhyme and cadence of its verses and the challenge of trying to find the equivalent in English.

Its fearless tone is uplifting. The moral strength behind this fearlessness symbolises the spirit that brought about a major spiritual renaissance, enabling ordinary men to die like heroes for freedom, for equality, for dignity.

[Navtej Singh Sarna's is presently India's Ambassador to the United States]

“The Path of Righteousnes”, described in
The Bachitar Natak



In this essay on the Bachitar Natak, Dr. Jasbir Singh Grewal elaborates on the Tenth Master’s life and how Guru Gobind Singh outlined the circumstance and history of the times, with infinite courage and strength to overcome the many challenges faced by the community.

Guru Gobind Singh’s *Bachitar Natak*, unique as an autobiography in the entire range of Hindi literature, is an incredible source of the Guru’s life before he instituted the Khalsa. This has been generally recognised; but what is not generally realised is that this autobiography also contains the most important

clues on the institution of the Khalsa. Most modern historians have tried to present the Order of Khalsa in terms of the personal or political motives of Guru Gobind Singh. They have looked at the events of his life from the outside and consequently, but have missed the essential psychological background to the most momentous event of his life. It must not be forgotten that in the *Bachitar Natak*, which was composed just a few years before the institution of the Khalsa, Guru Gobind Singh has presented *inter multa alia* a conception of his own mission which was soon to be adorned in the Order of the Khalsa.

Bachitar Natak begins with an invocation to God. 'I bow with love and devotion to the Holy Sword'. The Sword symbolises that power of God which is the destroyer of armies of the wicked, evil-doers and sinners. The same God turns men from blades of grass into mountains and is the cherisher of the poor and the good.

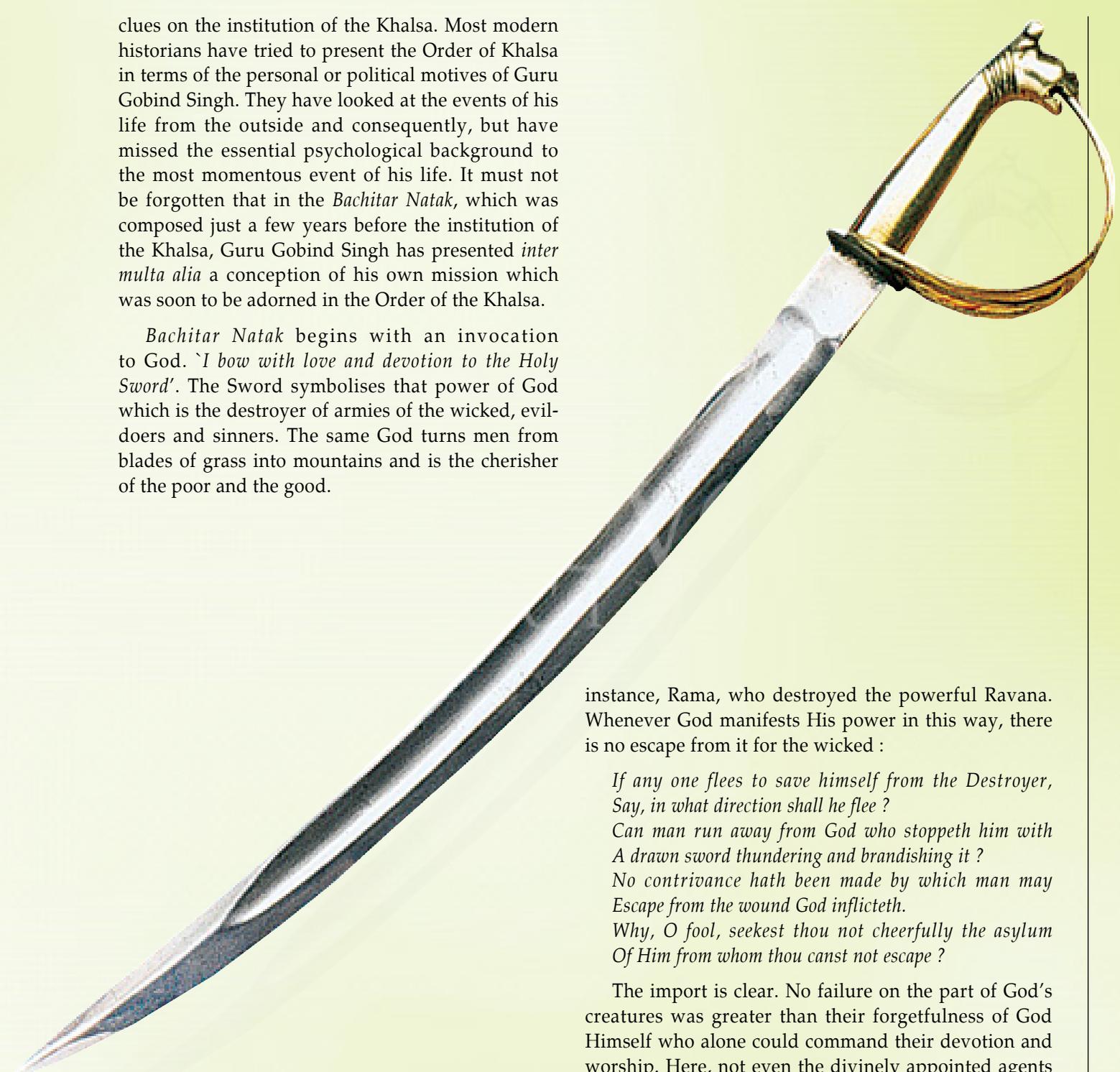
instance, Rama, who destroyed the powerful Ravana. Whenever God manifests His power in this way, there is no escape from it for the wicked :

*If any one flees to save himself from the Destroyer,
Say, in what direction shall he flee ?
Can man run away from God who stoppeth him with
A drawn sword thundering and brandishing it ?
No contrivance hath been made by which man may
Escape from the wound God inflicteth.
Why, O fool, seekest thou not cheerfully the asylum
Of Him from whom thou canst not escape ?*

The import is clear. No failure on the part of God's creatures was greater than their forgetfulness of God Himself who alone could command their devotion and worship. Here, not even the divinely appointed agents like Krishna, Rama or Muhammad and the heavenly creatures like Vishnu, Brahma or Shiva could ever be equated with the Creator.

Indeed, since the *raison d'etre* of the universe was worship of the One True Lord by all his creatures, none else should interpose himself between God and man.

In Guru Gobind Singh's world-view, where the forces of evil and good are constantly at work in the universe, God intervenes from time to time in favour of the good through the instrumentality of human beings chosen for that specific mission and could make legitimate use of physical force to overwhelm the forces of evil. Such a human instrument was, for



But God's creatures in the past had not honoured this moral commitment :

*When I created this world
I first made the demons, who became enemies and
oppressors. They became intoxicated with the strength
of their arms, and ceased to worship Me, the Supreme
Being.
They were destroyed by God and then,
In their places I established the gods :
They also busied themselves with receiving sacrifices and
worship.
And called themselves supreme beings.*

Mahadev, Vishnu and Brahma were as much to be blamed for this as any others and this was as much applicable to religious leaders as to the heavenly creatures. Those who are specifically mentioned in this connection in the *Bachitar Natak* were the Sidhs and the Sadhs, the Rikhis, Datariya, Gorakh, Ramanand and Muhammad. Their followers worshipped them rather than the Supreme Being.

Thus,

*Whoever was clever in the world
Established his own sect,
And no one found the Creator.*

The import, again, is clear enough. All these great persons had failed to lead their followers to the worship of the One True Lord.

As on himself, Guru Gobind Singh traces the descent of the Sodhis as well as of the Bedis from Rama, which might suggest his providential lineage. In any case, Guru Nanak, the Bedi, established true *dharma* in the *kaliyuga*, just as Rama had done that in a previous *yuga*. God removed all suffering and sin from those who embraced the religion of Nanak in the *kaliyuga* and, thus, they attained salvation. The truth revealed by Guru Nanak was cherished by his following successors who must all be regarded as one with Baba Nanak :

*The pious saw this, but not the fools,
Who thought them all distinct.*

But the wise recognised that they were all One. Thus, Guru Gobind Singh himself was the true spiritual successor of Guru Nanak. In fact, he was ordained by God to spread his faith among men and to bring them to their sense of duty towards God. Guru Gobind Singh thus came to the world to fulfil

God's purpose, without enmity towards any one and without fear of any one. He was the human instrument of God for upholding righteousness against evil.

*All who call me the Supreme Being
Shall fall into the pit of hell.
Recognise me as God's servant only
Have no doubt whatever of this.
I am the slave of the Supreme Being.*

But 'the slave' was sent by the Master for the sake of *dharma*, to extend the faith everywhere to destroy evil and the sinful. Guru Gobind Singh's mission was, therefore, essentially to extol the saints and to root out the wicked and the enemies of God.

From Guru Gobind Singh's account of his battles it is evident from the *Bachitar Natak* that he was aware of his position as the true successor of Guru Nanak and of God's support to him in his arduous mission. Everywhere he attributes his success to God and finds of himself and his Sikhs being under Divine protection. Indeed,

*God and God's servant are both one. Deem not that
there is any difference between them :
As waves produced from water are again blended
with it.
God remaineth apart from those
Who indulge in wrangling and pride.*

It was incumbent upon the Sikhs in particular to realise that the cause of their Guru was the right cause. Nowhere does he betray any bitterness against those who were opposed to him on the battlefield; but he is anxious to warn those of his followers or allies who had either betrayed him or had shown indifference to his cause. Though Guru Gobind Singh had little respect for Aurangzeb and was unwilling to pay allegiance to any temporal lord, he is keen to suggest that the successors of Babur had obtained the sovereignty of the temporal world through divine dispensation, just as the successors of Baba Nanak had obtained sovereignty of the spiritual realm. Even temporal authorities would plunder those who had not delivered the Guru's due. And those who had sought escape away from the Guru had in fact come to grief at the hands of the Guru's opponents. Guru Gobind Singh was safe because his only refuge was God.

*What is the wretched enemy to him whom the friend
preserveth and,
Who can meditate anything against those who enter
the Saint's protection ?
God preserveth them as the tongue is preserved
among the teeth.*

Guru Gobind Singh had no compassion for those who, whether from self-interest or through fear of suffering for the right cause, had failed to defend the claims of conscience. In fact, the moral drawn on this point from the *Bachitar Natak* would be precisely this : that those who abandoned the Guru's cause were much worse than those who had opposed him in the field of battle.

*They who turn away from the Guru
Shall have their houses demolished in this world and
the next.
They shall be laughed at here, have no dwelling
hereafter,
And be debarred from all hope.
Sorrow and hunger shall ever attach to those,
Who forsake the service of the Saint.
Nothing that they do shall succeed in this world,
And at last they shall fall into the pit of hell.
They who turn and fly from the Guru's feet,
Shall have their faces blackened in this world and the
next.*

Guru Gobind Singh had rid the defaulters either by inflicting punishment on them or by disclaiming them as his Sikhs. In order to succeed in his divine mission, Guru Gobind Singh needed only those who were prepared to consecrate their lives to the great cause. He first had to set his own house in order. This was the immediate background to his instituting the Order of the Khalsa, and the Baisakhi of 1699 is when this happened place.

In Guru Gobind Singh's view of the cosmic drama, the Creator of the Universe intervened from time to time to reinforce good in its struggle against evil and, depending upon the gravity of situation in human affairs, the divinely appointed human instruments of good were entitled to legitimate use of physical force against the wicked; but those who had been appointed to that task in the past had failed to accomplish God's purpose which was the establishment of His unqualified worship by mankind; these all previous dispensations were

superseded by the *dharma* instituted by Guru Nanak and it was given for Guru Gobind Singh to defend the claims of that *dharma* even if it involved the use of physical force against the enemies of this divine dispensation; for, the Sikhs must always be prepared for such struggle.

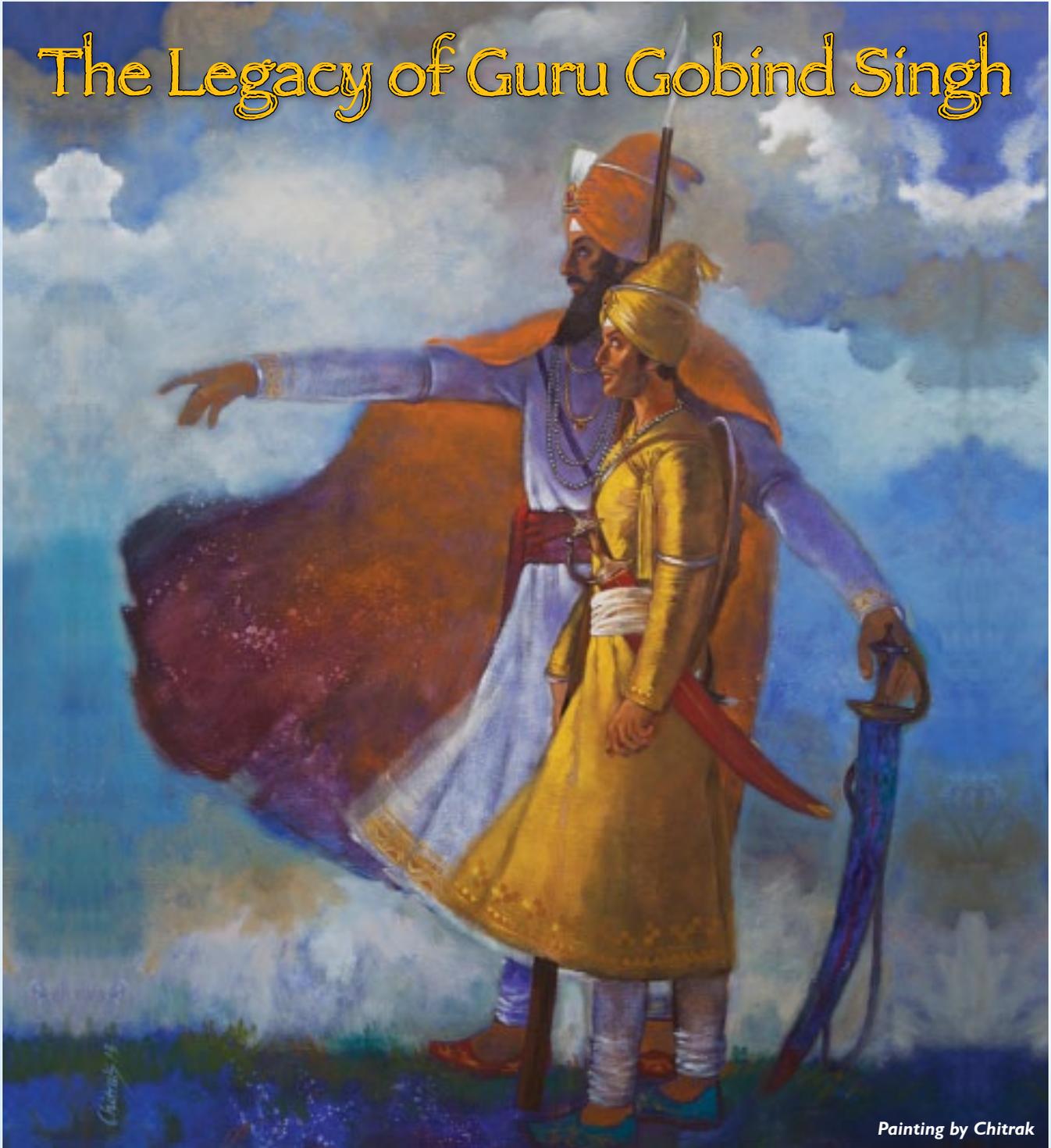
God sent me to this world giving this mandate:

*"I have cherished and blessed You as My Son;
To create and organise a Universal Order of Faith,
I am sending you to the human world.
Go there, and establish Righteousness: dharma,
And turn people away from the path of evil."
I stood before His Majestic Presence,
And bowing my head in humble submission said:
"The Community of Righteous Faith can be established,
If You, O Lord, graciously help."
For this mission and task, I have come to the world:
To establish the Path of Righteousness,
The Almighty God has sent me to the human world.
He has commanded me to uphold freedom and justice
everywhere;
To chastise tyrants and despots,
And annihilate their terror and tyranny.*



Dr. Jasbir Singh Grewal is a historian, scholar and former vice chancellor of the Guru Nanak Dev University. He has published several articles and books on Sikh history and is highly regarded as a scholar on the subject. Some of his notable works and his researches include 'Contesting Interpretations of the Sikh Tradition', 'The Sikhs of the Punjab', 'Sikh Ideology', 'Polity and Social Order', 'Social and Cultural History of the Punjab', 'Maharaja Ranjit Singh: Polity, Economy and Society, Kinship and State Formation', 'The Sikhs: Ideology, Institutions, and Identity', 'Guru Nanak in History' and 'Historical Writings on the Sikhs (1784-2011)'.

The Legacy of Guru Gobind Singh



Painting by Chitrak

I have often spoken about Guru Gobind Singh as a man without parallel. Many Sikhs take umbrage at that. The Guru was divine, they insist, not mortal. But in his lifetime, his own Sikhs honoured him as *Mard Agamra*, meaning a peerless man. Most religions have one Founder-Prophet who teaches a way of life. The tenets of the faith are elaborated during his life-time.

Dr. IJ Singh

Sikhism a rare faith in that there is more than one Founder-Prophet. So, my tribute will focus less on Guru Gobind Singh as a lone knight whose earthly journey finished at the young age of 42, but more as an integral part of the ten Gurus working in tandem towards a common future. The Gurus faced a multi-tasked agenda of remaking society, which demanded sustained and deft mentoring for over two centuries. The following is my thumbnail notation of mind-blowing events that took more than two centuries.

India in the 15th to 17th Centuries

The Punjab, where Sikhism originated, commands a special place in India. The Khyber Pass connecting Afghanistan to northwest Punjab was the most frequented corridor leading into the Indian sub continent. For centuries, it was the trade route but also the obvious pathway for the myriad of invaders into India.

This sub-continent then was a jigsaw puzzle of many quasi-independent nation-states, mostly at odds with each other. This made India an easy target for conquerors, where many invaders with embarrassingly small forces, easily prevailed because of rivalries between local satraps who were readily co-opted and corrupted.

Two demographic peoples dominated India then: Muslims, though a minority, held all political power. Hindus, vastly larger in number, but riven by a rigid vertically stratified caste system, survived under repressive laws and extreme State tyranny to convert to Islam willingly or at the point of a sword. Into this reality strode Guru Nanak, the Founder of Sikhism.

A Human Development Programme

How do a people under virtual siege re-claim their lives of dignity? This essentially becomes the mission statement of Sikhism. Goals seemed akin to the not-so-simple art of nation building. A nation with open borders, not arbitrary lines drawn in the sand, not defined by geography, currency, or religion. Instead, a defining ideology, philosophy, and core of common

ethics. Add economic hope, self-governance, freedom of expression, a model of conflict resolution and justice. In brief, a system that is accountable, transparent, representative, and dedicated to the public good. Sikhi was their agent for transformational change: a “human development movement.”

Sikh Building Blocks for National Development

Then, let us note some milestones in the path of Sikhi from Guru Nanak to Guru Gobind Singh that contributed to an increased social capital of the community:

Guru Nanak interacted with many scholars of the day. He created the Sikh model of Utopia at Kartarpur, starting with *pangat* and *langar*, emphasising lessons in sharing together, service to the needy, irrespective of caste, clan, or economic status. He taught moral and spiritual precepts of a productive life, including frank teachings against the unequal place of women in Indian society. Guru Nanak created that glue that binds a community.

Subsequent Gurus continued the path. By the time of Guru Gobind Singh, they had established at least 12 townships from Khadur Sahib to Amritsar, Anandpur and Damdama. A ‘national convention’ of Sikhs was slated twice a year on Divali and Vaisakhi. Akal Takht was established. The Gurus bequeathed to us an egalitarian, progressive structural model of accountability, with self-governance and transparency. The results were self-evident during the *misl* period and the time of Ranjit Singh’s rule of greater Punjab.

The standardisation of the *normaloquendi*, language of the people was Punjabi, the language, with Gurmukhi as its script. Centres for the propagation of Sikhi in Punjab and beyond were established and many of the centre-heads were women. Widows were encouraged to remarry, the practice of *sutee* was prohibited.

Guru Arjan collated the writings of his predecessor Gurus, and some Hindu Bhagats and Muslim Pirs, in the first recension (*Adi Granth*) of the Sikh scripture in 1604.

Guru Hargobind raised an army, as did the Gurus who came after him, and elaborated the seminal *Meeri-Peeri* doctrine. It asks that our inner life and outer

existence, the worldly and the spiritual core, be in sync, never in conflict.

During Guru Tegh Bahadur's time, State repression of the Hindus had become extreme. He argued their case. At his refusal to accept conversion to Islam he was publicly beheaded. His martyrdom was for the freedom of religion, regardless of its label. In accepting martyrdom, the teachers Guru Arjan and Guru Tegh Bahadur, taught mankind how to live and die with dignity.

Thus, systematically, the civic infrastructure of the Punjab, its economic muscle and community cohesion were developed. Nation building depends on such trans generational evolutionary processes towards revolutionary goals.

Timeless Legacy of Guru Gobind Singh

Successful human movements rest on two structures: developmental initiatives, and periods of consolidation. Both phases progressed apace throughout the Guru period and the relatively short and eventful life of Guru Gobind Singh. His mission was critical to Sikh identity and to formalisation of institutions which, because of the earlier Gurus, had existed in nascent form.

With Guru Gobind Singh rested the pivotal responsibility of coalescing and melding them into a grand design for lasting purpose. I point to some inter-related themes that define the many splendored reality of Sikhi today.

The *Meeri-Peeri* doctrine elaborated by Guru Hargobind flowered under Guru Gobind Singh. From this arises the holistic primal idea of the Sikh being a *Saint-Soldier* in life.

Guru Gobind Singh formulated four transformational events or precepts: The rite of Amrit – a defining marker of Sikh identity; as a free people Sikhs to bear arms for the defence of righteousness; Guru Granth Sahib the eternal repository of Sikh spiritual heritage; Temporal authority to reside in the Sikh *Panth* acting in awareness of the spiritual primacy of Guru Granth.

It follows from this that there was to be an end to the line of Gurus in human form.

Guru Gobind Singh staged the defining event of *Amrit Sanchar* in 1699; five Sikhs answered his call for a head, and were the first to be initiated into the Khalsa brotherhood. Then, in a classic role reversal, they transformed Guru Gobind Rai into Guru Gobind Singh. The Guru prescribed five articles of faith, and mandated rejection of the reprehensible caste system. From this modest beginning Guru Gobind Singh created the Sikh nation, which now has increasingly significant presence throughout the world.

War had been thrust on the Sikhs. What were the terms of engagement? What ends justify armed insurrection? What is a just war and what is not? Guru Gobind Singh brilliantly enunciated these issues by his conduct and in his ethereal composition, *Zafarnama*.

War is not for pillaging, seizing people, or territory. Weapons are drawn only when all other means have failed. Negotiations for peace continue even during war. Weapons are laid down whenever the foe appears so attuned. The enemy who surrenders or is captured is to be treated honorably. Finally, be humble in victory, graceful in defeat.

Without the five articles of faith, Sikhi would have rapidly been swallowed into the all-embracing tentacles of practices that define Hinduism. I buttress my argument with case studies of Buddhism and Jainism. Both these Indic religions are doctrinally distinct from Hinduism, yet their identity has been largely subsumed within Hinduism; neither retains much of an independent existence. Buddhism was at one time a powerhouse in numbers within India but is no longer, although it remains a major presence outside India.

Factions in resurgent Hinduism now seem desperate on redefining Sikhi as a reform wing of Hinduism; only the independent Sikh practices and distinct identity continue to firmly stand in the way.

The Sarbat Khalsa

The gurdwara remains a platform for Sikhs to discuss their needs and community life. The *Sarbat Khalsa*, a representative model of Sikhs worldwide, is a lineal descendant of the conclaves that date from Guru Amar Das. It ensures that Sikhs worldwide can have

a voice in designing policy, such as that needed to finalise a Sikh Code of Conduct during mid-20th century. The *Takhts* stand out, with the *Akaal Takht* as historically supreme, and recognised for conflict resolution.

During Guru Gobind Singh's times, much of the infrastructure of an emerging community was in place for representative administrative structures, mostly as prototypes with built-in self-correcting servo-mechanisms. The operative word here is 'prototypes,' but many seem dysfunctional today.

With minor additions to the *Adi Granth*, Guru Gobind Singh finalised the *Guru Granth Sahib*, which contains very little history and is not prescriptive. It provides an ethical framework but not a sin quotient or a catalogue of 'Dos and Don'ts'; the onus is ours to navigate the path and make a life. The *Guru Granth* remains free of ethno-centric, cultural, geographic, and historically time-bound constraints. It is a universal and timeless guide to shape every life.

Bearing in mind that the action points as noted today were not isolated programmes but well thought out steps towards a long-term purpose, *the end result was shaped by Guru Gobind Singh*.

History notes that the post-Guru period was marked by Sikh ascendancy in the sub-continent. The Khyber Pass was slammed shut against periodic invasions and an enlightened Sikh kingdom established in the greater Punjab that lasted until the advent of the British half a century later. Those times also saw the first land reform policies in India.

Guru Gobind Singh knew that his Sikhs had come a long way along Guru Nanak's path, and now deserved the responsibility of self-governance. When he asked the first five Khalsa to initiate him too he joined his Sikhs as one of the people, subject to the same rules: *aapay gur chela*. He pointedly attributed all his achievements to his Sikhs (*Inhikee kripakay sajay hum haen, naheenmo so garib kroreparay*). This preceded the modern norms of *Servant-Leader*, which finds resonance in modern models of academia and management.

Most people, including many Sikhs, opt for one of two choices when they weigh the legacy of Guru Gobind Singh. Some see his contributions as

independently transformative but disconnected from the Sikhi of Guru Nanak and so miss their collective impact. Or else, they view Guru Gobind Singh as sharply departing from the peaceful path of Guru Nanak. Either way the continuing coherence of the Sikh way from Guru Nanak to Guru Gobind Singh is lost upon them.

I ask you to reject such binary choices. Every action of Guru Gobind Singh is rooted in the life and teachings of his nine predecessor Gurus. Guru Gobind Singh's life and work embody the final integrative chapter on the development of the Sikh message. He was the master-weaver on the complex tapestry, which is Sikhi today.

Such a massive transformative remake of society can neither result from imposing laws nor is accomplished in a generation or two. Paradigm shifts do not occur in a vacuum. Hence the long eventful path from Guru Nanak to Guru Gobind Singh is to be considered as a *captivating multi-generational saga of a revolution via evolution that created a whole new people!*

Path of evolving

The accomplishments of Guru Gobind Singh, as a man of the people, a leader extraordinaire, a farsighted administrator, community organiser and as tactician, strategist and general in war and peace, remain unparalleled. His actions reveal that he found his Sikhs to be firmly on the path of maturity and wished them to go forward with wisdom and determination.

So, 350 years later, have we enhanced or diminished our legacy? As we become more aware of the realities of a fast-changing and different world, how do we remain true to the fundamentals of Sikhi? At which stage are we ready, how exactly did we get there, and what course corrections are called for are matters for introspection.

A haunting thought: have we really become the saint-warriors that the Great Guru wants us to be, or are we still on the path of evolving?

With great reverence, Paramjit Singh Bawa attempts

A Tentative Understanding of Guru Gobind Singh

Guru Gobind Singh (hereinafter the Guru) is a fascinating personality, both deep and diverse. It is difficult to fathom his contribution, personality, and legacy. Since we all aspire to the condition of gods and that is the message of the holy texts that implore us to be as they are, though very difficult for they were the unusual personalities, yet an effort to that end is worth attempting. I would not have dared to write on the Guru as a personality if he had not directed that anyone who considered him as God would go to the hell. (*Jo hum ko pameshar uchar hai, tey sabbh narak kund mei par-hei*: Bachitar Natak, Stanza 32) It is this call that inspires me to learn from his life and contribution. If we could emulate even a bit of his variegated personality, we would be much the richer both in character and action. Hence a humble attempt is made to that direction. Secondly, we must not be at awe with our gods and holy personages. We must understand them, emulate them, revere them, and learn from their example. Therefore, considering gods as human beings does more good than keeping them at a holy distance and remaining in their awe. We must take our Gurus as human beings else we shall never be able to aspire to their self. The Guru did not like to be treated as god. He is unique in delineating and celebrating the attributes of God. The Jaap Saheb suggests and confirms that the Guru was impressed by the attributes of the higher power in whose praise is the whole text.

If we consider our Gurus differently with miraculous powers, we cannot learn anything. Perhaps that is why none of Gurus showed any miracle. On the other hand, they called its exhibition an act of heresy and apostasy. When Ram Rai tried to please the Mughal king with his miraculous powers, the Guru never pardoned him. Even during the greatest

and most gruesome tortures the Gurus were calm and never undid His will. They liked to be seen as human beings so that others could be influenced.

Mine is, therefore, an innocent effort to understand this Guru's unique personality. Since he had forbidden all to call and consider him God, I make an effort to see whether his life can be emulated even to a little extent, for he was too great to be followed in any measure. Even a bit of what he was, if imbued with sensitivity, can be of immense use to an ordinary person.

Supreme Courage

The Guru was the epitome of courage in all its manifestations. He could take on the establishment, speak truth to authority, and call a spade a spade. He challenged the might of the Mughal empire and its fanatic king who had tried all methods in subjugating the rise of the followers of Nanak. His courage is exemplified in the battles he fought with the rajas supported by the empire. He won all the battles. He had the courage to write to Aurangzeb one of the finest letters, called Zafarnama, the 'Epistle of Victory' in which he laid bare the falsehoods of the emperor who had prevaricated in his dealings with his near and dear ones and also the followers of the Guru. It was an act of daring that he could be forthright in expressing his feelings and lay bare the falsehoods of the emperor. He calls him untrustworthy as he did not abide by the teachings of the holy Quran. Only an enlightened one could pick up cudgels against the might. It is best captured in the words of Navtej Sarana who has translated the epistle, '(The) letter holds an uncompromising mirror to the Mughal emperor. It indicts him and his comrades against a spiritual frame of judgment and exposes their lack of morality in governance as well as in the conduct of war. It foresees the end of an empire that

is dominated by falsehood and whose innards have been hollowed out by spiritual decay'.

The Guru invokes the holy Quran revered by Aurangzeb and tells him 'I have no faith at all/ In the oath that you swear/ That the God who is One/ Your witness does bear' (Zafarnama: 13). He had the spiritual courage to tell straight 'Not a jot of trust/ Do I now have in you/ Whose generals and ministers/ Are all liars, untrue' (Ibid: 14). He warns him of 'Such oaths of the Quran/ Who so ever does believe/Will be wretched at the end/ Destroyed beyond reprieve' (Ibid: 15). The Guru tells him 'In the false oaths of the Quran/ Had I not believed/ My brave army wouldn't be crippled/ Nor in such manner deceived' (Ibid: 18).

More plain speaking by the Guru: 'You sit on a mighty throne/ You are king of all you survey/ But strange is your justice/ Strange the virtues you display' (66). The Guru further adds, on the martyrdom of his four sons, 'What sort of manliness is this?/ What courage does it require/ To stamp out young sparks/ And then fan the roaring fire? (79). The Guru attributes this, by quoting the poet Firdausi, 'The poet Firdausi has said/ In words beautiful and chaste/ That they work for the devil/ Who act in such unholy haste' (80) thus alluding to the summary burial of his two younger sons amidst walls at Sirhind. The Guru chastises him by conveying, 'Do not in such heartless manner/ Put innocents to the sword/ Else this too shall be your fate/ At the hands of the Lord'. (69). The Guru again reminds him thus, 'The burden of your oath/ Lies heavy on your head/ You have to do the right thing/ And perform what you've said' (76).

Sacrifice

The Guru was unique in dealing with the plight of pundits from Kashmir who visited Guru Tegh Bahadur, his father, and expressed that the governor of Kashmir was bent upon converting them to his faith and they had nowhere to go and seek help. The Ninth Guru mentioned to them to tell the governor that if he could convert a holy person, then all would get in the fold of Islam. It was here that Gobind suggested, as a child of eight years, that who could be holier than his father. He prompted his father to deal with the issue as he had full confidence in his ability. The rest is all known.

Secondly, the Guru was not shy of sacrificing his sons at the altar of faith. All sons were martyred, two fought in the battles and gave their lives, and the other

two were bricked alive in the wall as they refused to abide by dictates of the governor who wanted them converted. It is a singular example when four young sons, between eight and fourteen years confronted the might of the empire and did not come under any temptation of worldly pleasures that would have been there just for the asking. The wife of the Ninth Guru who was with the young sons also breathed her last as she came to know of the perfidy by the rulers.

It was a singular example of a Guru sacrificing his father, sons, mother, and separation from his wives, which is not to be found anywhere in the world's religious annals.

Thirdly, the Guru was also a witness to the sacrifices of his beloved followers who were by his side till the last and fought valiantly.

Non-violence & justice

It was never he who started battles. He was not the aggressor, nor was there any ambition of carving out a kingdom. It was always the jealousies and machinations of the chieftains and rajas who did not like his growing influence which then led to battles. The Guru won all the battles. He required to be left alone in meditation and for spiritual activity that infused confidence in the backward community of Indians at that time. Battle was a last resort. He was very clear with Aurangzeb when he wrote to him 'When all has been tried, yet/ Justice is not in sight/ It is then right to pick up the sword/ It is then right to fight' (Ibid: 22)

In spite of the calumny, the Guru was still ready to meet Aurangzeb who had offered a meeting to sort out issues that the king had with the Guru. He also assured him of all security and protection (59) and suggested forgiveness after all that had happened with his family and beloved followers. 'Come so that we can meet/ And talk face-to-face/ I can show you forgiveness/ And grant you my grace' (60). The Guru expresses humility by suggesting 'Oh the King of Kings/ I am but a humble knave/ If He were to command/ I would respond as a slave' (62).

Unflinching Faith in God

The Guru was imbued by faith in God despite adversities in his life. In the Zafarnama he makes copious references to His grace and protection. Similarly, the Guru speaks of the attributes of God in Jaap Sahib, a sublime composition coming from the

heart. So is the Akal Ustat (*In praise of the Almighty*). The Guru had unflinching faith in God, so much so that when he was alone in a jungle and had nothing on him, he calls Him a Beloved Friend (*mitr pyarey nooh haall mureeda da kehna*) and without complaining, yearns for His benediction. He considered adversity as His gift and never remonstrated to Him. This also expresses a positive attitude of being cowed down by reverses.

The Guru reminds Aurangzeb of his faith in God, and yet betraying the trust in Him by not doing His bidding. He says, 'There is no belief in religion/ And faith is discarded/ The Lord is ignored/ The Prophet disregarded' (Zafarnama: 46). He further mentions that 'Ones who are firm of faith/ And true believers of God/ Break not their promises/ But stay firm to their word' (Ibid: 47). Yet the Guru is compelled to disbelieve in Aurangzeb's word. He mentions, 'There can be no trust in a man who/ Swears on the Quran and One God/ But values not the holy oath/ And is false to his given word' (Ibid: 48). Aurangzeb had belied his trust to such an extent that the Guru is compelled not to believe him. He affirms, 'And now even a hundred times/ If on the Quran were he to swear/ His word I would not believe/ For his promise I do not care' (Ibid: 49). He further advises Aurangzeb, 'Men must speak the truth/ The truth living in their thoughts/ Not have a promise on their lips/ And a lie in their hearts' (Ibid: 55).

Secular

The Guru was secular to the core. It is unfortunate that this aspect of his personality has not been appreciated by historians or the country as a whole. He stood for secular values. He sacrifices his family for those values that were enshrined by Guru Nanak and other saints. Nanak had castigated the practices of tilak, janeo, and other rituals. Yet when it came to the matter of practice of religion, the Guru realises that it was a personal matter of choice and none had any right to compel the others to do someone else's bidding. So he undertook the issues to rescue the followers of traditional faith in their practice of religion. All people fight for their own communities and convictions; the Guru took up cudgels on behalf of others in whose faith he did not conform. It was a unique example in history when some one fought for the sake of others. He had implored his father, the Ninth Guru, also to support the followers of faith who did not want to be converted. The saying of J.S. Mill that he would lay

down his life to ensure the other's right to say even if it was against him is well known. The Guru lived by this and practiced as such.

The Guru never believed in proselytisation to his faith as he respected all faiths. There is never an instance when he or anyone after him, and in power, had ever tried to impose his religion upon any one. This was an supreme example of existence of diverse faiths which are to be revered.

For him all human beings were His image (*manas ki jaat sabhey ekei pehchanbo*). It was the acceptance of diversity in all its forms. The inference was logical. God is One; The One resides in all; All have the same organs and features (*eikey nain; eikey kaan; eikey dhe; eikey baan/aab baad atash ao aab ko ralaao hai. Alloh abhekh soee; purana aur Koran oee/ Eikey hi saroop sabhey eik hi banao hai*). Therefore, there is no place for any distinction. This tenet is exemplified by his direction to Bhai Kanhaya, against whom others had complained that he gave water to the wounded Muslim soldiers during battles, that he would also provide first aid to all, irrespective of their creed. There was no enemy and all were his friends (*na koi bairi nahi begana, sagal sang hum ko bann aye*).

One of the great aspects of the Guru was his interest in the Indian tradition that inspired him to translate or get translated ancient Hindu scriptures and mythology. Only one with a secular approach could do so.

It may conveniently be stated that roots of a secular tradition that is an imperative now and finds space in the Constitution of India, were in practice laid by the Guru who did not only state it as a policy but also practiced the same in action, a rare contribution. Whereas the earlier Gurus and saints in the Granth Saheb had preached equality of status and tolerance by supporting only rightful living, thought, and action, devoid of all rituals, the Guru had put these into practise and demonstrated that this was possible, even against the heaviest odds.

It is therefor strange that the Guru is seen in the light as if he belongs only to the Sikh community. Many of the followers of Guru Nanak have not tried to understand hi life, philosophy, work, contribution, and spirituality. They find in him a warrior and not a spiritual master. This is a segmented view of his oeuvre and personality.

Patriotism

During the Guru's time, there was no concept of unity of the country or of belonging to one country. Local chieftains were only concerned with their domains and influence and in order to preserve that, they did not hesitate to seek the support of invaders. There simply was no concept of unity. Dharam Singh rightly says, '(The) small chieftains had no love for their country though they could lay down their lives for the vindication of personal honor, for the love of their families or for such partisan purposes.... There was no national consciousness'. It was for the Guru to raise the issue of national consciousness and give direction to the people under his influence.

The Guru accomplished this as follows:

Reference to Indian traditions

The Guru carefully revived the tradition by articulating the old texts in a language that ensured understanding and inspired confidence. These texts were once linked to the psyche and people revered these. But with the passage of time and subservience to foreign masters, especially the bigoted ones, this tradition was in limbo as people imitated ways of the rulers. So fully appreciating the need of the time, he resuscitated the tradition of bravery and courage by poetical rendition of Indian mythology and demonstrated that Indians were brave and could be so, that it was not the prerogative of the invaders. He specially gave prominence to themes of the goddess Kali, Chandi, and other forms. The tenor of compositions exudes valour and inspires the reader. The style is panegyric and appealing. Secondly, there is reverence for the weapons that are to protect the self and the honor of the weak. Thirdly, the Guru was attached to righteous causes and anything that could inspire the dormant consciousness of the demoralised peoples who were mentally downtrodden by the buffets of foreign rulers and insensitive kings. The Guru, by making use of such mythology certainly ignited the inner potential of India.

The Guru knew that every individual had a potential. So he brought out the potential of followers that had remained buried under the debris of superstition, lack of confidence, and a caste system that had denied them the right to wield arms, considered the prerogative of only the kshatriyas. The Guru infused a spirit of valor among the downtrodden so that they did not consider themselves inferior to anyone. It was a revolutionary idea that evolved a

force of ordinary people, loyal to a cause given by the Guru. They were second to none. Such was the Guru's influence. The ordinary were turned into the special. He made them so valorous that they would take cudgels against the mighty and were never scared of the martyrdom. The Guru's claim to make sparrows confront the eagles (*chirreo se baaj laraon*) became a reality, indeed.

Symbolism

The Guru communicated his philosophy through the powerful symbolism of *amrit*. The ingredients and preparation of the ambrosia itself conveys much of the Guru's thinking. It is water, the source of life, pure and moves as per law of gravity (in Guru's symbolic communication, water is humble); sweets added indicate equality as *patashas* of different size get submerged in water and lose their identity; iron container that is not only of humble metal but extremely powerful, and available, thus patronising the ordinary (even the Almighty has been described by the Guru as *Sarab Loh*); *khanda* that has two swords indicative of *miri* (temporal) and *piri* (spiritual) prowess, also symbolic of *raj-jog*, a term used in the Granth which suggests a combination of devotion and power, both vital for governance and the truthful use of power to protect and not to misuse; and five spiritual compositions. All these mixed into an elixir that transmutes the dross into gold. The one who obtains the *amrit* through a ceremony becomes conscious of the duties and disciplines to follow. This is not a mere ritual but a ceremony that strengthens character of the individual, an important rite of passage for the ordinary to become select of the Guru.

Synthesis of the Saint and Soldier

Plato had conceptualised concept of the philosopher-soldier. The Guru created the concept of saint-soldier. A saint without the attributes and bravery of a soldier was ineffective as he could not protect himself, and a soldier without the tinge of saintliness is likely to misuse his power. So a fine balance had to be constructed. The Guru did that. Every one of his followers was a saint as they imbibed the word of the Guru and practiced the ethical compositions daily, in recitation. They were soldiers as they were able to wield arms and use these when the occasion arose for seeking justice or protection of the weak. It was an incredible combination in one man. Even women were made courageous. Sikh history is replete with valorous

women who during the attacks of Ahmed Shah Abdali did not swerve from their faith and accepted torture with equanimity without losing their commitment.

The Guru was fully aware of the fact the devotion alone did not mean everything. It had to be protected. Bhakti had to be guarded against force of others who did not agree with it or felt threatened by its lore. Just as one cannot caress a rose for fear of the thorn, so bhakti was given the succor of shakti so that it is not disturbed by anyone. The concept of power exemplified in the sword, and courage to use it when needed is a combination of the devotion protected by power. Similarly, power is to be reined in by devotion and discipline. It cannot be permitted to turn into tyranny and go out of control.

To ensure such harmony, the Guru ordained the recitation of five compositions. The selection was not at random but thoughtfully selective in all respects. He prescribed five banis to be recited every day as a discipline. These are, first, *Jap ji* that is full of devotion; *Jaap Saheb* that prescribes the various facets of the Almighty, especially the shakti aspect; *Swaiye* that reckon with reality of the mighty with arrogance (haumain) coming to naught without His protection. This is full of *vairag*. It is a warning to those who misuse power. Fourth composition is *Chaupai* that has prayer as the main theme. And the fifth bani is *Anand Saheb*, the stage of bliss and a culmination of the process. These are to be recited seriatim. The Guru had a design in everything he did and prescribed a rationale approach to a life of fulfilment.

The Guru did not hesitate to conduct battles against whosoever was unjust, all the battles for a cause and not for capturing the area or increasing influence. These were for righteousness, humanitarian causes, and justice. All battles were fought in defence of principles and not for territorial gain. It needs appreciation that non-violence is not a reliable instrument all the time. One does not have to aggress, but if ones dignity is at risk and stake, it is justified to use the sword (*jabb av ki audh nidhan baney, tab hi rann me ab jhoojh maroo*) for which he sought blessings of God (*Deh Shiva bar mohe ehe, shubh karman te kabhoo na taro*).

Littérateur

The Guru excelled in literary writings. The prodigious output in the Dasam Granth is testimony to his literary genius. He wrote in Punjabi, Braj and Persian, with

a profusion of Sanskrit blending. The contribution can be classified in five categories. *Bachitar Natak* is an autobiographical writing. *Jaap* and *Akal Ustat* are evocative of God. *Chandi Charitra*, *Var Sri Bhagauti Ji Ki*, *Gian Prabodh*, *Chaubis Avtar*, *Brahm Avtar*, *Rudr Avtar* are renditions of the Indian tradition. *Ramkali* hymns and *Swaiye* are prayer pieces. *Zafarnama* is the letter to Aurangzeb who had reneged from his promises. It is an extremely powerful composition that touched the emperor and was cause of his diminishing health, a big blow to his ego. The Guru had the courage to speak truth to the biggest temporal authority of the time. The Guru made a versatile use of poetic and literary forms, used various types of *chhands* (meters), metaphors, and myths.

The writings of the Guru have definite meaning. Firstly, the Guru infused a martial spirit to counter tyrannies of oppression and bigotry. His compositions are inspirational and arouse national consciousness by resuscitating the strength of mythology, its gods and goddesses who fought against tyrannies of demons and demonic forces. Secondly, he preached the path of love as the solution to all problems and union with supreme consciousness (*Jin prem kio tinn hi prabh payeo*). Thirdly, he expounded, both in letter and deed, the concept of equality. Fourthly, the literature of dignified protest was his forte. The *Zafarnama* is a prime example of this. It may be kept in mind that the Guru has a hierarchy and gradations of protest. It is peaceful and non-violent at first; then it is composed of sacrifice and lastly, it is considered justified to pick up the sword for a righteous cause if all other methods do not deliver. The concept of power was very clear to the Guru.

Code of conduct

All Gurus had been consciously espousing strengthening of character by method of accepting good conduct and avoiding defects (*sanjh kejei guna ker; aisa kamm mooley na kichei jit ant pachotaeaa*). The Guru thus laid down some of the practices specifically to be avoided. He forbade weaknesses to which an individual is often a prey. These were given the sobriquet of *kurahet* (things not to be done or forbidden). Firstly, he ordained that the person shall not hanker after another woman and the sanctity of marriage and family life is supreme. One must intensify love for one's spouse and not look outwards, considering all women as his daughters, sisters, and mothers (*nij nari ke sangh neho tum nitt bedheo; par nari*

ka sangh supney nahi laheo). This is confirmation of the principle enjoined in the holy Granth (*par triya roop na dekhey netr*). Second commandment was to avoid all intoxicants as these make one lose sense of discrimination between good and bad, intelligence is sorely affected and one is not able to act in balanced manner. Both restrictions are based upon essential truths. The one leads a person astray while the other makes him not only a non-entity, but also useless and prey to many other diseases and defects. This stands proved by the proliferation of AIDS, addiction, and other maladies.

Celestial Balance

The Guru had a celestial balance in his personality. In spite of the injustices that he fought with determination he never uttered a word against any community that had tried to wrong him, his family, or his followers. There was no rancor, no sense of revenge, no irritants, no animosity, and no denigration of any sort. The Guru had infinite capacity of tolerance of the doings of others. Even the 'enemy' was actually not an enemy.

The Guru showed equanimity under the most trying circumstances and events. He was true to the concept of *hukam razai chalna*, obeying God's will. It was he who in his composition *mitr pyare nu haal mureeda da kehna* never complained when he was alone in the jungles having been separated from his family and followers. And amidst battle, he inspired his followers by relating them to their past spiritual glory and panoply of gods and goddesses.

When the Guru discovered that the mahants at the *manjis* had become degenerate, he did not hesitate to abolish the local religious satraps. This was one of the finest moves of the Guru who did not want the rotten institute to continue. Moreover, he had a strategic plan in substituting them with a unique Guru exemplified in the holy book. Obsolete, unworkable, and undeliverable institutions must be done away with and replaced by a new and better order. This was bestowed by the Guru to the community. The Sikhs do not have to revere any living Guru. The Holy Granth is the Guru, accessible to all who need to seek God. Thus inspired, the community has thrived wherever they have gone, directed to follow the path of understanding and introspection and not merely by praying to an image or a totem.

The Idea of Democracy

Though the idea of democracy was far from reality, the Guru practiced this in real form. According to Dr. Jaspal Singh, the Guru had changed the equation of power from the vertical to the horizontal. In the era of kingship all around, the Guru performed two revolutionary tasks. One, he conferred Guruship on the holy Granth so that the imposters could not usurp the spiritual domain. This avoided the wars of succession that were prevalent during those times. Since the Guru is supposed to lead, the Granth provides that leadership and guidance to the followers. Secondly, the Guru established hegemony of the Khalsa by creation the institution of five 'beloveds' (*pyarey*) and expanding the base of power. He brought the ordinary people into the mainstream by giving them equality and dignity and reposing faith in their competence. Those from the periphery who had been disposed were brought to the centre stage. The action of the Guru infused the democratic spirit in contrast to prevailing authoritarian rule.

This was unique, lifting the common to the stature leadership and creating confidence in them. The Guru was for dignity of all. One of the reasons for differences with the hill rajas was that they did not like the principle of equality, wanted exclusive and privileged social treatment, were arrogant enough not to share space with the citizens, and disdained Guru's penchant for an inclusive social culture without any discrimination.

The Guru had reversed the trend encouraged pluralism and diversity.

The Guru's worldly life was incredibly versatile and full of inspiration. He achieved the maximum in a short span of life. He fought battles, created literature of the highest order, laid foundations of a unique community by giving it a separate identity, terminated the concept of living Guru and substituted it by *shabad guru*.

I have surrendered my mind, heart and soul to God

I am the smallest instrument of God

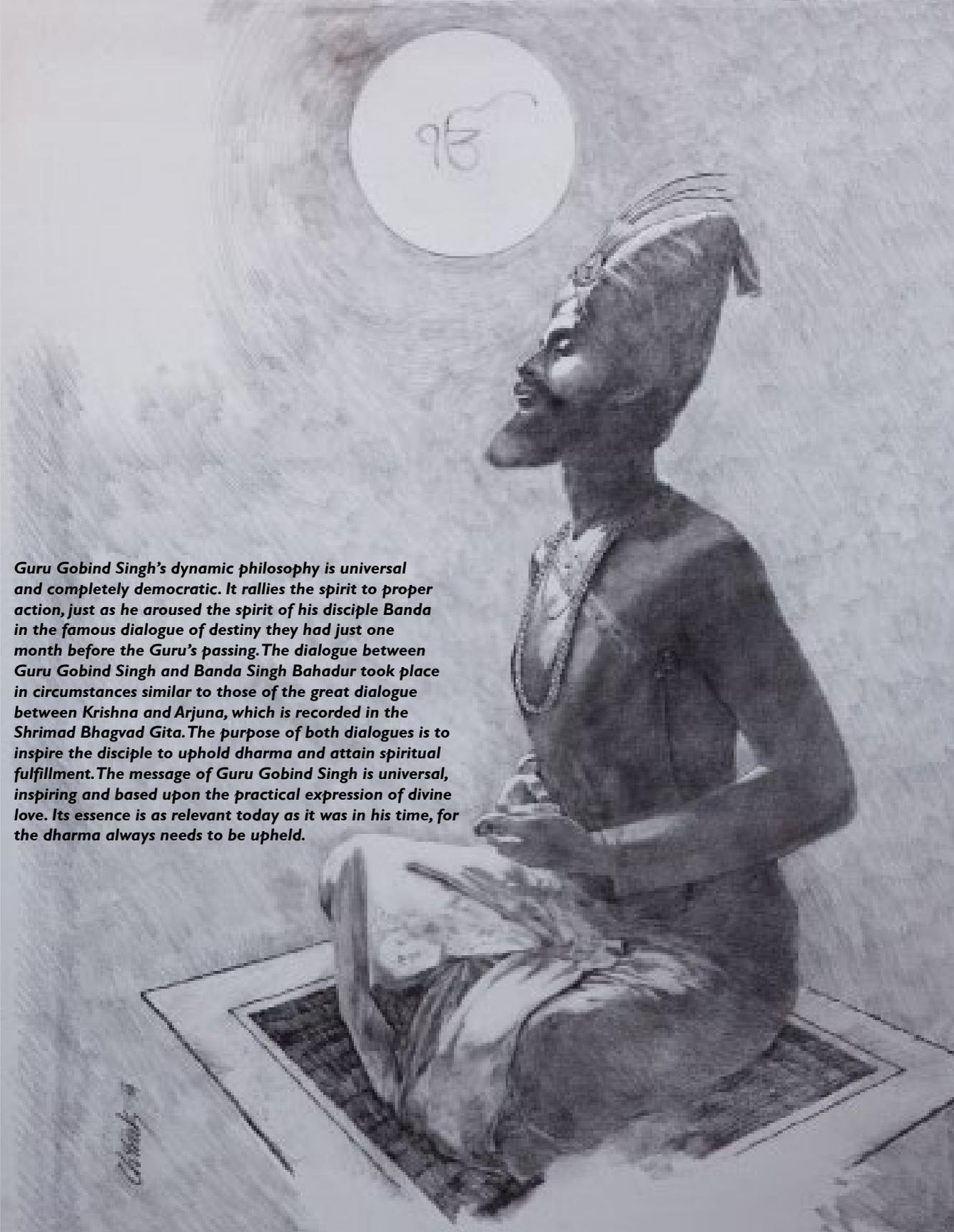
I will pay homage to no one but God

*I will not follow any tradition but truth,
which is God*

*I am a messenger who will deliver the
message of God*

I will lovingly sow the seeds of the pure love of God

(Bachitar Natak)



Guru Gobind Singh's dynamic philosophy is universal and completely democratic. It rallies the spirit to proper action, just as he aroused the spirit of his disciple Banda in the famous dialogue of destiny they had just one month before the Guru's passing. The dialogue between Guru Gobind Singh and Banda Singh Bahadur took place in circumstances similar to those of the great dialogue between Krishna and Arjuna, which is recorded in the Shrimad Bhagvad Gita. The purpose of both dialogues is to inspire the disciple to uphold dharma and attain spiritual fulfillment. The message of Guru Gobind Singh is universal, inspiring and based upon the practical expression of divine love. Its essence is as relevant today as it was in his time, for the dharma always needs to be upheld.

Takht Sri Harmandir Sahib at Patna



Painting by Baldeep Singh Malhans

Patna, the ancient Patliputra and presently capital of Bihar State is reverently called Patna Sahib by the Sikhs because of its consecration by Guru Nanak Dev, Guru Tegh Bahadur and Guru Gobind Singh. The latter was born here during Guru Tegh Bahadur's tour of eastern Bihar, Bengal and Assam from 1666 to 1670. Patna Sahib is situated on the right bank of the holy River Ganges.

Gurdwara Pahila Bara (lit. the first and larger), commonly known as Gurdwara Ghai Ghat, is dedicated to Guru Nanak Dev, who during his visit to Patna stayed here with Bhai Jaita, a pious person and confectioner by trade, who became the Guru's follower and later converted his house into a *dharmsal*. The

congregation that gathered here came to be called Bari Sangat or Ghai Ghat Sangat. Later, Silas Rai, a wealthy jeweller, became a Sikh and took the Guru to his own place where, too, a small community of Sikh believers was formed into what was known as Chhoti Sangat. A new building comprising a spacious hall with the sanctum in the middle was constructed during the 1980s. Two relics are preserved here: a rebeck claimed to be Bhai Mardana's and a stone called Mata Gujari's grindstone.

Takht Sri Harimandir Sahib, the principal shrine at Patna Sahib and one of the five Takhts or the highest seats of religious authority for the Sikhs, is built on site of the Chhoti Sangat. Guru Tegh Bahadur had

first alighted at Bari Sangat at Ghai Ghat from where he was taken in procession to this place which had once been the commodious mansion of Salas Rai, the jeweller, and where Raja Fateh Chand Maini later built a new house to accommodate the holy family. Guru Tegh Bahadur, leaving his family here in care of his brother-in-law Kirpal Chand and the local *sangat*, then proceeded further east. Guru Gobind Singh was born here on the seventh day of the light half of the lunar month of *Poh* in 1723 *Bikrami*, corresponding to 22nd December 1666.

He spent his early childhood at Patna until his departure for the Punjab in 1670. The house continued to be maintained as a holy place of worship. Its building was replaced by Maharaja Ranjit Singh during 1837-39 with a square flat-roofed hall surrounded by a covered passage for circumambulation. Rulers of Patiala, Jind and Faridkot together added several rooms and a gateway to the compound in 1887. An earthquake in 1934 seriously damaged the earlier building of the Takht Sahib.

The present five-storey building was constructed during 1954-57 with *kar-seva* under the supervision of Sant Nischal Singh and Sant Kartar Singh. The sanctum sanctorum representing the room where Guru Gobind Singh ji was born has a circumambulatory passage around it. Adjacent is the spacious high-ceiling congregation hall. The arch of the door of the inner sanctum opening on the congregation hall is covered with glided copper plates embossed with floral design matching the marble sculpture on the interior walls. Of the three canopied seats facing the hall, the central one has Guru Granth Sahib seated on it with a large-size portrait of Guru Gobind Singh behind in place of an officiant. Guru Granth Sahib is placed on its right and the Dasam Granth on one on the left, both attended by *granthis* holding whisks over them. The compound of the Takht Sahib also has several blocks of rooms for staff and visitors as well as for *Guru ka Langar*.

Gurdwara Bal Lila Maini Sangat, in a narrow lane close to Takht Sahib, marks the house where Raja Fateh Chand Maini lived. His childless Rani had developed special fondness for the young Gobind Das, who, too, often sat on the Rani's lap giving her immense delight and spiritual solace. She fed the Sahibzada and his playmates, on demand, with boiled and salted gram. Even today, boiled and salted gram is served as *prasad* in this Gurdwara, which, unlike the other shrines

in Patna Sahib, is served by Nirmala Sikhs. A wood carving on the old front door is dated *Assu sudi 1,1725 Bikrami* corresponding to 28th August 1668, but the hall housing the sanctum and other rooms in the inner compound have been reconstructed during recent decades.

Gurdwara Sri Guru Gobind Singh Ghat is where the child Gobind Das would play with his playmates on banks of the Ganges. Ghat means a place on the bank, usually paved, for bathing, drawing water or for landing or harbouring boats. This ghat, about one furlong from Takht Harimandir Sahib is marked by a gateway over which this Gurdwara is situated in a single room. The river has, however, since receded towards the north.

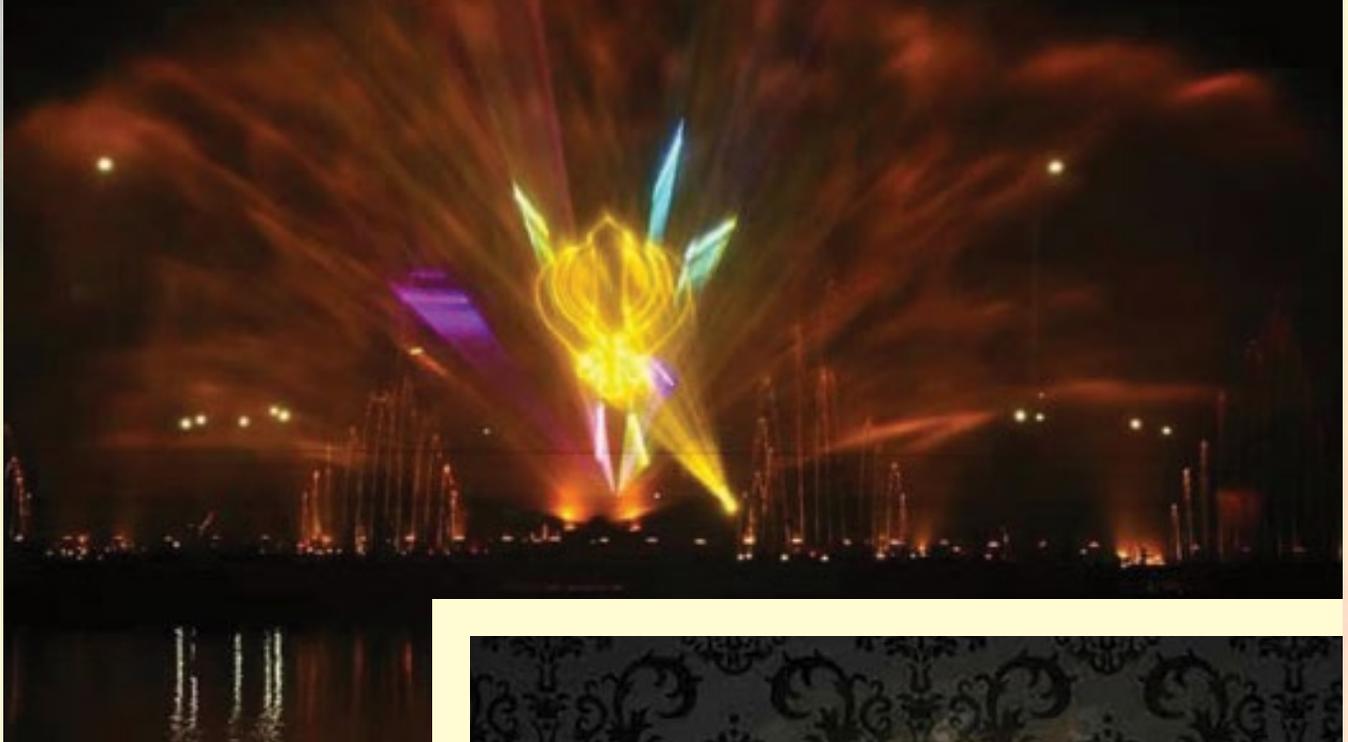
Gurdwara Guru ka Bagh is about three kilometres east of Takht Harimandir Sahib where Guru Tegh Bahadur first alighted in a garden (*Nigh*) belonging to Nawabs Rahim Bakhsh and Karim Baldish, nobles of Patna, and where the sangat of Patna came to receive him after his four-year long odyssey. Its present building was constructed during the 1970s and 1980s. An old well and a dried stump of the *imli* tree under which the *sangat* met Guru Tegh Bahadur, still exists.

Relics of the Tenth Guru at the Takhat

- ◆ **Cot of the infant Gobind Rai**
- ◆ **Four arrows**
- ◆ **Small Kirpan**
- ◆ **Small khanda**
- ◆ **Small kataar**
- ◆ **Kanga made of sandalwood**
- ◆ **Kharanwaan : sandals made of ivory**
- ◆ **Parchment inscribed with alphabets of Panjabi by young Gobind Rai**

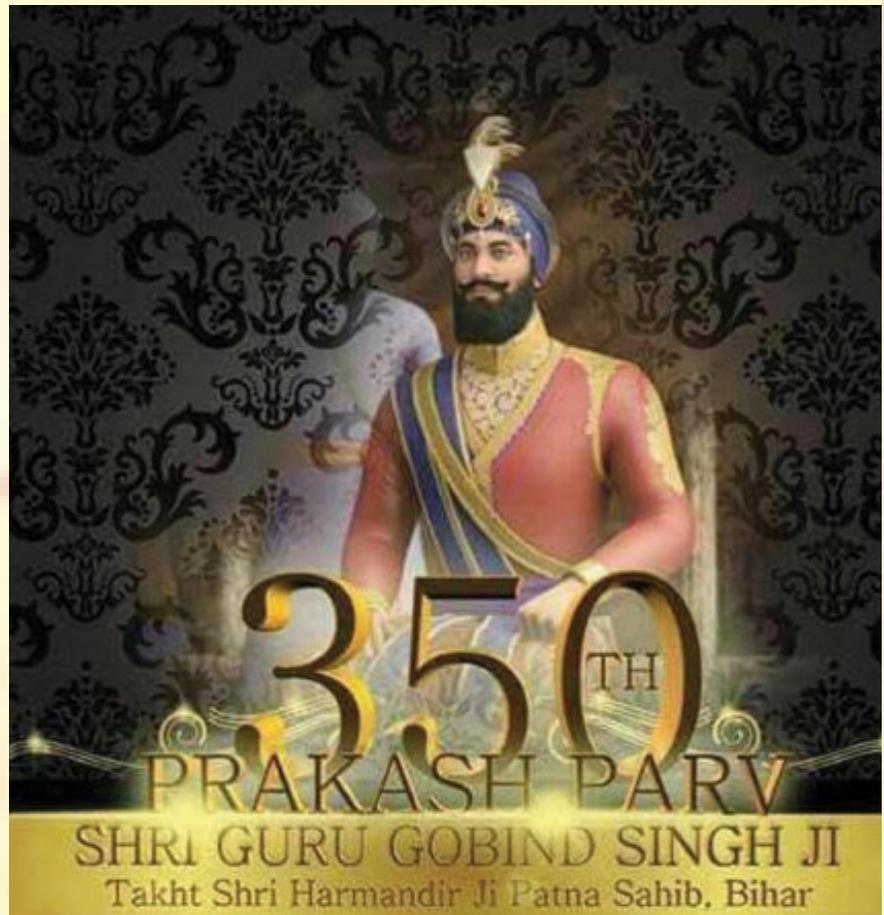
Also kept here are the Kharanwaan (sandalwood sandals) of the Ninth Guru.

An Infinite Reverence



The 350th Prakash Utsav of Guru Gobind Singh was celebrated with great reverence at Patna during January 2017 with a number of seminal events organised on the occasion. The Chief Minister of Bihar, Nitish Kumar took personal responsibility to ensure that the 350th birth anniversary celebrations of Guru Gobind Singh were conducted in befitting manner, having himself earlier launched a slew of initiatives in September 2016 (*including the Conclave, see separately*).

Patna Sahib, birthplace of the Tenth Sikh Guru, is considered as one of the holiest places of the Sikhs, besides being a major tourist attraction for people from all communities.



From widening the streets to sprucing up the Ganges riverfront, Patna City region with the iconic Sikh shrines nestled within, underwent a massive facelift in anticipation of the hundreds of thousands of pilgrims expected there during the 350th birth anniversary celebrations.

With multitudes of people from several parts of India, and abroad including Canada, Britain, the USA, Malaysia, Philippines and Australia expected to converge here, a tented city was planned and constructed. "Such a temporary tent city spanning over 75 acres was set up on the banks of Ganga near Kangan Ghat. All facilities including toilets, lighting, water and medical facilities were provided to pilgrims there," a senior Bihar government official elaborated.



Pilgrims on the Ganga, near Kangan Ghat



Eventually, three elaborate tented cities were constructed at Patna's Gandhi Maidan, Kangan Ghat and the Patna Old Bypass for accommodating 55,000 visitors. The one at Gandhi Maidan was spread





over 60.91 acres and housed 30,000 people; the one at Gurdwara Kangan Ghat was constructed in some 10 acres of land to house 5,000 people while the Bypass Parking Sthal having an area of 60 acres housed 20,000 people, so in all, nearly 60,000 people were lodged in these. Some 10 special trains and 300 buses reportedly transported over 25,000 devotees from the Punjab, without any charge.

Cooks from Amritsar came to the historic site to prepare special 'langar' over the entire week.

As the Commissioner of Patna Division, Anand Kishor said, "On the 350th birth anniversary, all roads will lead to Patna. And, we want to be fully ready to welcome this huge rush of pilgrims. It is not about one event, but Bihar's image itself"!



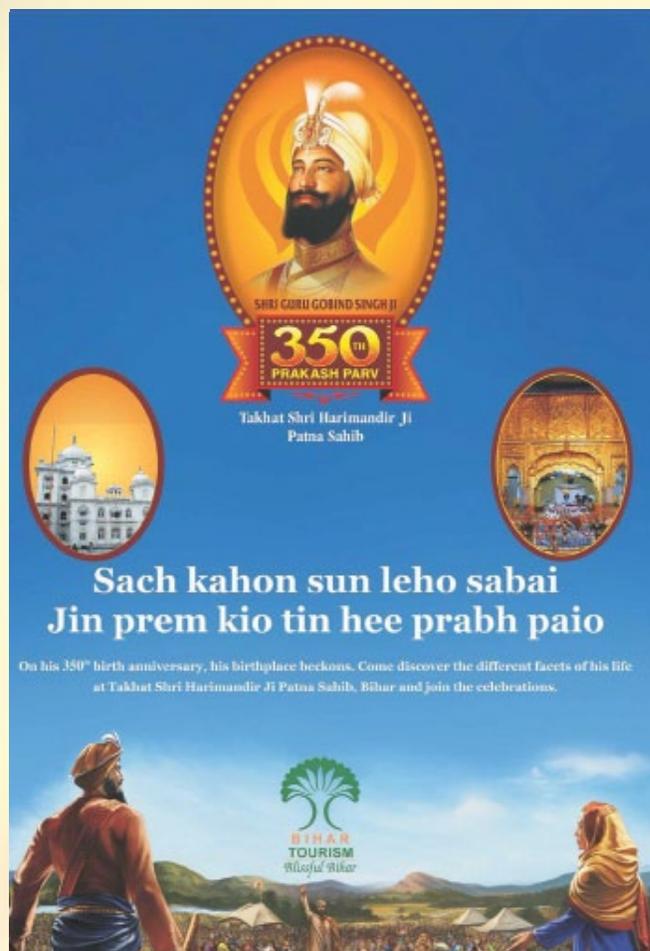
Old and narrow streets such as *Guru Gobind Singh Path* were widened and new roads constructed at Patna City, the old part of Patna, with narrow lanes and alleys and heritage buildings on the eastern side of the present capital and ghats along the Ganga being majorly redeveloped.

The Gurdwara at Patna Sahib or Takht Sri Harmandir Sahib, birthplace of Guru Gobind Singh was re-built in the 1950s over remains of the earlier structure erected by Maharaja Ranjit Singh in the late 1830s, but damaged in the deadly 1934 earthquake. The original building that stood there and the subsequent structure that came up in the 19th century were also damaged in a devastating fire. The then gurdwara management committee undertook massive construction in its campus, as most of the old guest house complex had been dismantled and a new structure erected in its place, to include provisions for vehicle parking for accommodating the massive



numbers. New structures also came up on the campus surrounding Gurdwara Bal Leela where young Guru Gobind Singh would play with his friends. A multi-storied building was completed on the adjoining campus replacing the old building that had once served as a warehouse.

Commissioner Anand Kishor added, "Sanitation and beautification drives were undertaken and Patna Municipal Corporation instructed to ensure cleanliness in the streets and premises around the gurdwara. Besides, beautification of the the city areas with street lamps and other lighting enabled visitors to experience a new and wonderful Patna and the great Bihar".



The Bihar government also understandably tapped the immense tourism potential of this mega event and had earlier hired Delhi-based Indian National Trust for Art and Culture (INTACH) to prepare a micro-plan for tourism-related assessment of the Patna Sahib area.

As part of the celebrations, Bihar's tourism department prepared nine documentary films on Guru Gobind's life, the DVDs of each film of nine-minute duration then widely distributed to schools and other institutions. The Chief Minister of Bihar Nitish Kumar himself flagged off mobile vans which went to several districts in the state, screened the films to create the right atmosphere for grand celebrations.

For the ease of visitors and devotees all over the world to access the event online, a special website - www.350thprakashparv.bih.nic.in - was launched to provide detailed information for those attending the weeklong celebrations, which commenced from 30 December 2016. The website also gave information on the manner of transportation for reaching Patna, hotel



accommodation and other facilities. The Government of Bihar also launched a mobile application for the devotees. The App offered a “one stop travel and information solution” for the visitors.

Amongst several major new projects undertaken was the long-awaited construction of an over-bridge to connect *Guru Gobind Path* with the National Highway and several other major construction projects. The roads and bylanes connecting Gurdwara Kangan Ghat in Patna, situated on banks of the river Ganges, which is 200 metres from Takht Sri Patna Sahib, were given major facelift. The Indian Railways reopened Patna Ghat railway station between Patna Sahib and Gulzarbagh for the convenience of pilgrims and also constructed a new road overbridge near Chowk Shikarpur on the main line. On 16 September 2016, Nitish Kumar, Chief Minister of Bihar, declared a three-day public holiday in Patna, from 3 to 5 January 2017.



Bhai Mohindar Singh from the United Kingdom was at the forefront in the renovation of Guru Darbar, and contributed much finances as well. Professional artists from around the country embellished gold inlay work in the gurdwara campus which was completed by the end of 2016, just in time for the celebrations. All



birth anniversary of the great Guru revered across the world. We will leave no stone unturned to make the event a memorable one". He added that the railways had also taken up several projects on request of the state government. "The tourism department will oversee the preparations in close coordination with other departments," the CM stated. "Guru Gobind Singhji has inspired mankind 350 years ago, the world should know this He put knowledge at the core of his teachings and inspired so much through his thoughts and ideals", he added. Former chief secretary of Bihar, GS Kang had been requested to oversee the preparations. "It is an issue of faith. We do not want to commit any mistake. Hence, Kang Sahib has been roped in" he had said.

three levels of the federal government comprising the municipal, provincial and federal levels contributed funds for the events and new infrastructure. Earlier, in February 2016, the Union Finance Ministry had allocated a package of Rs.100 crore for the celebrations, while the Bihar government had earmarked another Rs.100 crore from its state funds.

To commemorate the special celebrations, the Panjab Digital Library, in collaboration with Bihar Government, organised an exhibition entitled 'Emperor-Prophet Guru Gobind Singh Sahib' at the Bihar Museum, which was inaugurated by Shiv Chander Ram, Minister Department of Art, Culture & Youth on 30 December and was open to public till 31 January 2017, following which it toured different museums of Bihar. The exhibition was based on the digitised heritage of the Punjab, displaying all major events related to Guru Gobind Singh ji's life from 1666 to 1708. Also showcased were copies of different historical paintings, miniatures, hukamname, the forts, rare pictures detailing the life of Guru Sahib and coins issued in his name during the Khalsa Raj, all accompanied by descriptions and text on panels detailing their significance. "The Government

As Chief Minister Nitish Kumar declared, "Patna should play a perfect host to the sea of devotees coming in the city for the event. It is a matter of pride that Patna has got an opportunity to host the 350th



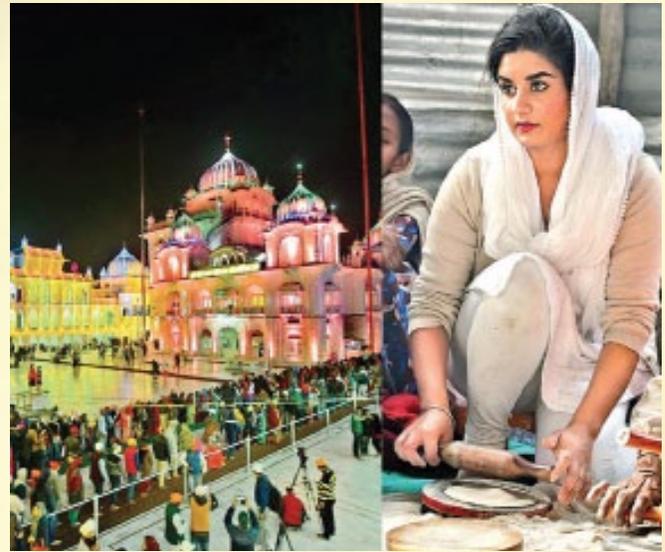


of Bihar is thrilled to host the exhibition on Guru Gobind Singh. About 500,000 people are expected to take part in celebrations from all over the world. We hope to exhibit this in other cities throughout the year," exuded Chaitanya Prasad (IAS), Director, Bihar Museum.

Inni Kaur, poet and story-teller (*and on the editorial panel of the Nishaan*) added: "As curators, our foremost concern was to tell the story of the Beloved in such a way that, audiences connect with the Guru regardless of their nationality or background."



"For the last two months, we have carefully worked on curating a theme that will enable the masses in Patna and other cities via official celebrations to get glimpses of the legacy of Guru Gobind Singh Sahib. It has been a remarkable collaboration between institutions and artists," said Davinder Pal Singh, PDL's Executive Director, who had collaborated with individuals and organisations from the Punjab and Bihar such as NPS Randhawa (PCS) and Takht Patna Sahib as well as *Art of*



Punjab and Sikh Research Institute in Canada and the United States of America. "Our focus was to present the 'Tenth Sovereign' in accordance with Guru Granth Sahib's vision, highlight the historical narratives based on contemporary and near contemporary sources, and make the saga relevant to today's generations via twentieth century authors and poets," added Harinder Singh, educator and thinker. A commemorative book





on Guru Gobind Singh Sahib and the *Sikhs of Bihar* was also published to mark the occasion in conjunction with Department of Art, Culture, and Youth, Government of Bihar.

Bihar's capital city of Patna was virtually transformed into a mini-Punjab on the occasion as the city teemed with Sikh devotees, some of whom had travelled from all parts of India—and globally—to be part of the celebrations from 30 December 2016 to 5 January 2017. For many, seeing foreigners with turbans and kirpans was extremely heart-warming, particularly listening to their heavily accented conversations in Punjabi !

Bhai Mohinder Singh from Birmingham had travelled to Patna with over 300 sevadars. Some 150 women from England volunteered their services in the daily langars, most of them having taken a two-week leave from work to participate in the festivities. About 120 Sikhs from the USA and Canada also visited Patna Saheb as a part of the *Raj Khalsa Yatra* organised by Sikh Dharma International to pay their tributes to the Tenth Master.

Most foreign visitors stayed at the Gurdwara or at the tented cities while some others booked themselves into hotels. They were outspoken in their views that they had received an even warmer reception in Patna Saheb than in the Punjab! A French woman, Barbara Stray, touring various countries on

her bicycle, and on learning about the celebrations, diverted to Patna to participate.

Hundreds of Sikh NRIs enthusiastically performed *kar seva* many of them including businesswomen, doctors, lawyers, technical consultants and professionals from other fields who said that they “were blessed to get an opportunity to participate in the religious event and do service for the devotees.”

Jaipal Kaur and Kiran Kaur, both NRIs from the United Kingdom, said they considered themselves fortunate to serve as sevadars at the langar at Takht Sri Harmandir Sahib. Hundreds of NRI Sikhs from the UK, the United States, Canada, Australia, Italy, Germany and France were enthusiastic in their voluntary services, one of the core tenets of Sikhism, serving at different langars in Guru ki Nagri (Guru's abode) sprawled between Patna and the historic gurdwaras. “This is the first time I am visiting the birthplace of Guru Maharaj. I consider myself lucky to do service at the ‘langar’,” said Jaipal Singh, a Sikh working with IBM in the UK. Kiran Kaur, also from the United Kingdom, said that nearly 150 Sikh women from that country were serving as ‘sevadars’ to take care of the dietary needs of the devotees. “I am really a lucky one to get to perform ‘seva’. My life has some meaning now,” Kiran exuded !



Mandip Singh from Canada said that he had served langar in the tented city for three days. "It is a matter of immense satisfaction for me. I will continue to serve at the community kitchen till I leave." Surjit Singh from California pointed out that community service was an essential part of the Sikh religion. "I can say little more than that I am privileged to work as a 'sevadar' here," he said. Makhan Singh from New York said: "It is a rare privilege to serve at the Patna Sahib gurdwara. There is no work bigger than to offer your services at the community kitchen here."

Baba Maan Singh, from Birmingham in the UK, said that most NRI devotees were well aware that this was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. "NRI devotees are helping with cooking, cleaning utensils, mopping floors and serving food to the devotees," he said. "It is a matter of pride for us that we got a chance to attend the 'Prakash Utsav' and work as 'sevadars'," London-based Omkar Singh echoed. These devotees were all praise for Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar for making the celebrations such a mega event. "I never imagined that such amazing arrangements would be made for these celebrations in Patna and at the Patna Sahib gurdwara," US-based Gurcharan Singh exulted.

About 350 members, including 60 women from UK-based Guru Nanak Nishkam Sevak Jatha led by Bhai Mohinder Singh Ahulwalia, offered voluntary service

at different community kitchens. "It is a big moment for all of us," said Parbinder Singh, one of the members of the group. His views were echoed by another group member Baba Sukhveer Singh.

The grand finale of the Prakash Parv on 3 January 2017 was attended by several dignitaries including Delhi's Chief Minister, Arvind Kejriwal, who paid obeisance at the Takht Harmandir Sahib Gurdwara besides visiting the Bal Leela Gurdwara in the vicinity. "I have come here to take the blessings of Guru Gobind Singh ji. His life is an inspiration to everyone," he stated.

Punjab Chief Minister, Captain Amarinder Singh visited Patna along with former PM Manmohan Singh, along with Union Home Minister Rajnath Singh and several other Union Ministers and Chief Ministers from other states.

On 5 January 2017, penultimate day of the Prakash Utsav, Prime Minister Narendra Modi came to Patna. Speaking at Patna Sahib, the Prime Minister praised Nitish Kumar for personally taking care of the minutest details and organising the celebrations successfully.

It is estimated that some 750,000 persons visited the Takht Sri Harmandir Saheb Gurdwara during the week-long celebrations.



The International Sikh Conclave 2016

The State Government of Bihar, led by Chief Minister Nitish Kumar actually began the 350th Prakash Utsav (birth anniversary) celebrations of the Tenth Master, Guru Gobind Singh in magnificent manner at the state capital city of Patna, birth place of the Guru three months earlier. With maximum effort and resources, the Government of Bihar nominated their Principal Secretary Mrs Harjot Kaur Bamhrah to organise the celebrations, which actually commenced with the International Conclave at Patna during 22-24 September 2016.

Hundreds of prominent personalities were invited by the Bihar Government to attend the functions, which began at the imposing SKM Hall at the heart of Patna on 22 September where the Bihar Chief Minister welcomed the invitees, including Chief Minister Prakash Singh Badal from the Punjab and scores of others from not only the Punjab and New Delhi and Indian states, but from many parts of the world including the UK, United States of America, Australia, Malaysia, Myanmar, and others converged.

Many visitors first paid obeisance at the Gurdwara Takht Patna Sahib before proceeding to the official dinner hosted by Nitish Kumar at the State Guest House, where the guests interacted also with senior ministers and officials of the Bihar government.

Scholars at the Conclave

Venue of the next two days for the International Seminal was the Hotel Maurya in Patna, where intellectuals and scholars congregated for panel discussions on select topics, which are also briefly reviewed:

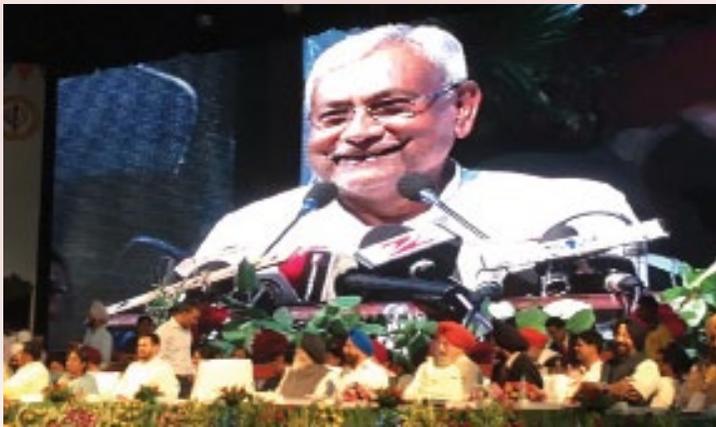
Crusader of Rights

The first Session included presentations by well-known scholars including Prof Gurinder Man Singh from the USA followed by Kuljit Singh Bains and Surinder Singh Raheja, also from the USA. This was followed by a presentation by Dr Paramvir Singh of the Panjabi



University, Patiala, who has been involved in seminal works on the *Encyclopedia of Sikhism in Punjabi*, which has been named after Professor Harbans Singh, a most befitting honour.

Dr Harbans Kaur Sagoo from the International Institute of Sikh Studies in Delhi spoke on the *Sant-Sipahi* concept and recollected those turbulent years of the 18th century when the Khalsa rose to defend the peoples from trepidations of the ruling Mughal dynasty. In plain speaking, she reminded the audience that but for the sacrifices of the Gurus in defence of faith, the entire sub-continent might well have been forcibly converted. In sacrificing his life for the right of belief, Guru Arjan Dev will forever be known as *Hind ka Peer*.



Professor Bhupindar Singh from Delhi stressed on the continuity of divinity from Guru Nanak to Guru Gobind Singh, and his talk was followed by that of Prof Shamsher Singh, who elucidated on the Akal Ustav, with research done at Patna University. Then Prof Mohd. Rabib, also from the Panjabi University at Patiala spoke on the dysfunctional relationship between true Islamic faith and the dynastic, virtually Caliphate-kind of rule of the Mughals. He alluded to the well-known facts that there never was any acrimony between the Sikhs and Muslims, climaxing his statement that “many Muslims consider Sikhism as being of their faith as well!”



Sardar Sukhbir Singh from Birmingham reviewed not only the rights but also key responsibilities of those in governance and was followed by Lt Gen Kartar Singh Gill, who focused on Guru Gobind Singh’s “military genius”. As a military man, the General gave examples of the great Guru’s strategic prowess, which evolved during his stay at Paonta Sahib on edge of the Doon Valley, “the best tactical training area in the country,” as he observed. In the seventeen or so battles fought in the Guru’s time, the Sikhs on an average took





on adversaries infinitely more than their numbers, General Gill making short references to the battle of Saragarhi in 1897, where 21 Sikh soldiers faced 10,000 fanatical tribesmen, which was in keeping with their tradition of centuries earlier when 40 Sikhs had faced some 40,000 adversary at Chamkaur Sahib.

The much acclaimed Sardar Tarlochan Singh, former Member of Parliament and Chairman of the Minorities Commission focused on the manner in which the media dominates Government policies and urged that the community get pro-active to disseminate values of Sikhism in the world media, both print and electronic. He made special reference to the contributions by *Nishaan*, particularly on their recent Issue covering the Sri Guru Granth Sahib Conference at San Jose, in California.

Dr Jaspal Singh, Vice Chancellor of the Punjab University spoke at length on the supreme sacrifices made by Sikhs, led by Guru Gobind Singh, whose young Sahibzadas were shaheed in battle against tyranny; "indeed they were shaheed to assure Hindustan's spiritual future."

Poet Par Excellence

The afternoon session continued in similar refrain, with Dr Harbhajan Singh from Punjab University in Dehra Dun recalling the great Guru's *Vichitar Natak*, or the 'Drama of Life', beginning at Hemkunt Parbat in the Himalayas leading to birth at Patna town. Dr Manjit Singh of Delhi University quoted Arnold Toynbee, one of the world's greatest historians, who wrote that "Mankind's religious future may be obscure; yet one thing can be foreseen. The living higher religions are going to influence each other more than ever before, in the days of increasing communications between all parts of

the world and branches of human race. In this coming religious debate, the Sikh religion and its scriptures, the Guru Granth, will have something special of value to say to the rest of the world."

The well-known Hindi scholar Lal Mohan Upadhyay focused on contributions of the great Guru to Hindi literature. It is not that well appreciated that of the many writings by Guru Gobind Singh, most are in Bhojpuri, Brijbhasha or Hindi (Devnagri script) apart from those in Gurmukhi and Farsee. In fact, Upadhyay got very emotional when he thundered that "the Sikh faith must be spread throughout the country – and in Hindi!"

Following up on this theme, Harinder Singh Bedi of the Guru Nanak Dev University at Amritsar, who is in fact Head of the Hindi Department there, stated that Guru Gobind Singh was perhaps one of the greatest poets composing in Hindi. His articulation was followed by that of Gurjit Singh Bains from Australia and then Kishore Gujral, who has been working on a similar theme at Lucknow University.

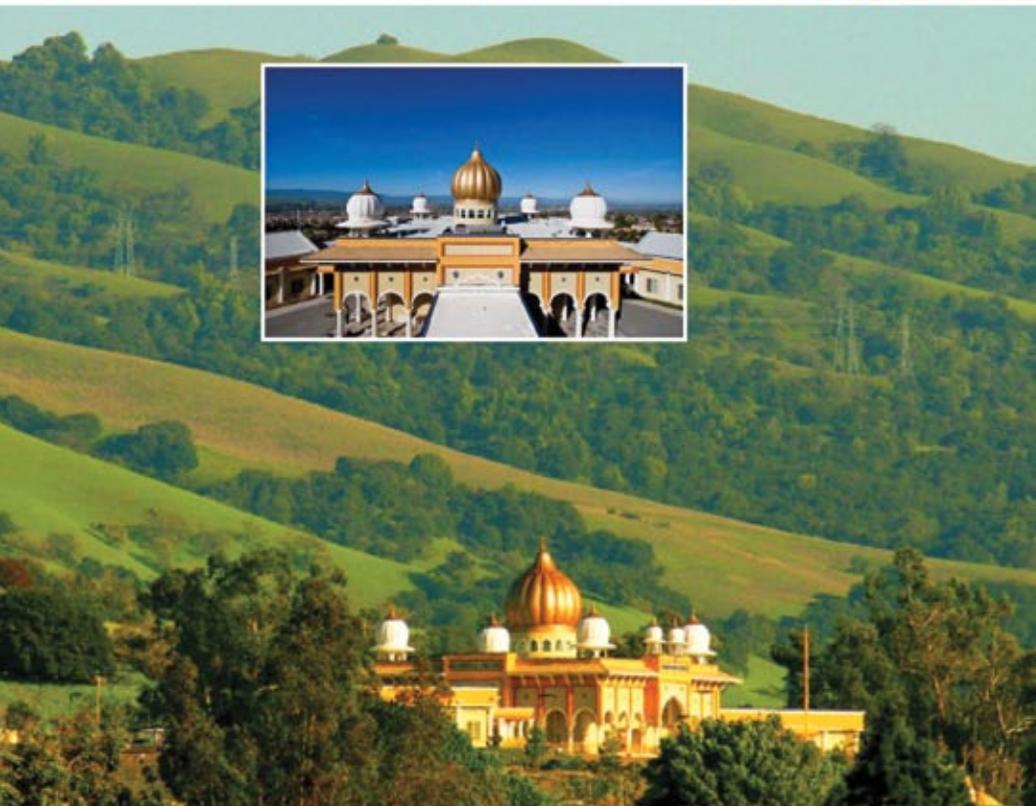
This session climaxed with Gyani Sarbjit Singh's *jaikaars* in Hindi, where he emphasised the power of the slogan *Hii-Hii-Hii*, which much like a war cry emanating from the epiglottitis, stimulates the warrior to fight with supreme valour.

Concluding the session was Dr Dayal Singh of Punjabi University, who focused on that supreme epistle *Zafarnama*, written in Persian by Guru Gobind Singh, directed at Aurangzeb, which made a life-altering impact on the Mughal Emperor.

Faith of Love and Humanity

Discussions followed on the theme 'Sikhism – A Faith of Love and Humanity', with Dr Jasbir Singh Sabar stressing on *Sarbat-da-Bhala*, which is Sikhism's key tenet for mankind. Prof Kulwant Singh of the Post Graduate College, Chandigarh referred to Sikhism's love for humanity which message in fact makes it virtually cosmic or formless, without boundaries. He was followed by Gyani Santokh Singh from Australia and Gulbarg Singh Bassi of the Global Sikh Council, USA before SJS Pall from Delhi and Gurpreet Singh and Ashok Singh Bagrian, both from Chandigarh eloquently spoke on the Sikh way of life.

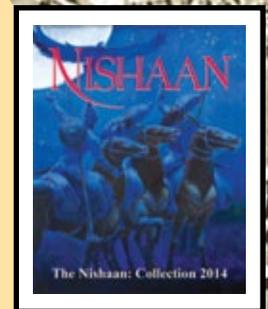
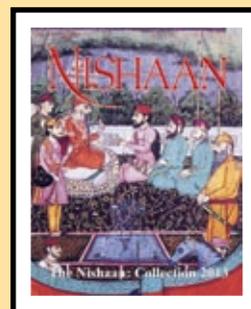
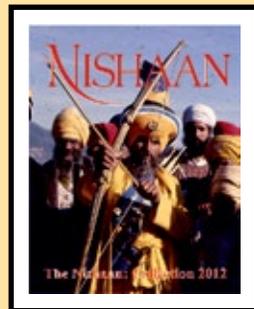
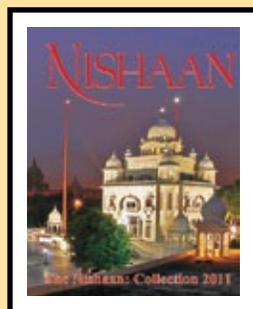
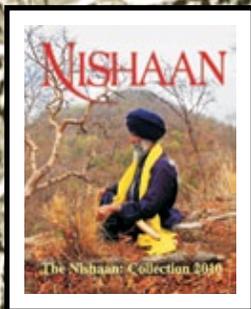
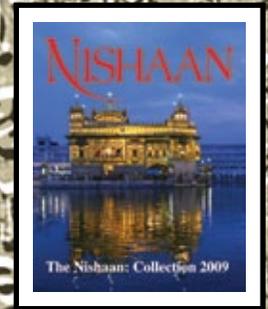
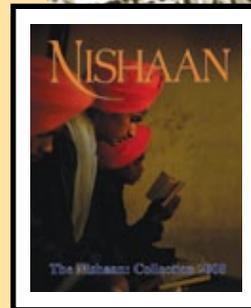
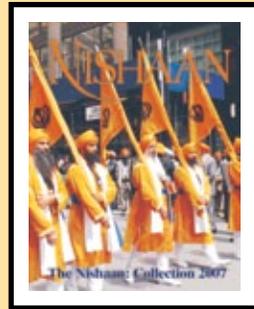
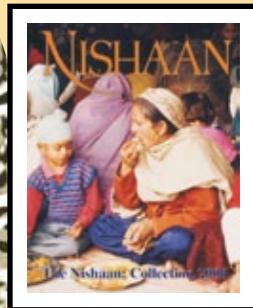
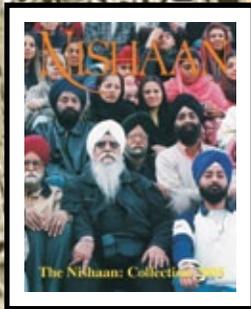
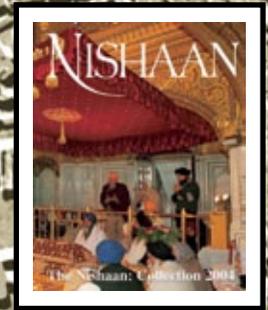
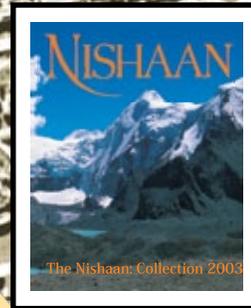
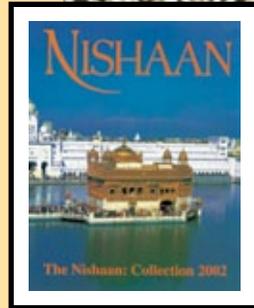
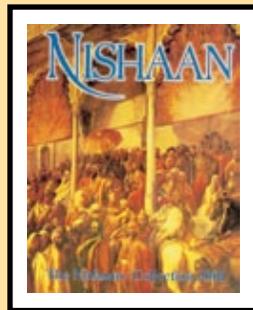
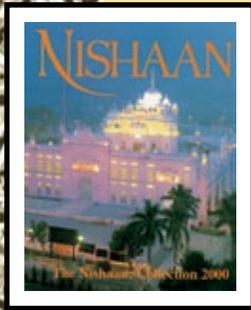
"The very fact that the Panj Pyaraas came from different castes and regions of the sub-continent makes Sikhi very much a pan-Indian faith, which has now spread to most parts of the world."



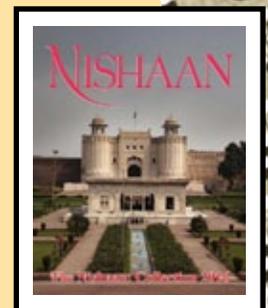
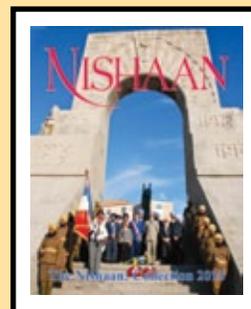
The Fifth Annual Conference on the Sikh scripture, Guru Granth Sahib, jointly hosted by the Chardi Kalaa Foundation and the San Jose Gurdwara, took place on 10 September 2016 at San Jose in California, USA. One of the largest and arguably most beautiful gurdwaras in North America, the Gurdwara Sahib at San Jose was founded in San Jose, California, USA in 1985 by members of the then-rapidly growing Sikh community in the Santa Clara Valley



The Nishaan Collections



The **Nishaan Collections** for 2000, 2001, 2002, 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015 and 2016 are now available in bound volumes, also including the Premiere Issue of the Journal released in April 1999 at the Tercentenary of the birth of Khalsa. **The Nishaan**, published quarterly, is considered a collector's item, to be read and kept with pride and faith Published by **The Nagaara Trust, New Delhi, India.**



Limited copies available from:

The Distribution Department Nishaan
D-43, Sujan Singh Park, New Delhi 110 003, India
Tel +91 11 24617234 Fax +91 11 24628615

e mail: nishaan.nagaara@gmail.com, nishaan@lycos.com • Website: www.nishaannagaara.com