

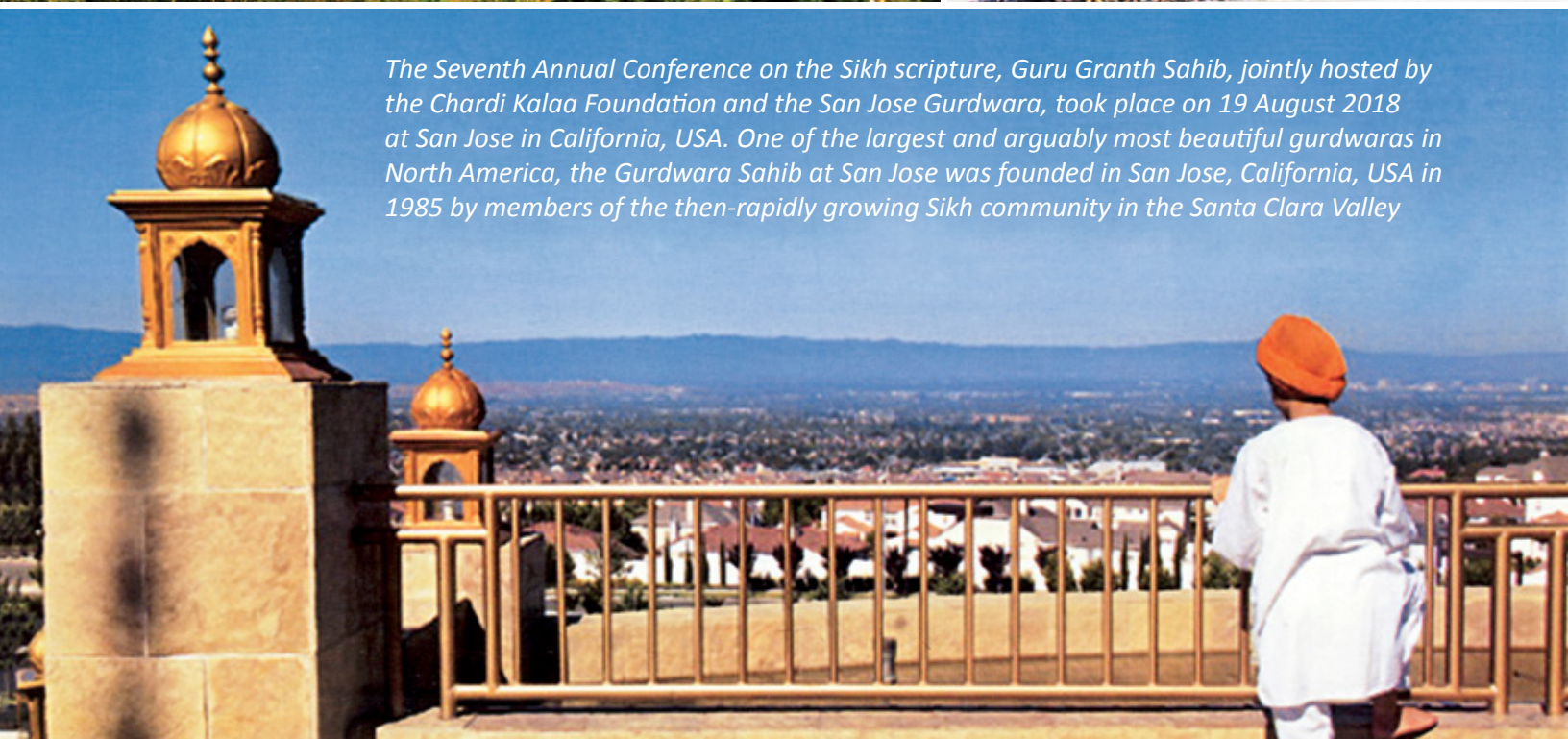
III/2019

NISHAAN

NAGAARA

Kashmir : Bridging the Chasm
The Sikhs of Kashmir

The Real 'Great Game'
On Sikh Heritage



The Seventh Annual Conference on the Sikh scripture, Guru Granth Sahib, jointly hosted by the Chardi Kalaa Foundation and the San Jose Gurdwara, took place on 19 August 2018 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

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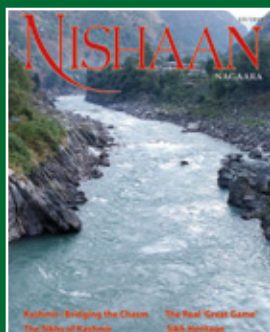
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The river Kishan Ganga or Neelam, flows through the Tithwal Valley and divides the Indian and Pakistani sides (picture by Cmde Dalbir Singh Sodhi).

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KASHMIR: BRIDGING THE CHASM

My parents must have reminded me a zillion times that, as a toddler, I had been to Kashmir, the picturesque valley that has awakened many a poet's muse over the years. Of course, on that trip I had promptly managed to lose my silver cup and some much-loved toys, during an outing on the lake.

Years later, on one of my rare trips back to India from America I revisited Kashmir, and promptly lost myself, but this time to the valley's magical charm.

In the intervening years I learned much of Kashmir's history, the disastrous war that followed India's independence in 1947, as well as of Sikh resilience that saved major part of the valley for India. I now need to rediscover a few historical but momentous nuggets to locate the Kashmir of today, in perspective.

Situated at the strategically important north-western border of India, Kashmir might not ever have resonated much in Indian consciousness but for the fact that Sikhs had taken it back from the Afghans in 1819. It remained an integral part of the Sikh kingdom of the legendary Ranjit Singh until 1849. The British acquired it as part of the Sikh Empire, but it was surreptitiously sold by them to the Dogras (who had been part of the erstwhile Sikh kingdom). One should label this intricate, but shady, business as treachery or conniving acumen of the British and the Dogras who had betrayed the Sikhs, but that is another sordid tale in Kashmir's political history.

Then, as is now, the erstwhile territory of Jammu and Kashmir, is in reality three distinct regions. Jammu, by its close geographical, religious and socio-cultural ties to northern India, was predominantly Hindu while Kashmir, the more picturesque mountainous valley was largely Islamic, while the bordering territory of Ladakh or 'Little Tibet' was essentially Buddhist.

Kashmiriyat, the culture that represents the ethno-national and social consciousness and cultural framework of the Kashmiri people, has come to signify the centuries-old indigenous secularism of Kashmir. The valley has a preponderance of Muslims, close to 90 percent while Hindus have a larger base in Jammu and Sikhs form barely 2 percent of the population of Jammu and Kashmir but have been intrinsically part of the region.

One must never forget that when the Mughal ruler of India (Aurangzeb) turned fanatical and overzealous in converting others to Islam, he focused on Kashmir which then had a larger Hindu population. When his dreadful orders to convert Kashmir into a Muslim enclave came in the late 17th century, they first focused on the Pandits (Brahmin priestly caste of Hindus) of Kashmir. Desperately seeking shelter and succor, a delegation of Pandits trekked to Anandpur in the Punjab, residence of the ninth Sikh Guru Tegh Bahadur, who did what a Guru would do. He was summoned to Delhi and appeared at court of the Emperor to protest such draconian edicts even though he was not a Hindu. He was given the choice of converting to Islam or accepting martyrdom. The rest is history. He refused and was publicly beheaded in Delhi on orders of the Emperor. In effect, this only hastened the process of dissolution of the Mughal Empire. Guru Tegh Bahadur's death antedates the lines most often misattributed to Voltaire "*That even though I disagree with what you say I will defend to the death your right to say it.*"

It is ironic that though Guru Tegh Bahadur accepted death in defence of freedom of religion – the right of Hindus to refuse conversion to Islam under duress – the community of Kashmir pandits are once more in beleaguered state, and the onus is once again on the Sikhs the rescue the ship of state. But in the present state of political uncertainty the Muslims too are in grave jeopardy, as are the Sikhs of Jammu & Kashmir.

I am flabbergasted by the intertwined complexities and senselessness of the imbroglio that is destroying a heavenly Eden on Earth, the place and its people. Once again, the misguided policies of governance are responsible for much of the situation.

The major part of Kashmir remains Muslim as it has for aeons. Recognizing the political complications, Kashmir had been governed by special ordinance that recognized the uncertainty of the State under the UN-mandated ceasefire in 1949. True that total peace has remained ephemeral, but life crawled on at a sleepy pace.

The past few decades have seen the situation worsen. One must remember that the Indian Subcontinent, in its long and turbulent history, like many other parts of the world, was hardly ever 'one nation' as many of today's India's myth-makers contend. For millennia, the Indian subcontinent was a *mélange* of independent or quasi-independent nation-states, each with its own culture, language, system of governance, cuisine, music and ethos. The Khyber Pass, on the north-west, connected India with Afghanistan, Persia and Central Asia. Most invaders entered India by this route, crossing the Indus into today's Punjab. This included the early Caucasians from Asia Minor, Alexander the Great, Mongols, Mughals, as also sundry invaders, adventurers, robber barons, workers and traders from the west and so on. Those who lived in this land were referred to as 'Hindus', most likely acquiring the name from the river Indus (Sindhu) which flowed into the plains south of the Khyber Pass. Europeans including the English, French, Portuguese and others of their ilk came centuries later, but by sea.

Clearly, this narrative created an ocean of genetic hybridisation in northwestern India, including Punjab, homeland of the Sikhs. Actually, genetic hybridisation increases genetic vigour which is widely seen in animal husbandry, and also visible in population studies in different parts of the world.

This divided subcontinent became easy prey for ruthless invaders, even those with limited strength and manpower. Too many of the local rulers were happy to sell out in appeasement to invaders for their own selfish ends.

Islam was possibly the first movement that entered the sub-continent with the objective of religious conversion of a hoary culture and philosophic tradition; history is witness that Islamists pursued their goals often ruthlessly.

This *mélange* of nations was visibly a reasonably united territory but only briefly in history under Ashoka, then under the Mughals and thereafter, for about 200 years under the British. Since its independence (and partition in 1947), India has been a unitary independent nation, but with fissiparous tendencies that still flourish.

On independence in 1947, the Government of India committed itself to the vision of a secular multi faith nation, but not surprisingly after so many centuries of suppression, the lure of majoritarian dominance was perhaps too heady to resist. After centuries of Islamic and then British dominance, despite democratic norms in place, the urge of absolute control by power dynamics and numbers seems to remain overpowering, even irresistible.

I support my reasoning here from the alarming popularity of support by the intellectual elite of India for the dubious notions of *Hindutva* and *Ghar Wapsy* as fundamentals and defining values and goals of the modern, democratic, secular nation of India. Keep in mind that *Hindutva*, held absolute by the governing political structure today, defines Hindu traditions and practices sacred and untouchable for all people who see themselves as Indians. Such reasoning coupled with widespread popular slogans of *Hindu*, *Hindi*, *Hindustan* diminish any other identities – religious or secular values. *Ghar Wapsy* adds another dimension of idiosyncrasy by arguing that since Indian converts to Islam, Christianity or Sikhism must have come from Hinduism, their conversions are illegitimate. They were Hindu once and must return to that reality even today, and that no one can walk away from that root belief. I have parsed this assumption elsewhere in some detail.

To my mind, such attitudes speaks less of the professed sanctity of Hindu belief and more of an insecure sense of self. Hinduism is an old and revered

rich tradition, don't diminish it unnecessarily by insecurity. Believe me, when I say that I have a fair sense of India's troubled colonial past, the centuries of invasions, its regrettable caste system and related practices.

India's hopeful future lies in its modern perspective when it committed the new nation to an inclusive social and cultural reality with equal rights for all men, women, high or low castes, people of different religions, identities. Yes, roadblocks remain; there is no path without some. We have to keep our eye resolutely on the road, even if it is the "less traveled." The solution does not lie in creating a deliberately biased nation where not all Indians are equal or some are more equal than others.

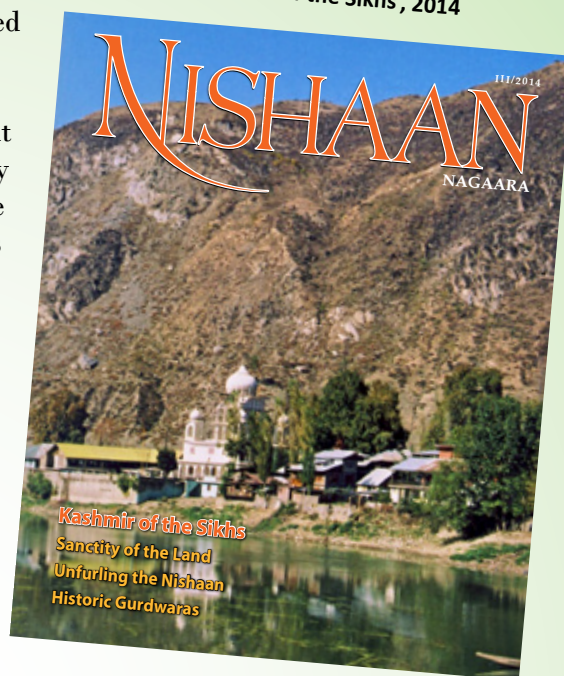
These are fundamental to our modern identity. Would it not be better for the nation to celebrate their modern identity keeping these caveats in mind? A people and nations progress when where if they value diversity and freedom of thought and expression along with equality and accountability. Equally important is diversity, where people can disagree. Diversity nurtures strength; in unity lies power. A healthy society and culture needs both. Diversity gives us ideas, progress and power. Homogeneity in thought and unanimity in action is a losing recipe for a productive life or a progressive nation.

It does not behove a nation to force such narrow policies on a free people, as it only diminishes everyone. The political institutions of India need to rediscover the nation's fundamentals that were so dear to its founders. My purpose, believe me, is not a scolding rant but a plea to listen to voices of our conscience – to be true to our essential truths.

Dear readers, I have deliberately not spent time on the early history of Kashmir when Guru Nanak and other Gurus widely traveled into that part of the Indian subcontinent and established Sikh places of worship and culture. I am also bypassing the intimate power relationships between Greater Punjab of Maharaja Ranjit Singh and the British on and about Kashmir. Excellent historical narratives exist on these matters – particularly by Jasbir Singh Sarna. My focus today is on Kashmir today and its precarious place in the present realities between India and Pakistan. The repercussions would be dangerous to Asia unless handled with some sensitivity and restraint.

This issue of *Nishaan* provides a slew of varied views on the present land of Kashmir. Readers, please pursue the many heart-rending examples therein, and raise your voice in thoughtful support to bridge the chasm.

Covers of Nishaan's Special Issues on 'Kashmir of the Sikhs', 2014





'Sarbat da Bhalla'

A History of Valour and Devotion

On 5 August 2019, there was a paradigm shift in the already turbulent state of Jammu & Kashmir. The present and future fate of the subcontinent is once more on edge, staring as some have been at *Armageddon*, with the destiny of over 1.5 billion people balancing on edge, exposed to unpredictable actions by the antagonists with radically different agendas.

In the midst of this severe turbulence, it is imperative again to turn to Guru Nanak's vision and teachings. Guru Nanak condemned religious bigotry and attempts by any religious group to assert their will on others. One must condemn and oppose religious bigotry of all hues in India and its neighbourhood and this can begin with celebrating the unique and universal path given by Guru Nanak, over five centuries back.

Taking the faith forward as given by Guru Nanak, Sikhs themselves should steer away from misleading dreams of political domination which in effect is against the essential Sikh philosophy and way of life.

Instead, Sikhs of the subcontinent and the diaspora must engage with those in power, both in India and Pakistan to genuinely reach out and to negotiate for a truly secular subcontinent as a common market area, with unbreakable bonds dictated by natural resources and the realities of geography. Such an entity could well become an economic colossus that minimises spending on competitive armies and nuclear weapons, with all their inherent dangers. Strong trading links would also dilute the dangerous trends towards extremism of various hues, both in India and Pakistan.

It is never easy changing fixed mindsets but the idea of '*sarbat da bhalla*' should be our obsession and so become a practical reality. This is easier said than done but as a small, but vibrant minority and that concentrated in a dangerous corner of the subcontinent at a dangerous time, the Sikh community should at least begin to articulate the way forward, and there could be no better time to begin than in this 550th year of Guru Nanak's birth.

Lest we forget : Key facts over the centuries



- ✘ Historical links of J&K with present day India began with incorporation of the territory into Kingdom of the Punjab in early 19th century.
- ✘ ‘Betrayal’ of the Sikhs and subsequent ‘Purchase’ of territory in 1849, while remaining ‘autonomous’ within British India.
- ✘ Independence of India on 15 August 1947 and Kashmir Maharaja’s ‘Standstill Agreement’ for three months.
- ✘ Invasion of Kashmir by Pak-led tribals in late September (Poonch) and Valley (22 October 1947).
- ✘ Dogged resistance against invaders by Sikh civilians of Muzaffarabad/Uri/ Baramulla/ Tangdhar, resulting in massacres (still not recognised) till arrival of first Indian troops (1st battalion Sikh Regiment) on 27 October 1947, many gallantly killed in action including the CO.
- ✘ 1st Sikhs save the Valley and then led by Colonel Harbaksh Singh, spearhead Indian Army advance towards Muzaffarabad in November 1947, capture of Tangdhar (Tithwal Valley), in early 1948.
- ✘ Siege of Poonch withstood, under command of Brigadier Pritam Singh, till its relief in mid-1948.
- ✘ Capture of Zojila pass and consolidation by 1st Patiala Infantry through the winter of 1947-48, enabling advance to Kargil, Drass and then Leh in the summer of 1948.
- ✘ Danger to Ladakh from advancing enemy thwarted with airlift of troops in autumn of 1948, pioneered by Air Commodore Meher Singh, landing on an improvised air strip at Leh.
- ✘ Throughout turbulence and violence in the Valley over past 30 years, the Kashmiri-Sikh community have continued to live and work in various cities, towns and villages, thus perpetuating their rights, displaying courage and forbearance even as some communities ‘fled’ from perceived dangers during 1990-91.
- ✘ The Sikhs of Kashmir have demonstrably upheld secular traditions of the country and this must be recognised by both the State and National Government.

The Sikhs of Kashmir



A microcosm of India's quest for "unity in diversity," the Valley is home to several distinct religious and ethnic communities. While Muslims comprise around 96 per cent of its population, Hindus comprise 2.5 per cent and Sikhs a mere 1 per cent. Predominantly an agrarian community, Sikh households own anywhere between 5-180 *kanals* (0.5-22.5 acres) of land, on which they grow rice, beans, and vegetables (non-cash crops) in addition to apple orchards and walnut trees (cash crops).

The largest of 14 Sikh villages in Anantnag district in South Kashmir, Chitti Singhpura is home to around 400 Sikh households, which form its core, and 30-40 Muslim households, which live along its peripheries. Never before the target of violence, the Chitti Singhpura execution came as a shock to Sikhs and Muslims alike in the Valley. Believing they were finally the target of militants, Sikh community leaders deliberated on migrating *en masse* like their Pandit counterparts in the immediate aftermath of the massacre.



But 19 years on (see image above) with hopes for justice fading and violence on the rise again, majority of the Sikh community remains rooted in the valley because economic prospects outside Kashmir, for a community whose main source of income is its land, are limited. Harjant Singh, a government worker in his fifties, says: *Assi kyun rahe ethe? Saddi compulsion*

hai... zameena “Why did we stay here? We are bound... by our land”. Pashaura Singh, a young officer in the Finance department, too explains that Sikh decisions come down to two things — land and government jobs. Almost all urban Sikh families have at least one government *mulazim* (employee), which makes leaving an unfavourable option.

Although several families have sold small parcels of land to buy property in the adjoining Jammu region to construct housing if things get too bad, many Sikhs don't perceive a personal threat from the insurgency. Sikhs insist that it is not religious persecution, but the economic distress resulting from the violence and the frequent shutdowns in the Valley, that will eventually make them re consider the situation.



Sikh residents near Baramulla

Gurpal Singh, a 35-year-old engineer who works as a primary school teacher because engineering positions are hard to come by, and has two young school-age daughters, clarifies, “*Jad tak twada income source nahi milega, tussi kithe nahi rehe sakde*” (until you have a source of income, you cannot stay anywhere). Gurpal's family owns about 15 acres of land. But for him, this land is not just an economic asset; it holds an essential meaning. On it, he says, is spilled the blood of seven family members who were killed in the post-partition violence.



There are several, predominately Sikh, villages in the Valley, including Singhpura, situated between Srinagar and Baramulla



Importantly, while the older generation cites economic necessity and attachment to their land as reasons to continue living on in Kashmir, the younger generation of Sikhs prefer to remain rooted for fear of religious persecution in India, which is a sad flashback to 1984.

Jaspal Singh, a 19-year-old activist and convener of a group disseminating Sikh political and religious education, explains, “*Ethe sanu respect mildi hai*” (we feel respected here). Amanpreet, a 20-year-old student and Sikh activist, reciprocates this sentiment.

These youngsters’ antagonism towards India stems from the insidious attack in 1984 on the Golden Temple in Punjab, a scar that will not heal.

The way forward

The politics of the Pandit exodus and the ensuing communal discourses in its aftermath conveniently ignores stories of the other side: minorities who continue living in Kashmir.

While their exodus was near-complete, Nishita Trisal documents the experiences of nearly 7,000 Pandit families who did not leave the Valley owing to either economic constraints or attachment to their land. By their own account, these families, like the Sikhs, face no religious persecution, but have little

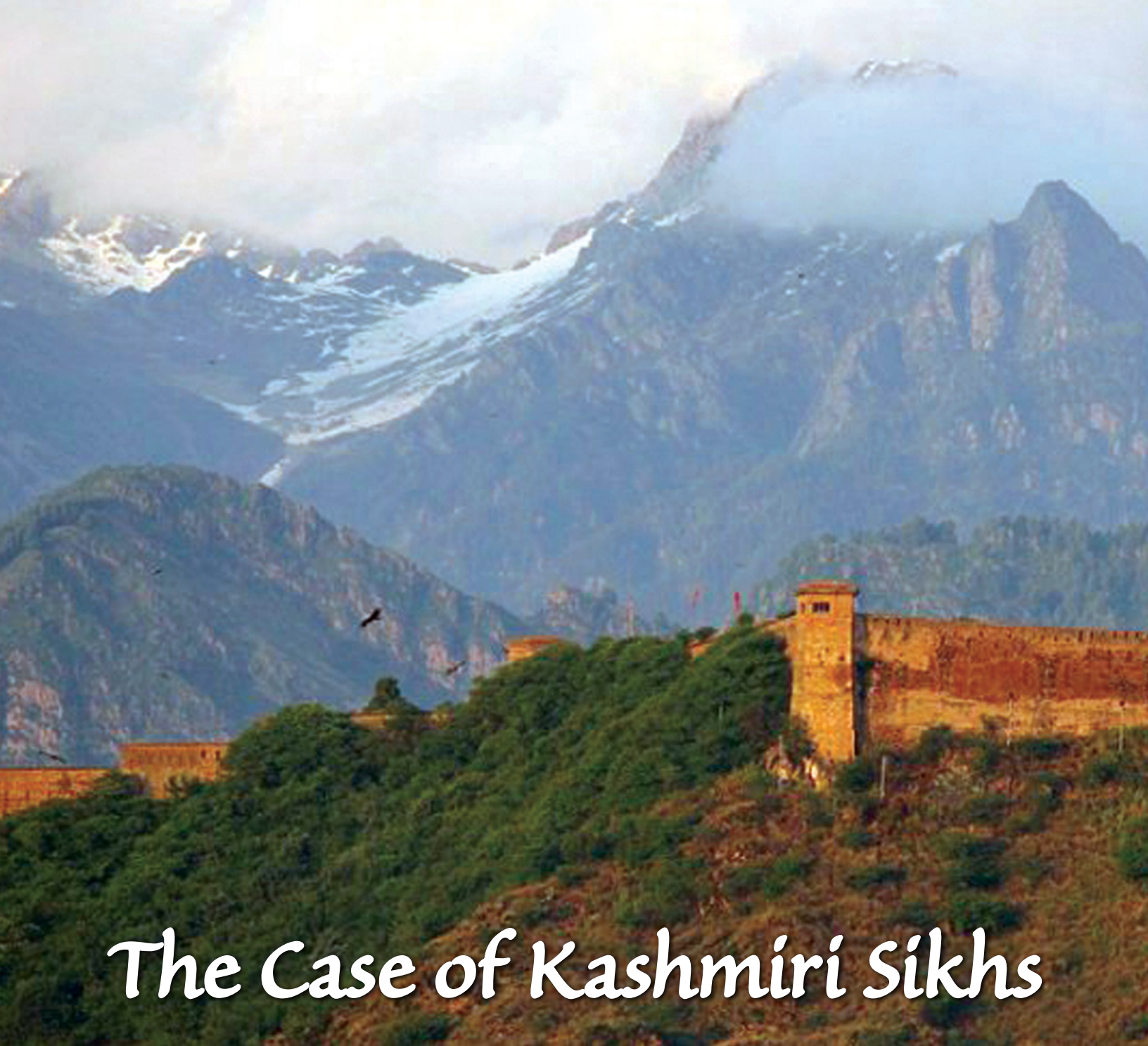
economic opportunity elsewhere while they are passed over for migrant families who have received generous government support recognising their hardships. Despite Chitti Singhpora, the Sikhs’ biggest worry, too, is not religious persecution but economic hardship.

If indeed the abrogation of Article 370 will bring economic gain to Kashmiris, the government’s “development” approach now, must not ignore the economic hardships of micro-minorities like the Sikhs and remaining Pandits (and, of course, the majority Kashmiri Muslim community) at the expense of the migrant Pandit community, which already receives government benefits, disproportionately.

As it mulls strategies to repatriate migrant Pandits, the government must also acknowledge these clearly articulated concerns and costs of conflict borne by those who have continued living in the Valley despite violence. To prevent further exodus, it must really move beyond communally motivated policy responses that threaten demographic restructuring in the Valley.

Khushdeep Kaur Malhotra

The writer is a Ph.D. candidate in Geography and Urban Studies at Temple University. This article is by special arrangement with the Centre for the Advanced Study of India, University of Pennsylvania.



The Case of Kashmiri Sikhs

For this predominantly agrarian minority community, the biggest worry is not religious persecution but economic hardship. On 20 March 2000, armed renegades cold-bloodedly murdered 35 Sikh men in Chitti Singhpura village in South Kashmir on the eve of US President Bill Clinton's visit to India. A "micro-minority" in Kashmir, such targeted violence was a first for the Sikh community, who have lived for generations in harmony alongside their Muslim brethren in the Valley.

Although the reasons behind the violence and the identity of the perpetrators remain shrouded in mystery, Kashmiris – both Muslim and Sikh – believe that its intent was to create communal fault lines and drive out the Sikh community from the valley. 19 years later, as they still await justice, the Sikhs have stayed on—and remain part of Kashmir.

As many debate the recent abrogation of Article 370 and the conversion of J&K into a Union Territory, one



of the most resounding justifications for this dramatic move by the Modi government has been the correction of a historical wrong – the exodus of Kashmir's other *minority* community, the Kashmiri Pandits, who left the Valley virtually overnight in January 1990, following violent threats made against Kashmiri minorities.

While terribly shameful and unjust, the displacement of Kashmiri Pandits is not a unique outcome of identity-

based violence targeting a particular community on the lines of ethnicity or religion; in India it is, in fact, the norm. Whether one looks at Nellie (Assam), Delhi, Ahmedabad, or Muzaffarnagar (UP), identity-driven conflicts almost always lead to displacement of the violated community. Given this, why is the Kashmiri Sikh case different? How do we understand the Kashmiri Sikhs' decision to continue living on in Kashmir?

Now, more than ever, this is an important question to ask, in order to challenge the communal narratives accompanying the Pandit exodus and Kashmiris' struggle for self-determination, and what one hears resonated in the celebrations following abrogation of Article 370.

Using evidence from ethnographic fieldwork completed between March and October 2018, it is clear that the decision to stay in the Sikh case is driven by a combination of economic necessity, attachment to their land—and very sadly, distrust of India. Furthermore, while harm from violence is a general concern, religious persecution is categorically stated as a non-issue. Despite violence, the Sikhs and Muslims continue to cohabit neighbourhoods in close proximity to one another.

Securing Tithwal



*RIAF C-47 Dakota of No.12 Squadron supply dropping in the Tangdhar Valley of Tithwal Sector in June 1948.
(Historic photograph taken by Col Harwant Singh).*

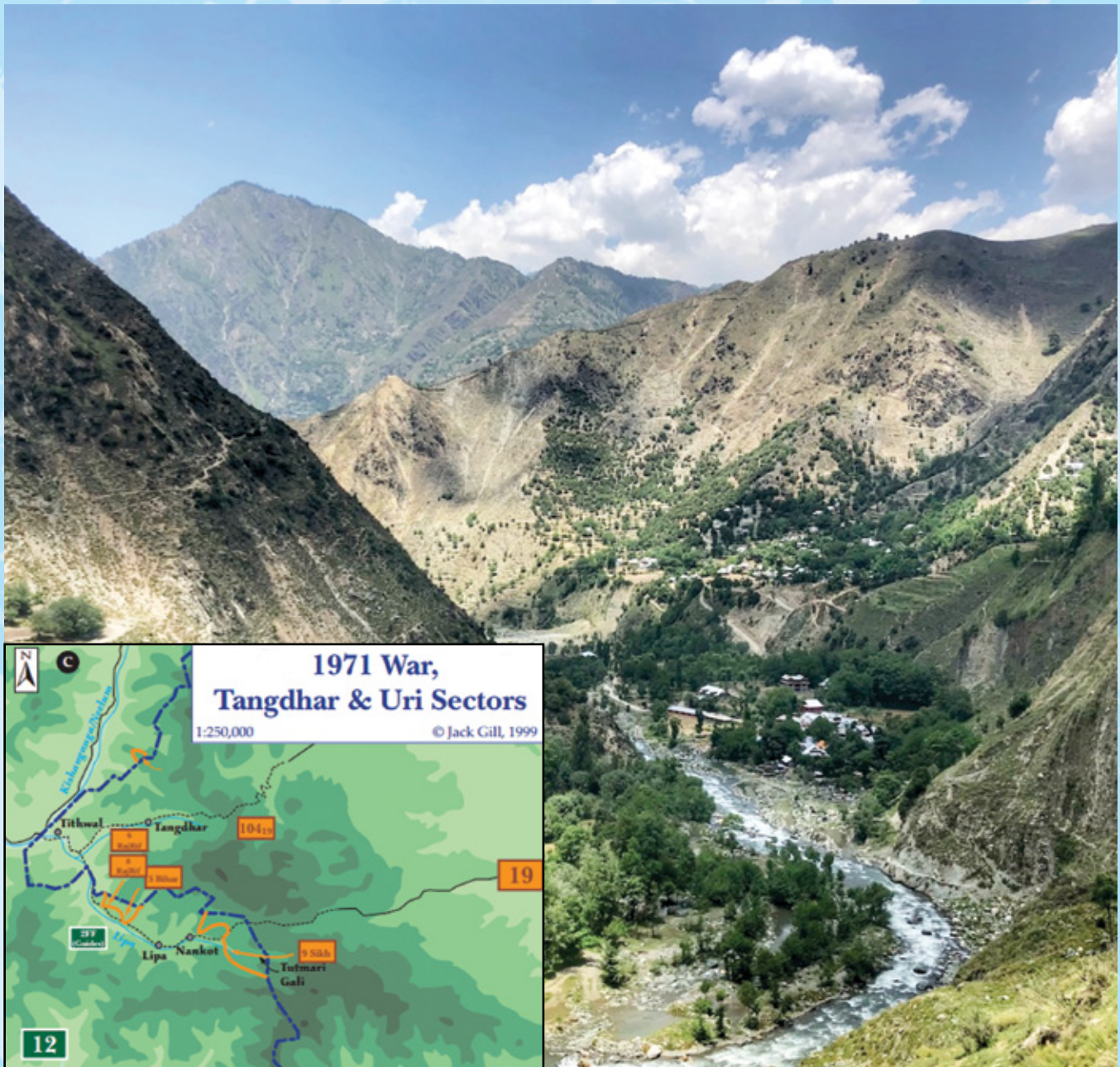
During the last week of May and first week of June 1948, the (Royal) Indian Air Force made heroic sorties to supply Indian Army troops who had recaptured Tangdhar in the Tithwal Valley during the summer offensive. The spearhead was 163 Infantry Brigade of Sri Div (later 19th Infantry Division) which under the stout leadership of then Brigadier Harbaksh Singh covered some 45 miles through very difficult hilly jungle terrain which included the crossing of the Nastachhun Pass (10264 feet) covered with dense snow. 1st battalion of the Sikh

Regiment, (which had already secured Srinagar in the initial battles of October-November 1947), led the advance against major resistance. The capture code was 'Eagle', and flashed on 23 May 1948.

It was indeed a remarkable military operations- a test of physical endurance and fighting qualities of the troops. Only a jeepable track then existed from Kupwara to Chokibal and supplies were carried by porters, ponies, buffaloes, donkeys, even goats, to transport vital supplies at Chokibal, over the



Maps by KBK



The Tithwal salient was the scene of severe fighting during the December 1971 conflict. As in 1948, 19 Infantry Division was responsible for the actions with its constituent Brigades (104 with 3 Bihar, 6 Rajput, 8 Raj Rif and 9 Sikh plus 161 with 7 Sikh LI and 8 Sikh taking part). They were faced by Pakistan's 12 Infantry Division.

Nastachhun pass to 163 Brigade headquarters at Chhamkot, close to Tithwal, the effort taking 3-4 days. As the troops deployed at Tithwal area were running short of ammunition, rations and medical supplies, air drops were then carried out by Dakotas of No.12 Squadron RIAF which continued for weeks till the jeepable road from Chokibal to Tangdhar was completed by 3 Field Engineers and 3 Pioneer Companies of the Indian Army in September 1948. Till then Indian troops were supplied continuously by the RIAF.

Commodore Dalbir Singh Sodhi on

Defending Tangdhar



Remembering the Martyrs

One of the most scenic places of Kashmir is Tangdhar, which is part of the Karnah Tehsil, in Kupwara District of Kashmir, some 75 kilometres north west of Srinagar. Karnah Tehsil has a population of some sixty thousand, the local language being Pahari.

Before the trauma of October 1947, Karnah was the largest tehsil of Muzaffargarh Wazarat, ensconced in a small valley between the high mountains of Shamasbari and Karanu. The area witnessed severe fighting during the 1947, 1965 and 1971 conflicts with Pakistan. Located close to

Uri on one side and Keran on the other, Tangdhar is virtually on the Line of Control (LoC) with the river Kishan Ganga, named as the Neelam in POK, bisecting the area.

In October 1947, the *Kabalees* (as the tribal raiders armed and led by Pakistani officers in mufti were known), also came across the border to attack and capture this area. At that time there were hundreds of Sikhs living in the Tithwal valley and a large number were killed defending their home and hearth. A large number of Sikhs worked with the forest department and bravely faced the *Kabalees*, many attaining



Many Sikhs were martyred defending Tangdhar in 1947

martyrdom, amongst them being Amar Singh, Sangat Singh, Gopal Singh and Dula Singh.

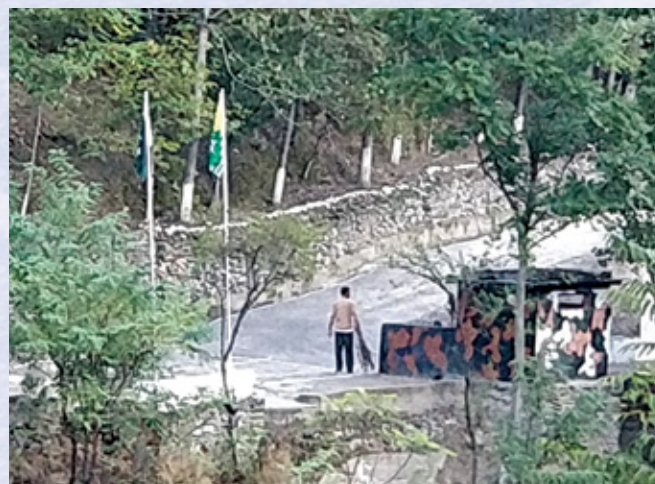
Some 500 Sikhs continue to live in this frontier region and there are two gurdwaras in the vicinity. Being virtually ignored by the many governments that have come and gone from power, the Sikhs of Tangdhar are planning to construct a memorial in honour of their martyrs in 1947.

Commodore Dalbir Singh Sodhi who has recently visited Tangdhar in the Tithwal Valley, had discussed such a proposal with the Sikh villagers and has suggested that support be given for construction of a simple, yet appropriate, memorial to the martyrs of the area in October 1947.

In the past, this was an important township and on the trade route linking Srinagar with Rawalpindi



Dalbir Singh Sodhi with residents in the Tangdhar region



Dividing the valley, the LoC at Tangdhar

via Muzaffarabad. Through the Tithwal Valley were carried the choicest of fruit including apricots, honey, woolen blankets while from Rawalpindi came salt, tea, gur, naswar and finished garments. The wholesale traders were essentially Hindu Khattris.

Then came the violence following partition and invasion of Kashmir by Kabalees in October 1947 and since then, Karnah has been under Pakistani occupation. A large number of families have been separated but poignantly can view each other across the river Neelam. For a very short while after 2003, as part of Confidence Building Measures, relatives from across the LOC were able to meet at Chalaina.

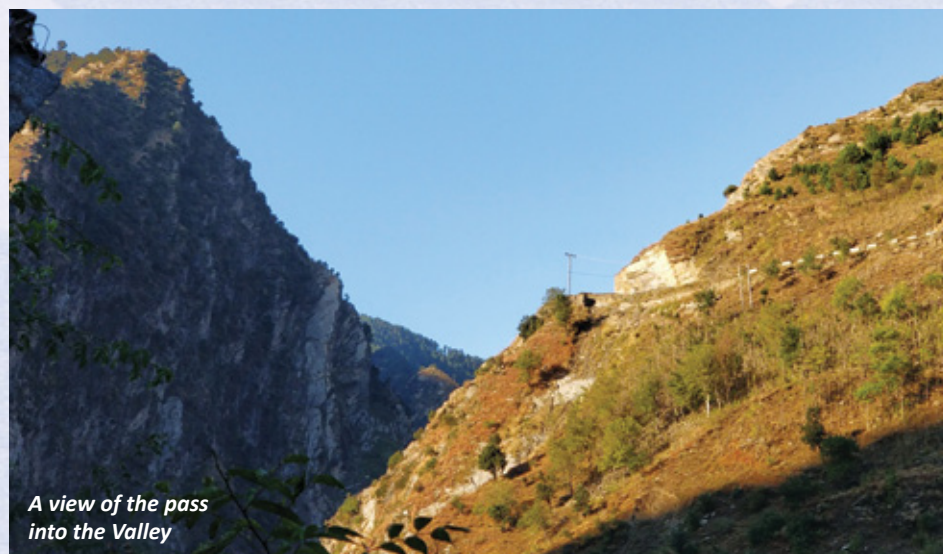
According to legend, this area was once ruled by Raja Karan of Mahabharat fame who named the place as Karan-Nah but with passage of time, the name was changed to Karnah. As Dr Sabar Afaqi, a renowned scholar writes in his book *Muzaffarabad*, Lord Krishna also visited Karnah and thereafter the river passing through Karnah was named as the Kishan Ganga. Abdul Rashid Qureshi recalls that on excavation of the area, artefacts of much historical value were recovered that relate to that period of civilisation. Ruins of the palace of Raja Karan are visible at the site. During the rule of Ashoka in 273 BC, a university was established in the Karnah area (presently in POK) on confluence of the rivers Madhumati and Kishan Ganga, known as Sharda University. Sharda Peeth Temple is also located in this area, much revered by Kashmiri Pandits, but

this shrine has not been visited after 1947 and is in ruins.

Whilst at Tithwal, one can see both Indian and Pakistan Army posts, separated by the bridge built in 1931 by the Forest Department. From here, the road built by the Chinese as part of CPEC connecting Muzaffarabad with Mirpur, is also distinctly seen.

Indeed this area is very picturesque and breathtaking. After crossing Kupawara and Chowkibal, one climbs to *Sadhna Top* to cross into the Valley (was named as Sadhna pass after the glamorous film actress visited the area following the 1965 war when visiting troops). From *Sadhna Top* one has a panoramic view of the Valley as well as various hills and peaks (some of them are across the LOC), and one of them named *Madras Hill* when captured during 1965 but this was later returned to Pakistan.

As one can imagine, this area has a major presence of the Army and being far flung from other areas, the local population greatly relies on the Army for essential supplies. A Degree college has recently come up and is part of efforts being made to provide essential services to the local population. Regrettably, there has been continuous cross border firing and shelling which prevents more tourism which is a very unfortunate situation indeed.



A view of the pass into the Valley



Commodore Dalbir Singh Sodhi of Kashmir, now retired from the Indian Navy

Komal GB Singh on

An Unseen Community



The Sikhs of Jammu and Kashmir

Kashmir is back in the news, this time on the abrogation of Article 370 and 35A. There is a constant debate on TV channels, on social media and in the news, everyone jumping in, mostly driven by a sense of nationalism. The aspirations of Ladakhis, Buddhists, Dogras, and Muslims are being debated. Yet, Kashmir is under an information embargo, Kashmiris are forbidden to participate in the discourse that the Government is busy fathoming for them. Whether it is these debates or the geo-political regions of Jammu, Kashmir and Ladakh, they are all based on the basis of 'us' versus 'them'. The stronger the identity consciousness, the more intense is the debate. In all this Sikh community - with a population of 2,34,848 across the region, which is more than the total population of Buddhist 1.33,000 remains as invisible as have been its aspirations over the years.

The Sikhs of Jammu and Kashmir constitute 1.87% of the total population. There are seventy thousand Sikhs in the valley and many others in Rajouri and Poonch districts, and all remain cut off due to the communication blockade, they remain unseen in the larger suffering of Kashmir.

When I asked a friend from the Kashmiri Sikh community about Article 370 and 35A abrogation, the response was, '*Na koie fayada na koien uksan.*' This roughly translates to: it is neither good nor dangerous. The implication is it does not matter (to her) since she is hardly noticed by anyone. Yet, there are a few who believe that the abrogation has some impact on their cultural identity. Some are apprehensive that it might become more difficult to live in border districts.



Many Sikhs in Jammu and Kashmir maintain a residence in Jammu. This divides not only the community but also families. Another Sikh friend says, ‘We are silently migrating from Kashmir, it’s just that nobody is ready to see us. But is Jammu safe?’

Other views from the community include that “we are exactly where we were seven decades ago.” This is because the larger debate remains about Hindus and Muslims while the Sikhs remain trapped in between those communities. There is another layer to this: while a few Sikh families who migrated in 1990 along with majority Hindus and benefitted under the migration scheme, they are seen as an enemy within the family or the local community. The tussle is that those who left got something and those who lived on are not even recognized by the larger society.

The diverse and plural society of Jammu and Kashmir is today reduced to Kashmir represented by Muslims, Dogras represented by Jammu and Buddhists represented by Leh. Alongside Kashmiri Sikhs and Jammu Sikhs, this manner of representation skews the

regional aspirations and grievances of Jammu Muslims, Kargil Muslims, Doda Hindus and they all remain unseen and unheard.

Around 70,000 Sikhs continue to live in the valley while 150,000 Sikhs live in Jammu. In Kashmir, the Sikhs are a minority community. In Jammu, most of the Sikhs live along the LOC from Kathua to Rajouri and Poonch. Life on the border is never easy but there is no end to mainlanders talking about the “border”.

No Political Representation

While the Sikhs in Jammu and Kashmir have a long history of suffering, their religious injunction - *Chardi Kalan*—which means high spirits - forbids them from living with a sense of victimhood. This itself imposes a sense of silence on them. That is why perhaps, since the Partition until now, the stories of Sikhs seldom finds place in narratives outside the community.

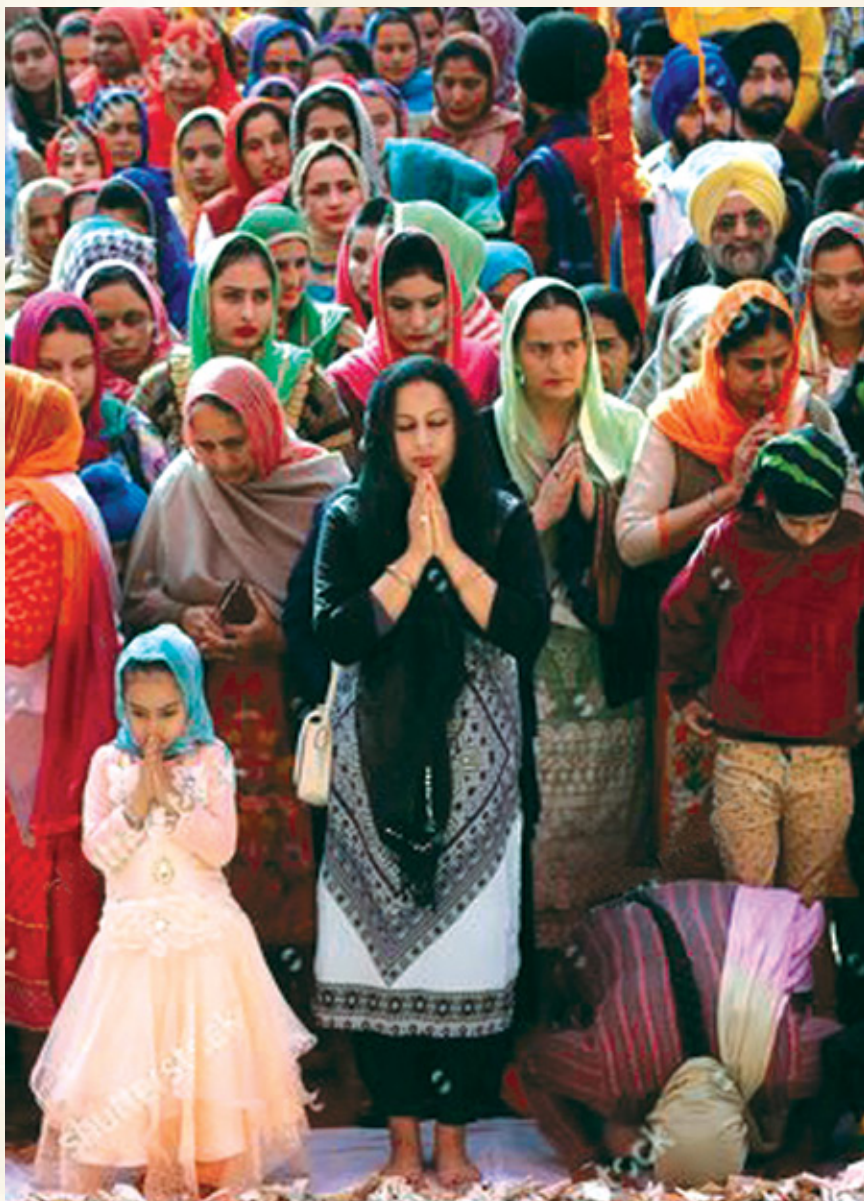
Over the last three decades the Sikhs of Jammu and Kashmir have stayed proud of their distinct cultural identity. Yet, their political aspirations remain silent.

Kashmiri Sikhs have had no political representation to present their issues and ambitions. Until now, the national minority commission has not been applicable in Jammu and Kashmir. The Kashmiri Sikhs have been demanding a minority status in the state but to no avail. No political party gives the Sikhs tickets for elections, or for any representation. Now when the statehood is lost, the long pending demand of Sikhs to have reserved seats has also gone.

The Chattisinghpora massacre

Three decades of turmoil has also had severe impact on the Sikhs of Kashmir. It is not easy to live as a minority especially when the Kashmiri society is not diverse. In March 2000, when Sikhs were killed by unidentified men in Chittisinghpora, as a community they still remained silent.

Today the lives of Sikhs are on the edge between *Kashmiryat* and *Insayinat*. The *Kashmiryat* is alive because we are still part of the Kashmiri society and *Insaniyat* because we are just seen people who are voiceless. Yet, the Sikhs have always been there to help all others.



The Way Forward

The mistake that politicians and policy makers commit is to view Jammu and Kashmir through the lens of the Muslim and Hindu binary.

However, it must be recognised that today the close to two and a half lakh Sikhs in Jammu and Kashmir are in an important and historical position in society. They are the connecting bridge between Hindus and Muslims. They have a larger role to play as peace makers. It is this historical call to which the community must respond. It is this historical position of the Sikhs the powers that be must recognise to bring peace to Jammu and Kashmir.



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Forgotten Voices of the Valley

Time and again, Kashmiri Sikhs have rejected any attempt to disintegrate and divide Kashmir along communal lines. As Kashmir continues to be under siege, many from the community of Kashmiri Sikhs – a micro-minority in Kashmir – feel dejected by the Centre’s decision to revoke the autonomy of Kashmir. Although miniscule in number (1.5-2% of the population), Kashmiri Sikhs have cohabited with the majority Kashmiri Muslim community even during the peak of insurgency.

After the Chattisinghpura massacre, in which 35 Sikh men were executed in broad daylight, Kashmiri Sikhs were expected to leave the valley *en masse*, but they stayed. Time and again, Kashmiri Sikhs have rejected any attempt to disintegrate and divide Kashmir along communal lines. Amidst the issue of exodus of Kashmiri Pandits and the explicit nature of the resistance in Kashmir, the oft-neglected Kashmiri Sikhs continue to live on in Kashmir. For Kashmiri Sikhs, insurgency was never a big threat, but the manner in which they have been stripped of their rights is definitely one.

Speaking to *NewsClick*, Bhupinder Singh, former secretary of Indian Dental Association and executive of State Dental council, J&K, said, “Not just Kashmiri Sikhs, but Sikhs in Jammu and Poonch and the other parts of our state too are not in favour of this decision. Our roots are in Kashmir and this is our state. We should have been consulted before taking a decision about our future. We witnessed the massacre at Chattisinghpura, which is still shrouded in mystery. No justice has been served to us (post the massacre). Yet, we never left our land. We always proved our loyalty to the state in democratic ways. In simple words, this is not democracy. This decision was not for the people. There is a communication blockade. We don’t know whether our loved ones are safe.”

While the lifting of special rights and demotion of the erstwhile state of Jammu and Kashmir received support from the majority of Dogras and migrant



Kashmiri Pandits, many Kashmiri Sikhs believe that the decision was a blunder. “They have committed a big blunder,” iterated Jagmohan Singh Raina, president of the All Parties Sikh Coordination Committee, while speaking to *Reuters*.

Another Kashmiri Sikh, Rabinder Singh, told *NewsClick*, “Kashmiri Sikhs have never been harassed by the majority community in Kashmir. We have always lived in harmony and peace. But this step has created uncertainty in our minds as well and now, we are worried about our future. We are disappointed.”

The fear and insecurity among the Sikh community in Jammu and Kashmir also stems from the 1984 pogrom against the Sikhs. A Sikh from the erstwhile state of Jammu and Kashmir, requesting anonymity, said, “Sikhs have seen 1984 and they know how the state functions. The government can’t mislead us in the name of religion, hatred or majority-minority status. Sikhs have never cowed down, nor will we now. Our rights can’t be revoked like this.”

On 5 August, the central government revoked Article 370 of the Constitution and carved two Union territories: Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh. A week before taking the decision, tens of thousands of additional armed forces were flown to the state and from 5 August 2019, the State went into a state of lockdown.-

NewsClick Report

On revoking the Region's Autonomy

“The Indian Government’s move to revoke autonomy of Kashmir has increased anti-India sentiment in this Himalayan region and will backfire,” said President of the largest Sikh group in Jammu and Kashmir state. Sikhs represent just 2% of the population in Muslim-majority Kashmir but are spread across the state, engaging in everything from farming and government services to running bakeries and provision stores.

“They have committed a big blunder,” stated Jagmohan Singh Raina, president of the All Parties Sikh Coordination Committee (*in picture on the right*), a group of civil and religious organizations from the Sikh community. “They could have changed laws, but at least they should have consulted us,” Raina said in an interview.

The Central and Jammu & Kashmir governments did not immediately return emails and messages seeking a response to Raina, one of the few community leaders in Kashmir to go public with criticism of the Government of India’s step following the detention of over 500 local leaders or activists.

The Central Government has said that revoking of Kashmir’s special rights, which allowed it to create many of its own laws, is meant to bringing the state more into the national fold, help combat terrorism and to give the region a chance to grow faster.

The dramatic policy shift has of course widespread support within India’s majority community. Many opposition MPs have supported Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s Hindu nationalist party on the matter. The change means that non-residents will be allowed to buy property in Kashmir and state government jobs will not be reserved for residents. To some in the Sikh community that is a threat as many families own land on which they grow produce and have members who are in government jobs.



Raina, who sells liquefied petroleum gas for cooking in central Srinagar, said he was concerned that government was creating an anti-Muslim sentiment and dividing the community. The Sikh community in Kashmir still bears the scars from the Chittisinghpura massacre in 2000, in which 36 Sikhs were lined up and executed in the village. The Indian government said then that the atrocity was committed by an Islamist militant group.

Jagmohan Singh Raina felt the current security clampdown in Kashmir, including the detention of moderate local leaders, meant that “anti-India sentiment has grown stronger.” That, he said, would make it more difficult for someone with nationalist pro-India views to live in Kashmir in the future. His views were backed by Harbinder Singh, a Sikh businessman from Srinagar’s Batamaloo area. “There is a big problem, it’s not a small thing that (special status) has been revoked. We are extremely disappointed,” he said.

And what of fear for the future of the Kashmiri Sikh community? “We Kashmiris didn’t have much, we just had this special status, and now this is also taken from us. This will mean that our people will find it harder to get meaningful employment here”.

Zeba Siddiqui, Fayaz Bukhari

The call to protect Kashmiris comes from the Sikhs



In the bedlam which followed the sudden abrogation of Article 370 on 5 August 2019, and the ensuing lockdown in the Valley where political leaders, activists, lawyers were jailed amidst a communication and media blackout, one story has been evaded by the Indian media. That of the singular and spectacular resistance of Sikhs against this move and manner. Amidst the deafening silence by all, from the judiciary to political parties, civil society and media, the Sikhs have stood out extraordinarily, giving their call for compassion and protection to Kashmiris all over the country, offering them succor in gurdwaras and homes, from Delhi to Pune, Dehra Dun to Bengaluru.

Did their valorous cry dissuade blood-thirsty gangs from attacking Kashmiris this time, from students on campuses to traders on the street? Unlike the assaults post-Pulwama, where Vishwa Hindu Parishad and Bajrang Dal activists beat up students in Dehra Dun, terrifying Kashmiri students all over the country, and the calls of social boycott and attack on traders by Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh-affiliated groups, there were no untoward incidents this time. As a fallout too, this has possibly put the brakes on the RSS's stealthy attempts to co-opt the Sikhs into the Hindutva fold. There

remain insidious attempts to paint Sikhs as separatists and anti-nationals, with the dreaded Khalistani tag resurfacing once again on social media.

How did the story unfold?

Days after Home Minister Amit Shah declared the abrogation of Article 370 in Parliament, the plucky rescue of 32 Kashmiri girl students in Pune received a hurried mention in the national media. The audacious operation was conducted by three young Sikh men from Delhi who not only paid for their air tickets but escorted the students from their colleges to their homes scattered across five regions of the Valley. The national media dutifully beamed visuals of one ecstatic student running into the arms of her relieved parents in Shopian, the most dangerous part of the Valley, that too taken by the Sikh trio as the media was largely curtailed from moving around.

The press at large has dodged the challenge that is coming from the Sikh community against the Hindutva hate campaign targeting Kashmiri Muslims in the country. Yet it has not diminished the resolve of Sikh groups who are waiting to help any Kashmiri in distress.

It was a self-assured Harinder Singh Ahluwalia, a 40-year-old software employee of an MNC and the prime mover of the Pune escapade, who sits with his compatriots in the tiny cabin of *Jagga Properties* in the jostling heart of East Delhi. He is flanked by Armeet Singh Khanpuri, a property dealer, Jagtar Singh Jagga, the proprietor, Baljeet Singh Babloo and Gurpreet Singh Sonu, both takeaway restaurateurs. There's an air of satisfaction and accomplishment among the band of bearded troopers, gentle and self-effacing. But make no mistake, they are ready to take on anyone who dare harm defenseless Kashmiris.

"We saw what happened after Pulwama, when the saffron gangs of RSS-BJP people attacked Kashmiri students in Dehra Dun, and the kind of hate speeches they made then," says Ahluwalia. "This time too, I knew something big was going to happen in Kashmir after thousands of additional troops were being sent to the Valley. I kept a close watch as rumours were floating about abrogating 370. And so in preparation, I did a Facebook live where I announced that any Kashmiri

in the country who felt unsafe should go to the nearest gurdwara for help. I even posted my mobile number for them to call in any emergency. The prime minister made his announcement on Kashmir the next day."

Ahluwalia says that this time they were fully prepared after their successful arrangement for the passage of students from Dehra Dun, Ambala and Chandigarh to Kashmir post-Pulwama. Says Khanpuri, "No one knew about our efforts at the time, perhaps because of the celebratory mood in the country after Pulwama, but we arranged for tempos to send the students home."

This time, it was Jagga who paid the money upfront to a travel agent for the tickets, saying he would wait for the donations, if they came at all. "I was happy to do *sewa* (charity)," he says matter-of-factly. All are in agreement when Ahluwalia says that every Sikh carries a sense of duty and compassion in his heart, especially in this atmosphere of hate and violence. "I feel this even more after RSS-BJP types trolled me and made disgusting remarks about Kashmiri girls," he said. "Their leaders were making lewd remarks in public, like the Haryana CM saying that *now Kashmiri girls can marry in Haryana* and suchlike. We had to protect their honour."

It's also the memory of the brutality of the 1984 anti-Sikh holocaust that fires them. At that time 35 years back, thousands of businesses and homes were destroyed, men killed, women raped and children left orphaned. "We went through these hate crimes too,"



they recall. “Just like the Kashmiris today, we too were demonised as a community and religion, and called terrorists and anti-nationals. Every Indian attacked us saying we deserved what we got. It’s the same story playing out again.”

Meanwhile, in Bengaluru, an agitated Mohinder Jit Singh is working towards creating a coalition of 40 Sikh NGOs in Delhi apart from aligning with other Sikh organisations in the country. Singh is a businessman and director of *United Sikhs*, a global advocacy group for civil and human rights.

“There was a lot of dilemma amongst our directors about reaching out to Kashmiris for fear of becoming politicised,” says Singh over the phone. “But we went ahead after we got the go-ahead from our international directors as we were doing nothing illegal or wrong.” Mohinder Jit Singh says he has seen how hate crimes vitiate the atmosphere after he visited Shillong last year for rehabilitation work, when anti-Sikh riots broke out in the region.

Mohinder Jit Singh is also pained that the SGPC (*Shiromani Gurudwara Parbandhak Committee*) which is responsible for the management of gurdwaras

in Punjab, Haryana and Himachal Pradesh is not following the path given by the Guru Granth Sahib. “The SGPC has joined the RSS. It allowed RSS schools to indoctrinate thousands of schoolgirls in Punjab to dilute the tenets of Sikhism with Hindutva. Neither has it come out in support of the Kashmiris. We don’t believe that gurdwaras should be politicised but it is our constitutional right to protest if the government is doing something wrong.”



Armeet Singh Khanpuri and Harminder Singh Ahluwalia

“Protecting Kashmiri girls is our duty” : Akal Takht Jathedar

On 9 August 2019, just days after the clamp down in J&K, and amidst much fear and uncertainty, Sikhi’s highest temporal institution, the Akal Takht, urged the community to come forward and make it their “religious duty” to defend and protect the honour of Kashmiri girls who were being humiliated by certain political leaders and others on the social media after scrapping of special status for Jammu and Kashmir under Section 370.

“God has given equal rights to all human beings and it is a crime to differentiate against anyone on the basis of gender, caste or religion. The kind of insidious remarks made by elected representatives on social media against the girls of Kashmir ... are not only defamatory but also unforgivable,” stated Jathedar Giani Harpreet Singh.

Without naming anyone specifically, the Jathedar said, “The manner in which some people are posting pictures of Kashmiri daughters on social media has hurt India’s image. Such comments objectify woman. At the same time, these people have forgotten that a woman is also a mother, daughter, sister and a wife. It is women who has the power of creation”.

Again desisting from naming any person or community, he said that the same “mob”, which was now targeting the Kashmiri women, “had reacted in the same way and attacked Sikh women during the pogrom of 1984”.

Mohinder Jit Singh says he financially helped a Kashmiri student in Bengaluru as the student's parents could not transfer money for his college fees after the lockdown in the Valley. But by and large, he says, there were no distress call in the South.

For years the RSS has stealthily tried to merge Sikh identity with Hinduism—it even has a Sikh wing called the *Rashtriya Sikh Sanghat*—but the Sikhs have always been wary of the RSS idea of a Hindu rashtra which seeks to subsume the Sikhs within its fold. To the RSS's credit, it has been undeterred in its pursuit of Sikh rights despite several of its leaders being gunned down by Sikh hardliners in Punjab over the last few years.



However, while the Modi government got the support of the Akali Dal in Parliament on abrogating Article 370, the move was outrightly condemned by Akal Takht Sahib, the highest temporal seat of the Sikhs, when the Jathedar issued an edict urging Sikhs to protect Kashmiri women under any circumstances, reminding the flock how women were abused during the 1984 holocaust in Delhi. Also the Punjab government of Congress's Amarinder Singh came out vociferously to protect Kashmiris, even inviting those living in the state for meals during Eid. Apart from various Panthic groups, student associations have all come out in support for Kashmiris in the state.

Professor Balveer Arora, former rector of JNU and presently chairman of the *Centre for Multilevel Federalism*, says the “othering” of Kashmir has been a long process, similar to what happened in Punjab. “There are a lot of similarities between Kashmir and Punjab and the people are naturally empathetic with

each other. Both have strong religious affiliations but it goes beyond religion. For the Sikhs, 1984 is playing out in this form for the Kashmiris, they are caught in something similar, the price that a religious minority has to pay for wanting more independence from the Centre. Also, both feel they have been let down : after all, the Anandpur Sahib Resolution of 1973 actually demanded greater autonomy and more powers to be devolved from the Centre to the states. Kashmir is an abstraction for most Indians, many Indians don't even know that other hilly states enjoy similar restrictions on outsiders rights as have in Kashmir. Unfortunately, communalism has crept into perceptions.”

The Sikhs today are cautious of the slur of separatism slapped on them by Hindutva forces, especially in the aftermath of taking on anyone who threatens to harm the Kashmiris. They have faced trolls threatening their life and calling them names, from being ISI agents to being pro-Pakistan. However, they believe their sense of duty and justice overcomes the smear campaign. They blame both the Congress and BJP for using hate politics to come to power: in 1984, the Congress won over 400 seats; in 2019, the BJP has come with over 300 seats.

“Both parties have nurtured the RSS to spread hate and come to power,” says Ahluwalia, “the Babri Masjid was demolished in Congress rule, as now has the abrogation of Article 370. When madrassas are targeted for teaching hate, why can't RSS schools that teach hate about a particular community and a particular religion not be shut down?”

Khanpuri adds: “If Khalistan and Dravidastan is wrong, then Hindu rashtra is also wrong. Funny, but can the RSS and BJP explain why the Sikhs, who are also a minority in Kashmir, have not been targeted in the Valley and made to flee like did the Kashmiri Pandits? Sikhs are flourishing in Kashmir, they have thriving businesses, they have never been harmed by Kashmiris and live together without any problem. Isn't that a statement?”

Perhaps herein lies the answer to communalised politics and its deadly consequences and eventuality.

Getting the Girls back Home

How a Delhi-based software engineer helped 32 Kashmiri girls from Pune return home safely

After abrogation of the special status of Jammu and Kashmir, there were restrictions imposed on communication and the movement of people in the state, which was of great worry for the state's residents living outside. However a Sikh software engineer from Delhi went out of his way to ensure that some 32 girls from the state who wanted to get back home safely were able to do so.

On 5 August, Harminder Singh Ahluwalia went live on Facebook to tell all Kashmiris outside the state who were feeling unsafe that they could either contact him or take shelter in the nearest gurdwaras. The post went viral and 32 girls from Kashmir, who were trying to get back home, got in touch with him. "They were panicky, I got a call from a lady named Rukaya, She told me that there were 32 Kashmiri girls, all from underprivileged families, just waiting to get back home, because of the recent government moves in Kashmir." The girls, who were between 17 and 22 years of age, were at Pune for nursing training and placement programme as part of the *Deen*





Dayal Upadhyaya Grameen Kaushalya Yojana. Harminder Singh said the girls told him that they just wanted to go back home as they couldn't get in touch with the families due to all communication lines being disrupted.

The coordinator of the contingent contacted the state government and was assured of assistance from the Army once they reached Srinagar. But they did not have the funds to get there ! Harminder Singh then sought donations to fund the girls' journey back home with another Facebook live on 8 August. "A Sikh businessman was quick to contact me and sponsored the air tickets for the girls and four volunteers," he said.

On 9 August, the group flew to Srinagar and with the assistance of the Army, all of them were escorted home and reunited with their families, amidst much emotion and gratitude. Harminder Singh's actions were widely praised on social media, but he simply said that he had decided to help because after the Pulwama terror attack, there were



instances of Kashmiris outside the state being targeted and he didn't want the same thing to happen to the girls.

(Pictures by Harminder Singh Ahluwalia)

Twixt 1947 and 2019

No Returning to the Partition



After much rhetoric and grandstanding, the powers-that-be abruptly abrogated Article 370, along with some parts of Article 35A, which were an integral part of the secular Constitution of India. This drastic act has created a very fluid situation, one knows not what will be the shape of things to come in near future. But there are many rumours swirling around, there is talk that this will further deepen the divide between people of two communities, that it will lead to more misery. If this happens, the outcome may also be very similar to what occurred at the time of partition of India in 1947. We should never let that happen.

15 August 1947, which is a day of independence for India from the British rulers, is also a day of ‘ruination’ for a large number of peoples especially of the Punjab. It was on this day that India was politically partitioned into two separate lands – India and Pakistan – on

the basis of religion. Its after-effects were horrifying. Unfortunately, I was one of those witnesses to this holocaust, as I had just entered the very impressionable teens. This event left an indelible mark on my memory, and even today, when I am in the mid-eighties, the memory of those days makes me shudder.

I had had an almost idyllic and peaceful childhood, living in a tiny township named ‘Preet Nagar’ (Town of Love). Set up in 1938 by my father Gurbakhsh Singh (the renowned Punjabi novelist and short-story writer), it was equidistant between Lahore and Amritsar, and surrounded by many villages, big and small. Thanks to its vibrant residents, masters in their creative fields, it was recognised as the first rural socio-cultural hub of the Punjab. The ideal of this township was that here “all hearts should throb in unison, and the atmosphere should be filled with the mesmerising tunes of songs celebrating love”.

Alas, when the 'Independence Day' of India and creation of Pakistan was being celebrated in other parts, life at Preet Nagar came to a standstill. It tentatively became part of Pakistan, as it was at the fringe of villages where a majority of the population followed the Islamic faith. But fortunately there was no unwanted commotion whatsoever in this area, as the simple-hearted villagers themselves did not know of their future. But on 18 August, when the actual line of demarcation was drawn, after giving due consideration to natural compulsions, our township along with a number of villages having Muslim majorities were actually assigned to India.



Now the 'minority' started dominating over the 'majority'. Excited by this sudden change, incited by outsiders and pressured by the large-scale forced migration of non-Muslim population from Pakistan with their attendant tales of violence, some people began widespread killings of innocent Muslims. This then forced migration of the Muslim population to areas just across which were now a part of Pakistan. Those who were without much means took shelter in our township. True to real human values, residents of this township provided them the best possible protection. At an appropriate time, they also arranged for their safe passage on to Pakistan.

However this humanitarian act of our township made its residents *personae non-gratae* and gave license to anti-social elements, who started looting and

marauding. The peaceful life of this township was instantly shattered. Thus, by end of that year, the Muslim population of this township had to move away to safer places, making every one of them a refugee in their own homeland. This stroke of history left many horrifying marks on this township, which had once been a blissful land of dreams.

By the time India became a republic, earnest efforts were being made to wipe out the depressing atmosphere prevailing in this township. It was hoped that this township would also revive, quite like the mythical Phoenix bird that rises from its own ashes. Concerted

efforts were made to revive the golden period of the township where people led a wholesome coexistence regardless of the differences of religion and caste. But unfortunately, being very close to the new international border, with an unfriendly, unreliable and unpredictable neighbour, most of the old residents were scared of returning! So life in this township carried on at its own slow pace, and the magical atmosphere of the olden days never returned, which has been the biggest tragedy.

Having witnessed those tragic happenings, I do sincerely hope the situation currently prevailing in Jammu & Kashmir will be amicably resolved and settled for the good of the state and of the nation itself.

Hirday Paul Singh
Translated from the Punjabi

“We are One”!

Amidst great emotion, Nagar Kirtan from Nankana Sahib in Pakistan crosses into India at the Amritsar border



It was a historic moment for some 480 Sikh pilgrims who were part of the procession of *nagar kirtan*, start of the celebrations marking the 550th birth anniversary of Guru Nanak Dev ji. This started from Gurdwara Janam Asthan in Pakistan and reached the international border at Wagah-Attari on 1 August 2019.

Amid loud cheers ‘*Bole So Nihal, Sat Sri Akal*’, the first such crossing in 72 years took place with *ardaas* done by Bhai Sultan Singh of Darbar Sahib at Amritsar. The procession, as traditional, was led by *Panj Pyaras* followed by *Guru Granth Sahib* placed on a golden palanquin mounted on a Pakistan Singh Gurdwara Prabhandak Committee (PSGPC) bus chariot decorated with flowers as it left Nankana Sahib. There were thousand of devotees all along the way, even as Sikh children of Nankana Sahib, performed the ‘*gatka*’. There were many of their Muslim friends who joined the procession. The Nankana Sahib District Police Band was in attendance, paying respects to the holy processions, which included





The devotees from Pakistan followed the nagar kirtan with devotion till they reached the Wagah border with India from where most of them returned home with moist eyes. The emotions of devotees on both sides clearly emphasised the message of universal peace and brotherhood, central to the teachings of Guru Nanak Dev.

The procession reached the international border at 4 pm and was allowed to enter the zero line without any checking or other formalities. Additional head granthi of Darbar Sahib Giani Jagtar Singh thereafter carried Guru Granth Sahib with utmost reverence upon

devotees from Sindh, Peshawar, Lahore and others places in Pakistan, the Government having made elaborate arrangements for security and providing medical services, all the way from Nankana Sahib to the Wagah border. Earlier, the *bhog* ceremony following *akhand paath* had been organised by the SGPC at Nankana Sahib and was followed by *gurbani kirtan* by Hazoori Ragis of Darbar Sahib.



The SGPC honoured Evacuee Trust Property Board secretary Tareek Wazeer Khan, secretary Imran Gondal, PSGPC president Satwant Singh, general secretary Ameer Singh and other prominent personalities from Pakistan with siropas, replicas of Darbar Sahib and special gold coins, even as the PSGPC honoured representatives of the SGPC amongst others.

his head and placed this on a palanquin on the Indian side. The Indian Punjab Police Band and devotees in large numbers welcomed the procession on various points on route to Darbar Sahib in Amritsar.

GS Paul
(from the Tribune)

When things fall apart*

Dr Darshan Singh Maini on the horrors of 1984 – and their consequences

There are moments in the life of a nation when the deeper spiritual rhythm is so addled by events and incidents as to bring to the surface all manner of ironies and irrationalities inherent in its body politic. Such contradictions and institutional insincerities remain largely out of view, and even acquire a doubtful ethic and a passing validity in the name of pragmatism. But when finally the weight of wanton and rogue occurrences reaches a point where the state begins to split at the seams, as it were, the rulers themselves are no longer in a position to comprehend the course of history, or to direct it; they are either marginalised and rendered irrelevant, or, more grievously, as in India today, turn into political rakes and phonies for whom indulgence and gimmicks become a style of life. The spiritual side of the state—its inner life, its evolve ceremonies and its milk of moral nourishment – is then desecrated, and public life does become nasty and brutish and degrading. That invisible bond of trust between the state and the citizen is snapped, the bond which sustains a civilized society. And once this trust is lost it is thereafter, a whoredom of the spirit, anybody's game, so to speak. The state is turned into a political slut.

To be sure, all nations are sustained by a certain dream even when its bones begin to show, and the India of Gandhiji's conception or of Jawaharlal Nehru's vision which still comforts the Indian imagination in a romantic fashion was in ruins soon after the advent of Indira Gandhi. That betrayal of the dream by the daughter was, to use Freudian language, an act of political patricide. Starting on a most promising note, she had by 1975 exhausted her spiritual energies.

From the Emergency to *Operation Bluestar*, it was (even when she was out of power for a while) an

extended exercise in the upturning of the state to feed her reavenous lust for power. No wonder, as her appetite grew, and her paranoid impulses sharpened, she stopped at nothing. The Constitution, the Supreme Court and the entire state machinery were required to administer her will and whims. It was, in other words, an assault upon the state as state, and an invitation to chaos and hell. And riding the storm of history, she took the lethal leap. How the swift and tragic and horrendous chain of events then forever altered the balance of trust and faith need not be gone again. It is one unredeemed story of disgrace abounding.

Briefly then, it is the very structure of the Indian State that now raises certain fundamental questions and doubts. In turning against itself, and becoming its own enemy, the state has sabotaged its own rationale, its own moral being. It's thus that we may understand the 'philosophy' of neo-politics (which denigrates political activity in favour of the market economy) that Rajiv Gandhi and his high-tech kids were seeking to set up as an alternative for a new paradigm of power. This could perhaps make us understand partially why after 40 years of freedom, India today answers so brazenly to the echoes of the Bofors guns, and to the threat of another Emergency. The wheel of venality and wantonness has come full circle. The state has almost become anti-state, a travesty of itself.

The state, it appears, is, at any given time, a composite organism of two parallel pulls, one fuelled by the energies of poetry and dream, and the other by the pressures of *Realpolitik*. And in this continual tension or dialectic lies its moral health. A rampant and warped idealism (witness the rise of the Khomeinis in today's world) can cause a national tragedy as surely as

a populist pragmatism, and the politics of thunder and prophecy are as dangerous as the politics of unbribed power and pelf. Therefore, so long as a reasonable balance is maintained between the two, the state, despite ups and downs, manages to negotiate a passage to progress, and a general respect for the constituted authority and for the instrumentalities of governance remains in attendance.

But when the balance is willfully disrupted or destroyed in either direction, the result is a maverick state. And a maverick state is answerable to no institutional discipline or whip; it obeys only those dark impulses that, in the first instance, brought the state *qua* state into being. In other words, in such situations, the state finds itself returning to that primal chaos from which it rose gradually and dainfully to effect a truce with reality. This political regression is an aspect of the Freudian deathwish that all organisms carry within themselves. What we witness, then, is the spiritual demise of the state as state, though, to be sure, the trappings and emblems of authority are, for that very reason, sought to be extended, augmented and apothecised. It's a hegemony of 'the hollow men', and they seek to perpetuate their power through recourse to national totems and *shamanism*. Trickery, travesty and tyranny come natural to them. The state thus loses its putative majesty, and becomes a cartoonist's joke. The rulers are almost mocked to their face and a kind of shamefacedness becomes their stock response. It will perhaps be tedious to narrate the 'stories' and gags that have now gathered round Rajiv Gandhi and the kickbacks, but I reproduce briefly a real-life 'story' that appeared recently in a newspaper. A boy caught coy in an examination hall in a Punjab town had the wits and the cheek to stand up and shout that if the country's Prime Minister could cheat the nation in regard to the truth about the Defence deals, why should he be punished for so small a lapse. Reportedly he was allowed to have his way ! When things reach such a level, the state is left with little to cover its nakedness.

There is, unfortunately, some such feeling about the Rajiv Gandhi government in the public mind today. Wherever you go and whomever you talk to, there's

an air of moral unease and distaste, if not disgust and nausea, about its style. Even the admirers (a dwindling species) have often to fall back upon cant and clichés to stay in the argument. There's almost a sense of guilt and furtiveness in their eyes, and they know that in defending the indefensible, they are only registering their own misery and bewilderment. And if they happen to be intellectuals a la Girilal Jain, they require a great expense of the spirit to retain even a semblance of honour. After the JPC performance in Parliament on the Bofors and German submarine kickbacks, even the cynics have started shaking their heads. The Congress (I) MPs have simply reduced the country's highest body to the level of a political 'keep'. They all lied fully, generously and copiously, and they exercised their statistical lungpower as viciously as they could to drown the truth.

Can the honour of a state ever be safe in such soiled hands? Will any parliamentary committee or commission in future ever carry any moral weight or authority ? The JPC has not only been 'economical with the truth', as an American official confronted with his web of lies observed in his confessional report : it has sent the truth packing out of Parliament with the hounds of the law at its heels ! The state has outlawed the truth, so to speak. But the truth will be out, as they say, sooner than they imagine.

Let me conclude this piece with a few lines from a 19th century American poet, James Russell Lowell (who incidentally, was also, at one time, his country's ambassador in London).

*Truth for ever on the scaffold,
Wrong for ever on the throne –
Yet that scaffold sways the future,
And, behind the dim unknown
Standeth God within the shadows
Keeping watch above His own.*

**Dr Darshan Singh Maini was first Editorial
Director of the Nishaan Nagaara.**

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The Real 'Great Game'

The story of Kashmir, its Afghanistan connection, the Sikh Empire and Dogra rule till 1947



Afghanistan und Seine Nachbarländer : (<https://www.wdl.org/en/item/15021/view/1/1/>)

Till the early nineteenth century, the territory known as Kashmir, including the swath of lands east of the Pir Panjal, were under Afghan rulers. Kashmir was under Governance of Atta Muhammed Khan even as internal conditions within Afghanistan steadily worsened. On the advice of Fateh Muhammed, Shah Muhammed removed Shah Shuja from the seat of power and asked him to seek sanctuary in the Punjab, and instead appointed Fateh Muhammed Khan to govern the State. Shah Shuja and Shah Zaman were

on their way to the Punjab, along with their families when the Governor of Attock, Jahandad Khan detained Shah Shuja and instead sent him to Kashmir. Shah Muhammed was most cruel, having blinded Shah Zaman who, along with his family and that of Shah Shuja, still managed to reach Lahore. Maharaja Ranjit Singh welcomed them and ordered arrangements for their stay, Fakir Aziz-u-Din being tasked to look after Shah Zaman.



Maharaja Ranjit Singh

After some days, the wife of Shah Shuja, Wafa Begum requested Fakir Aziz-u-Din to implead with Maharaja Ranjit Singh that if he got Shah Shuja freed from captivity in Kashmir, she would gift him with the priceless Kohinoor diamond. Fakir Aziz-u-Din, Bhawani Das, and Mohakam Chand conveyed this



Shah Shuja

message to Maharaja Ranjit Singh, particularly that the Begum was very concerned on the well-being of her husband. At this juncture Fateh Muhammed Khan met with Maharaja Ranjit Singh to inform that he very much wanted to occupy Kashmir, by invading the territory via Bhimber, and proposed that he would pay an annual tax of eight lakh rupees to Maharaja Ranjit Singh after the occupation of Kashmir. Maharaja Ranjit Singh, being aware of the plight of Wafa Begum and wanting to rescue Shah Shuja, thus agreed to help Fateh Muhammed and soon assembled a force of twelve thousand Sikh warriors under command of Mokham Chand, S Nihal Singh Atariwale and S Jodh Singh Kalseya for the campaign.

Through his informers, Atta Muhammed Khan, then Afghan Governor of Kashmir came to know about these plans and so assembled his forces ahead of Shopian at Heerpur. The armies of Maharaja Ranjit Singh and Wazir Fateh Muhammed Khan had not only to face difficult terrain but also extreme cold and snow as this was the month of December. The warriors of Maharaja Ranjit



Sher Ghari fort



The legendary Kohinoor Diamond, now 'jewel in the crown' of Britain's royalty

Singh thereafter fought fierce battles and scattered the forces of Atta Mohamad Khan, who then fled to Srinagar and hid in Sher Ghari fort. The Sikh forces surrounded Sher Ghari fort and Atta Khan soon surrendered and was then brought to Diwan Mohkam Chand. S Nihal Singh and his forces went on in search of Shah Shuja, who was located in a small cell, heavily shackled. Now freed, he was greatly relieved that his brother and family were safe and sound in Lahore.

At this stage, Wazir Fateh Muhammed Khan requested that Shah Shuja Khan be handed over to him, but this was not accepted. Mohkam Chand along with the Sikh forces with Shah Shuja shortly returned to the Punjab while Wazir Fateh Muhammed, after spending some time in Kashmir, appointed his brother Mohamad Azim Khan as the Governor of Kashmir before returning to Kabul. However, Shah Shuja after reaching the Punjab, now started creating excuses so

as to avoid giving up the Kohinoor Diamond. Maharaja Ranjit Singh, who had spent much resources and had many of his soldiers killed in the expedition to free Shah Shuja, however tactfully acquired the Kohinoor Diamond by giving Shah Shuja 3 lakh of rupees and some property in the Punjab in lieu.



Drawing of Attock Fort on the river Indus

Meanwhile, Muhammed Azim Khan had appointed Pandit Sahaj Ram Dhar and Diwan Hari Das Tikoo to senior positions to rule Kashmir efficiently. Returning from Kashmir, the forces of Maharaja Ranjit Singh thereafter captured the strategic fort of Attock on the river Indus. Attock was the key for invaders to enter the Punjab and Maharaja Ranjit Singh definitely wanted to bring this gateway under his control. After learning that Maharaja Ranjit Singh had annexed Attock, Mohamad Azim Khan refused to pay the second installment of rupees eight lakhs to Maharaja Ranjit Singh since his brother had earlier been the ruler of Attock.

Fed up by all this, Maharaja Ranjit Singh now personally led his forces which entered Kashmir



The Pir Panjal range



Physical map of Jammu & Kashmir

through Poonch in 1814, the Sikh army crossing the Pir Panjal to take on the Afghans near Heerpur. A fierce battle took place near Behram Galli and the Sikh forces prevailed, but many casualties were suffered, not the least because of extreme climatic conditions. Maharaja Ranjit Singh thereafter tactically decided to go back.

Reports were coming in this Mohamad Azim had carried out atrocities on Hindus, had Diwan Hari Das murdered and initiated systematic massacre of Hindus. With the revenues depleted, he however changed his tactics and appointed Kashmiri Pandits to important posts, including Birbal Dhar and Mirza Pandit Dhar.

Unfortunately that particular year the crops had been damaged because of early snowfall and since the farmers could not pay taxes, revenues had depleted. Still, Muhammed Azim Khan kept pushing Birbal Dhar to recover taxes from the poor people. In disgust, he left his wife and daughter-in-law with a Muslim family, Kados Gozwari and with some Muslim friends, alongwith his son Raj Kak Dhar moved south to Jammu, and then traveled to Lahore with a letter from Dogra Gulab Singh addressed to Dhiyan Singh. At Lahore, Dhiyan Singh briefed Maharaja Ranjit Singh and took Birbal Dhar to meet him and give

accounts of the terrible situation in Kashmir. He implored Maharaja Ranjit Singh to annex Kashmir even as Fateh Khan in Kabul directed Muhammed Azim Khan, the Governor of Kashmir to hand over



Akali Phoola Singh

charge to his younger brother Jabbar Khan and return to Kabul since the situation in Kabul too was getting precarious.

Muhammed Azim Khan obeyed the directives of Fateh Khan and returned to Kabul, but looted whatever he could from the depleted treasury. Unfortunately, Jabbar Khan on assuming charge, continued the atrocities on Hindus and imposed severe taxes. The Kashmiris were fervently praying for deliverance, in the form of Maharaja Ranjit Singh freeing them from tyranny of the Afghans.

Maharaja Ranjit Singh was kept well informed of the conditions in Kashmir and finally made up his mind to bring the territory under his rule. Maharaja Ranjit Singh entered Kashmir with 30,000 troops in 1819, the first contingent under command of Misr Diwan Chand and Sham Singh Atari, the second under Kanwar Kharak Singh with Akali Phoola Singh and the third directly under himself.

The Sikh forces entered Kashmir via Rajouri, the ruler of that place Agar Khan having fled and his brother Rahim-ulla-Khan quickly surrendered to Sikh forces. Kharak Singh then appointed Rahim-ulla-Khan as the *Hakim* of Rajouri. Kharak Singh came to know that the *Hakim* of Poonch, Zabardast Khan had prepared strongly for battle and set up various

obstacles with trees and boulders. Akali Phoola Singh and Kharak Singh then attacked Poonch, a fierce battle was fought and the forces of Zabardast Khan retreated. The Sikh troops, after breaking through walls of the fort, took Zabardast Khan along with his men into captivity and surrender to Kharak Singh.

The Sikh army thereafter advanced into other areas. In 1819, both columns of Sikh forces entered the Vale of Kashmir but Jabbar Khan opposed the Sikh forces. Fierce battles were fought at Heerpur and Shopian. Mohkam Chand attacked the Afghan forces with heavy guns, but the enemy fought back with resolve, making Diwan Mohkam Chand pause. However, Kharak Singh along with Akali Phoola Singh then reinforced Diwan Mohkam Chand and in the fierce battles that followed, Jabbar Khan and his forces fled, retreating to Afghanistan.

So, it was on 3 July 1819, that the Sikhs finally captured Kashmir and brought it under Khalsa rule. After annexation of Kashmir by the Sikhs, Maharaja Ranjit Singh honoured Birbal Dhar and himself went to Amritsar to pay obeisance at the Darbar Sahib in gratefulness to the Almighty. The capital city of Lahore was lit up and gifts distributed to the people.

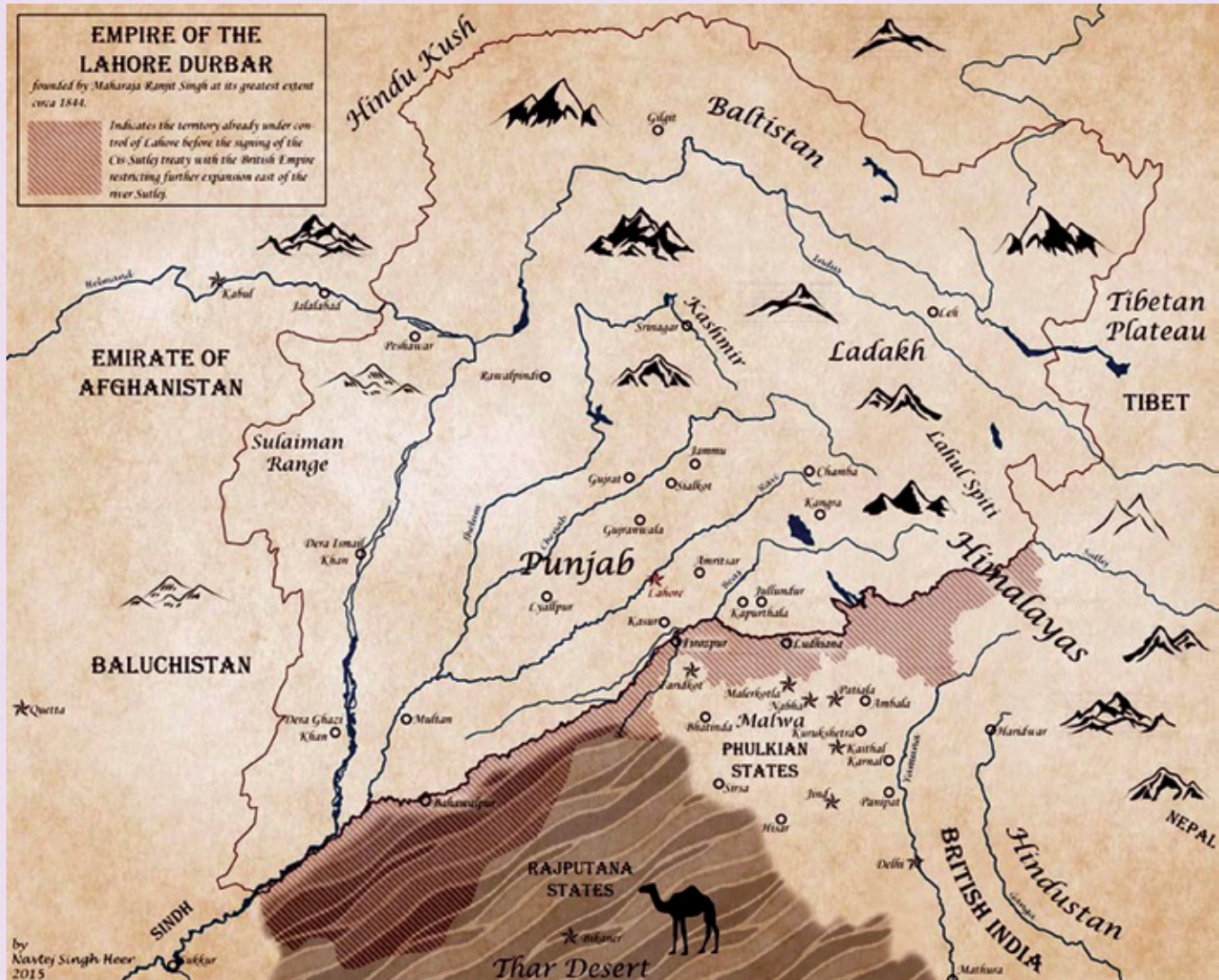
Extracted from
‘Kashmir and The Sikhs’ by S Anoop Singh Sodhi



"If there is a heaven on earth, this is it, this is it, this is it!"

First Perceptions of a Sikh State

The Cripps Mission of 1942



The Sikh Empire (also Sikh Khalsa Raj, Sarkar-i-Khalsa or Pañjab (Punjab) Empire)
<https://neopunjabi.com/blogs/blogs/the-sikh-empire>

World War II took a major turn in 1942, with Japan's offensive in South East Asia and the consequent 'threat' to British India, which was directly to impact upon moves for independence of India. As Prime Minister Churchill stated in the House of Commons, "The violent irruption of Japan upon East Asia, the withdrawal of United States Pacific Fleet to the American West Coast, the sinking

of HMS *Prince of Wales* and HMS *Repulse*, the loss of Malaya and the surrender of Singapore and many other circumstances of the time left us for the moment without any assured means of defending India from an invasion by Japan. We had lost command of the Bay of Bengal and indeed to a large extent of the Indian Ocean. Whether the provinces of Madras and Bengal would be pillaged and ravaged by the Japanese at that



Victorious Japanese Army in SE Asia

time seemed to be hanging in balance and the question naturally arose with poignant force how best to rally all Indian elements to the defence of their native land”.

The British Government then sent Sir Stafford Cripps to India to assess defence of the country and issued Draft Declarations with the following main provisions:



Sir Stafford Cripps with Mahatma Gandhi

- ◆ “Immediately upon the cessation of hostilities, steps shall be taken to set up in India, an elected body charged with the task of framing a new Constitution of India”
- ◆ “His Majesty’s Government undertake to accept and implement forthwith the Constitution so framed”
- ◆ “The right of any Province of British India that is not prepared to accept the new Constitution to retain its present constitutional position, with such non-acceding provinces, should they so desire, His Majesty’s Government will be prepared to agree upon a new constitution, giving them the same full status as Indian Union”
- ◆ “During this critical period, His Majesty’s Government must inevitably bear the responsibility for and retain control and direction of the defence of India as part of their World War effort”

This Draft Declaration was the *first official document* which gave for the first time the right to the provinces of British India to acquire the “same full status as an

Indian Union”. According to Prof R Coupland who was on staff of the Cripps Mission in India, the non-acceding provisions in the Draft Declaration were really meant to dissuade the Muslim League from pursuing their Pakistan policy. It was argued that the Muslim League actually wanted for every Muslim majority province a right of separation so that it might have deterring effect on the Hindu majority of the Centre – but not for actual separation. However this line of argument proved wrong in the long run because this non-acceding provision actually proved an incentive to the Muslim League to press for their demand for a Pakistan rather than to leave it. It proved to be the foundation stone for establishment of a Pakistan because it was recognition of the principle of the partition of India which the Muslim League had been demanding.

According to Maulana Azad, “The right given to the Provinces to opt out meant opening the door to separation”. Sir Stafford Cripps himself subsequently admitted that “this offer contemplated that if two major communities could not reach agreement, then it might become necessary to divide India between them”. Lumby has rightly pointed out that non-acceding provision for a province in the Draft Declaration “was both recognition of the strength of the demand for Pakistan and a long step towards its ultimate realisation”.

However, such a *Draft Declaration* actually gave the Muslim League such substance of Pakistan and Sir Stafford Cripps subsequently stated that it had the effect of encouraging all parties in India to look for realisation of their freedom either by the path of unitary Central Government or the other path which envisaged possible division. Despite that, the Muslim League rejected the Cripps offer on the ground that “right of non-accession to the Union has been conceded but the method and procedure laid down are such as to negate the proposed object. In the draft proposals no procedure has been laid down as to how the verdict of the provinces is to be obtained in favour of or against accession to the one Union”.

With regard to non-accession of provinces as provided in the Draft Declaration, the Congress did not indicate any firm policy. On one hand it condemned the draft proposals on the ground that “the acceptance

beforehand of the novel principles of non-accession for a province” was a severe blow to the conception of India’s unity and an indication of discord, likely to generate growing trouble in the provinces”; on the other hand in the same resolution it also recognised the right of the provinces to secede from the Centre by stating that the Congress committee “cannot think it terms of compelling the people of any territorial unit to remain in an Indian Union against their declared and established will”. This policy of non-compulsion of the provinces in fact encouraged separatist tendencies of the Muslim League and strengthened their creed of Pakistan.

Sikhs meet Sir Stafford Cripps

The Draft Declaration issued by Sir Stafford Cripps was to have major impact on future of the Punjab. One of its main features was to give right to the provinces to secede from the Centre and “with such non-acceding provinces should they so desire” were to be given new Constitution “giving them the same full status as Indian Union”. This greatly alarmed the Sikhs of the



Master Tara Singh, representing the Sikhs

state because it meant that the Punjab, being a Muslim majority province, could well secede from the rest and acquire the same status as an Indian Union. In that case, the Sikhs and Hindus of the Punjab would be subjected to perpetual Muslim domination.

It was at this time that Master Tara Singh, S Baldev Singh, S Ujjal Singh and Sir Joginder Singh met Sir Stafford Cripps, on 27 March 1942, and discussed with him the “possibility of having some redistributions of provincial power between eastern and western Punjab in order to create a province in which the Sikhs would have the decisive voice as a large balancing party between the Hindus and Muslims”.

With regard to the protection of minorities, Sir Stafford continually emphasised the important place of the Sikhs and argued that if they joined the Indian Union, the Congress would have to satisfy them and they “might entail the sub-division of the Punjab into two provinces or setting up of within the Punjab, two provinces of a semi-autonomous district of the Sikhs on the Soviet model”. He also assured that in case of the Treaty being negotiated “contemporaneously with framing of the constitution we should be able to insist on the insertion of minority protection clauses in accordance with the definition set out in the document”.

The Sikh deputation met Sir Stafford on 31 March 1942, handed over the Memorandum to him and expressed the view that “they would like a special area in which their vote could be taken to decide whether they should join the first or second union”.

The Sikh Memorandum

In effect: “After giving careful consideration to the proposals which have been published from the point of view of India’s integrity and the Sikh position, we find them unacceptable because instead of maintaining and strengthening the integrity of India, provisions has been made for the separation of provinces and a constitution for Pakistan and the cause of Sikhs has lamentably been betrayed.”

The Memorandum continued: “Why should a province that fails to secure a three-fifths majority of its legislature, in which a community enjoys a statutory

majority be allowed to hold a plebiscite and given the benefit of a bare majority. In fairness, this right should have been conceded to communities who are in a permanent minority in the Legislature. Why should not any population of any area opposed to separation, be given the right to record its verdict and to form an autonomous unit”?

“We are sure you know that the Punjab proper extended upto the banks of the Jhelum, excluding Jhang and Multan districts and the trans-Jhelum area as were added by the conquest of Maharaja Ranjit Singh and then retained by the British for administrative convenience. It would altogether be unjust to allow the extraneous trans-Jhelum population, which only accidentally came into the province, to dominate the future of Punjab proper”.

With regard to right to separation granted, the (*Sikhs*) are strongly opposed to the vivisection of India into two or three rival dominions or sovereign states as is contemplated in the British proposals. They feel that such a step would lead to a state of perpetual strife and civil war in the country. If the object is to give self determination to the province, in the matter of accession to the *Union of India*, the right to stand out and break the unity of India should not be exercised by bare majority but by atleast 65% of Indian members present at the meeting of the Provincial Assembly where the resolution is considered. A plebiscite on the issue of succession is certain to lead to inter-communal riots of the most serious character and magnitude and should in no case be resorted to”.

The Memorandum advocated partition of the British Punjab; “The Sikhs, therefore, feel that they cannot effectively protect their interests *unless the Punjab is redistributed into two provinces with the River Ravi forming the boundary between them*. The population of the Punjab is so distributed that two western Divisions of Rawalpindi and Multan are predominately Muslim and two eastern divisions of Ambala and Jullundur are predominantly non-Muslim. The three Districts of Amritsar, Gurdaspur and Lahore have a balanced population. If a new province of a contiguous area of two divisions of Ambala and Jullunder plus three districts of Lahore,

Gurdaspur and Amritsar is carried out it will have a population with non-Muslims being 63% and Muslims 37%.

The Great Impact

The Draft Declaration issued by Sir Stafford Cripps had great impact on politics of the Punjab in general and on future of the Sikhs in particular. The major demand of the Sikhs for bifurcation of the Punjab with the River Ravi as the boundary was conceded in 1947. It is very significant to note how this demand of demarcation of boundary with districts of Amritsar, Gurdaspur and Lahore has been partially fulfilled by the Redcliffe Award, in 1947. Master Tara Singh, the Akali had stressed the idea of partition of the Punjab in his letter to Sir Stafford Cripps dated 1 May 1942. "I thought I had convinced you at Delhi that you could give Sikhs substantial protection by dividing the present Punjab in two parts and giving right of non-accession to each part. The Sikhs and the Hindus do not want to go out of India against their wishes If you can separate provinces from India for the domination of the Muslims why can you refuse to separate a big area for the protection of the Sikhs from the rule of single community"? In his Press statement published on 2 December 1942, Master Tara Singh advocated the partition of the Punjab into two provinces: one predominated by the Hindus and the Sikhs and other by the Muslims. He quoted "the example of Orissa, Bihar and Sindh which had been created separate units without in any way destroying the integrity of the country".

Demand for the Sikh State

In order to counteract the Muslim League demand of Pakistan, Shiromani Akali Dal put forth the demand of a Sikh State. The main aim and the most prominent feature of this demand was to insist upon partition of the Punjab, and create a province in which Sikhs had dominant position. It was based on the argument that "the *Panth* demands the splitting up of the existing province of the Punjab with its unnatural boundaries so as

to constitute a separate autonomous Sikh State in these areas of the Central North Eastern and South Eastern Punjab in which the overwhelming part of the Sikh population is concentrated and which because of the proprietors in it being mostly Sikhs and its generally character being distinctly Sikh, is also the *defacto* Sikh Homeland". The proposed Sikh State was to consist of the territories parts of Ambala and Multan Divisions with the area comprised of Sikh State and Malerkotla with certain hills in the north and north east.

Whatever may be the merits and demerits of his scheme, it proved to be very realistic and farsighted in advocating exchange of population. The Sikh leaders clearly saw that it would be impossible for the Sikhs in general to live in a purely Islamic state. This demand of Sikh State rested on an implied resumption of exchange of population. The Sikh states were to provide facilities for such exchange. It was stated that a State Commissioner or Board was to be constituted to evaluate an purchase the property of emigrant population on reasonable terms".

Khalistan

Sir B Glancy, Governor of the Punjab wrote to the Viceroy in his personal and private letter dated 1 May 1942 "as you are well aware, the practical objection to Khalistan are even greater than those which lie in the path of Pakistan. Apart from upheaval that would be caused by tearing out a large section of territory



The possible Sikh State : between a rock and a hard place

from the vitals of provincial body politic, it is worth remembering that there is not a single district in which the Sikhs command a majority – though there are half a dozen Sikh States in the Agency, there was only one State, one Muslim State of Malerkotla where the majority of population were Sikhs”.

On 30 March, 1942, Master Tara Singh met Mr CMG Ogilvie of the Ministry of Defence, Government of India and told him that the scheme propounded by Sir Stafford Cripps “was more likely to cause complete cessation of the war effort than to encourage them (Sikhs) to do more”.

The Punjab’s share in the Indian Army was very substantial. It initially provided 201,000 men in all, of which 51,000 were Sikhs. The Akali Party had been observing the Congress attitude of non-cooperation and starting a mass movement known as *Quit India Movement* so the government was apprehensive that the Cripps Mission might not adversely affect the recruitment of the Sikhs during the war.

In order to avoid this possibility the government posted Major J.M. Short as Recruitment Officer in

the central districts of the Punjab. Major Short had served with the XI Sikhs and retired in 1931. He was reemployed in 1940 when the Sikh Squadron of Central India Horse refused to embark for the Middle East, and was successful in restoring the loyalty of the Sikh forces. He had influence over the Akalis and he was a personal friend of Master Tara Singh. He was successful in persuading a section of the Akali leaders to have favourable attitude towards the recruitment of the Sikhs. He was able to effect an understanding between the Akalis and the Unionist Government in the Punjab which culminated in Sir Sikander-Baldev Singh Pact in June 1942.

Sir B. Glancy, the Governor of Punjab wrote to the Viceroy in a private and personal letter dated 18 July, 1942 commenting on the Sikander-Baldev Singh Pact, “Master Tata Singh and Akalis are notorious for their habit of ‘sailing in two boats’ and inspite of Sikander-Baldev Singh Pact they have by no means severed their connections with the Congress.”

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British officers of a Sikh Regiment: the community’s role in both World Wars was remarkable

In honour of Baba Kharak Singh (a century later !)

The contribution of Sikhs in India's freedom struggle is remarkable, but for reasons that can only be speculated, has remained very understated. In the course of our Independence struggle, of the 121 patriots hanged, 93 were Sikhs. Of the 2626 awarded life-imprisonment, 2147 were Sikhs. Of the 1300 martyred at Jallianwala Bagh, 799 were Sikhs. Considering that the Sikhs comprised hardly 1.5 per cent of the total population of India at the time, their sacrifices amount to a staggering 90 per cent.



In those times, Baba Kharak Singh was perhaps one of the most active in India's freedom movement, particularly during the 1920s. Actively drawn in to Sikh politics in 1920, deeply anguished by the Jallianwala Bagh massacre of 1919, he became president of the Central Sikh League which, under his direction led Sikhs to participate the non-co-operation movement launched by Mahatma Gandhi. He was elected president of the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee and in the following year became President of the Punjab Provincial Congress Committee.

After successfully leading the struggle for restoration of keys to the *Toshakhana* (Treasury) of Darbar Sahib (Golden Temple) he underwent numerous jail terms for making what was regarded as 'seditious' speeches and manufacturing kirpans at his factory. Mahatma Gandhi had telegraphed him: "First decisive battle for India's freedom won! Congratulations". This was indeed a very (yet to be established), Gandhian way of successfully

conducting an agitation against the repressive colonial masters.

He was sent to jail in Dera Ghazi Khan (now in NW Pakistan), where in protest against the forced removal of turbans of Sikhs and Gandhi caps of Hindu political prisoners, he discarded all his clothes except for his *kachahira* or drawers to add a new dimension to Gandhiji's Civil Disobedience movement. Despite the extreme weather conditions, he remained thus clad until he was released after his full term (extended twice

for non-obedience of orders) ended on 4 June 1927. He had unanimously been elected president in absentia of the Gurdwara Central Board (later redesignated Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee) and was reelected to the high office after elections in 1930. He resigned soon after but continued to work both for national independence and for the protection of Sikh interests.

Baba Kharak Singh must be hailed as the prototype of various movements which were subsequently launched by Mahatma Gandhi. He was undoubtedly foremost amongst Sikhs in India's freedom struggle. Civil Disobedience, while in jail, became a practice subsequently adopted by Mahatma Gandhi in later years while launching *Savinay Avagya Aandolan*.

During 1928-29, he vehemently opposed the Nehru Committee's Report which the Congress Party subsequently shelved and undertook to secure Sikhs' concurrence in the framing of constitutional proposals

for the future. He also opposed, though without success, the Communal Award, which gave statutory majority to Muslims in the Punjab. He was a firm protagonist of national unity and opposed both the Muslim League's demand for a Pakistan and for an Azad Punjab by a section of the Sikhs, what was also propagated by Mahatma Gandhi who till the end opposed the partition of India.

Baba Kharak Singh Marg

It is unfortunate that one of the most prominent roads of New Delhi (Baba Kharak Singh Marg), next to Connaught Place, in the very heart of India's capital is only fleetingly referred to without knowing its significance. Virtually no one knows about this noble person and his contribution to India's freedom struggle, nor is there mention in text books, so much so that his sesquicentennial (150th year of birth), on 6 June 2018 went virtually unnoticed and unreported. No initiative was undertaken either by the Congress-led Punjab government or even Akali-led Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee (SGPC), whose first President Baba Kharak Singh was. No tributes came from the Akalis although he was virtually their heart and soul.



It was thus that, as the Sikh representative in the ruling party (BJP) with the support of area MP Ms Meenakshi Lekhi, I took up this matter with the Home Minister and Chairman, NDMC, for building a small memorial near Gurdwara Bangla Sahib on the Baba Kharak Singh Marg itself. This was the very least a grateful nation could do so as to raise awareness about Babaji's inspiring contributions in India's freedom struggle. It is a matter of great satisfaction that the Home Minister readily agreed and approved instillation of the plaque (in picture).

With increasing realisation on the need to enshrine the role of our heroes, particularly those who laid down their lives for India's freedom, it is incumbent to accord them their due place in our text books for posterity.

RP Singh



The Maha Putra

Commemorating Harbrinderjit Singh Dhillon of Indonesia

Arguably the best known, and admired, Sikh of Indonesia was Harbrinderjit Singh Dhillon, who passed away in Denpasar, Bali on 16 September at the age of 74. He was an agricultural expert, political economist and human rights activist. According to Amnesty International Indonesia Executive Director Usman Hamid “he never stopped thinking and always invited everyone to continue to think about the nation’s interests in a spirit of humanity that transcended the boundaries of ethnicity, religion, race and origin.”



Harbrinderjit Singh was born in Medan, North Sumatra in 1945, obtained a bachelor’s degree from the University of North Sumatra and post-graduation from Cornell University in the United States.

Between 1983 and 1996, Dhillon held various positions at the Agriculture Ministry and was coordinator of the *Task Force on Agricultural Policy* of Indonesia at the *Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation Forum*, and was also Senior Adviser to Director General of the United Nation’s Food and Agriculture Organization in Rome.

He was involved in many human rights and anticorruption activities and was a commissioner of the National Commission on Human Rights (Komnas



HAM) as well as a Joint Anticorruption Team member. In an interview with *The Jakarta Post* in 2015, he stated that “corruption is one of the main reasons that poverty levels remain high because corrupt officials not only steal money from the government, they steal from the people”.

On 3 September 2015 on Indonesia’s 70th Independence Day, Harbrinderjit Singh Dhillon was awarded the *Mahaputra Star* (Star of Mahaputra) by Indonesian President Joko ‘Jokowi’ Widodo at the State Palace, an award akin to India’s Padma Bhushan. He had served in senior government positions, especially in agriculture and poverty alleviation through his Indonesian political activism for more than two decades.

The State funeral

On a cloudless morning on 16 September 2019 at the Kalibata National Heroes’ Cemetery the head of a military guard of honour read out: “I stand here today on behalf of the state and people of Indonesia, to honour and read out the life and accomplishments of Harbrinderjit Singh Dhillon...” He was the first Indonesian Sikh to be honoured at Indonesia’s National Heroes Cemetery, receiving a six-gun salute.

His great grandfather came to Medan in North Sumatra in the 19th century and began work as a night watchman, the family working its way up and he would surely have been proud to know that his great grandson is now honored in Kalibata. “... perhaps he will remain



the only Sikh honoured here as there are no other Sikhs who have received the *Maha Putra* (Great Son of Indonesia) Award,” commented his brother Rajkumar Singh with pride.

At the Kalibata Heroes’ Cemetery, Henry Saragi head of the Indonesian Farmers Union was clearly trying to come to terms with his feelings of loss at Dhillon’s passing, “I have known Dhillon for close on to 19 years – since when we first began the struggle for the rights of poor farmers,” he began. “It’s an enormous loss for the Farmers’ Union. Dhillon was the intellectual backbone of the thinking behind agriculture reform as well as for rural life in Indonesia. He helped to formulate the Universal Declaration of the Rights of Indonesian Farmers in 2001 when he was with the Indonesian Human Rights Commission and this provided the foundations for the promulgation of Law number 19 of 2013 for the *Protection and Empowerment of Farmers*. It in turn became the basis for the United Nations *Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas* which was ratified in New York on 17 December 2018.”

Rajkumar Singh was not surprised that Dhillon chose agriculture as his field, “The Sikh culture is an agricultural one. In the Punjab the Sikhs are farmers,” he explained. But what drew Dhillon to dedicating his

life to farmers and the poor? Henry Saragi tried to explain it: “We both came from Medan and we both had lived on plantations there. So, we knew how plantations were managed with an economic system that was so unfair to the workers and farmers. If our plantations had been managed in a fair way, Indonesia would now be prosperous. So, Dhillon really understood how farmers and agricultural workers lived. At the Ministry of Agriculture he was the one who created the concept of PIRBUN (*Perusahaan Inti Rakyat Perkebunan*) or NES (Small Holder Nucleus Estates) in 1977.”

Many people do not know that in his capacity as a member of the Human Rights Commission, Harbrinderjit Singh went to Timor Leste and Atambua (a town in Indonesian West Timor on the border with Timor Leste) as head of the team that exhumed the

mass graves of victims of atrocities. A member of the team spoke of how in the hot sun with the terrible stench of rotting bodies Dhillon only thought of the wellbeing of other members of the team.

It was in part this integrity that made it possible for Harbrinderjit Singh Dhillon to serve his country in so many capacities: on the expert staff at the Ministry of Agriculture for the plantation sector especially state-owned plantation companies, as Director of the Centre for

Agricultural Policy Studies, as a member of the National Economic Council, as member of the KPK. As Country Representative of the International Association of Agricultural Economists he was head of the Association for Indonesian Agricultural Economy. He also served as President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono’s special envoy for poverty eradication and held many more national and international positions, too numerous for all be mentioned here.

Harbrinderjit Singh Dhillon’s wife Dr Drupadi Harnopidjati (in picture above with their son) popularly known as Atje, quoted Prof Ascobat Gani when she said, “My husband criticised almost everyone...but he hated no one; he had no enemies... he loved everyone.”



The Pride of Texas

Sandeep Singh Dhaliwal “in our hearts”

On 27 September 2019, an American Sikh police officer Sandeep Singh Dhaliwal, Harris County Sheriff's deputy was shot in cold blood while conducting a traffic stop in the line of duty.

In his early 40s, he was the first police officer in Texas to serve while keeping his Sikh articles of faith. As per senior official Sheriff Ed Gonzalez, “Dhaliwal, a 10-year veteran of the department, stopped a vehicle with a man and woman inside and one of them got out and shot him ambush-style at least twice in a ruthless, cold-blooded way.”

Since 2015, Dhaliwal had been the “history-making” police officer in Texas with his turban and beard while patrolling the streets in order to bolster cultural diversity. With this policy, one of the largest sheriff's offices in the country had affirmed that a

person does not have to choose between their faith and a career of service.

The public was invited to attend the viewing and funeral services. Services were held at the Berry Centre, which can accommodate up to 8,000 people, and space was set aside for overflow of crowds. Thousands of people including police officers, Sikh, Indian-Americans and Houston-area residents were in attendance to honour slain Sandeep Singh Dhaliwal.



Along with traditional Sikh rites, there was a 21-gun salute from fellow officers and a helicopter flyover. As ‘Amazing Grace’ was played on the bagpipes, members of HCSO folded the American flag that covered his casket and Sheriff Ed Gonzalez presented this to Dhaliwal's widow who clutched it to her heart.

Following a final prayer by the Dhaliwal family, HCSO officers moved his casket into a hearse to escort it to the funeral home for a cremation. After final ceremonies and memorial service at Berry Center, the Dhaliwal family and members of HCSO headed to the Winford Funeral Home for a closed cremation.

The community and mourners proceeded to Gurdwara Sikh National Centre at 7500 North Sam Houston Parkway West for the langar (communal meal), a dress code worn being navy blue, just like the Harris County Sheriff's Office uniform.





“the community supports you and lifts you up. We are grateful for your father’s service, and his sacrifice and his legacy”. Lt.Gov. Dan Patrick said that “since 2015, we’ve lost 50 men and women of law enforcement in the line of duty and Deputy Dhaliwal was the fiftieth. He did more in his life than some people do in a hundred years.”

As Houston Mayor Sylvester Turner said “it is at moments like these when we fall on our faith and he was the ambassador of all that is good. And the way he died does not erase that in a city that happens to be the most diverse in the country, and

this city, because of this one person, on this day and hopefully days to come, will be the most unified it has ever been,” added Turner.



US Army Captain Simratpal Singh described Dhaliwal as “humble, fearless, not dissuaded by negativity.our lion may be gone physically but his legacy of selfless service and of breaking down barriers will continue to live”. Senator Ted Cruz, R-Texas, addressed Dhaliwal’s wife and three children saying

Gonzalez said that Dhaliwal was a trailblazer and wore his Sikh faith on the outside for all to see. “He saw in our profession the opportunity to serve with a deeper purpose and to make a positive difference and he succeeded far beyond his own dreams and expectations. He was an inspiration to us all and was considered to be one of our finest deputies, with a bright future to match his beautiful bright personality. I will miss the gentle smile and embrace I received each time I saw him”.

Joe Biden, Demoractic Party candidate for the US Presidentship tweeted, “Harris County Deputy Sandeep Dhaliwal was a hero and a trailblazer who selflessly served his community every day.... we are keeping his family and loved ones in our hearts”.



Contemporary Sikh Role Models

The Inventor

Gurtej Singh Sandhu is an inventor who has more patents to his name than had Thomas Edison, known as the *Father of Inventions*. While Edison had 1,084 patents to his name, the 58-year-old Gurtej Sandhu has already secured 1,325 patents and is 7th on the worldwide list of most prolific inventors. Currently residing in the State of Idaho in the United States of America, Gurtej Singh Sandhu is Vice President of Micron Technology.



After attaining a degree in electrical engineering from IIT Delhi, Gurtej earned his PhD in physics from the University of North Carolina in 1990. Standing on the cross-roads of choosing between a top American computer memory maker or a startup, Gurtej chose the latter, Micron Technology, which opportunity would obviously give him more space to grow and venture out.

Gurtej Singh got his first few patents while he was with Micron, working to sustain Moore's Law - the phenomenon that saw the number of transistors in an area of circuits doubling each year. He figured how many memory units could be accommodated into these chips and since his successful invention, chip manufacturers around the globe have used and benefitted from Gurtej's patents.

Gurtej Singh has also been experimenting and innovating with self-driving cars, *Big Data* among other big projects, which has increased his list of patents. His pioneering achievements concerning patterning and materials integration have enabled the continuation of Moore's Law for aggressive scaling of memory chips integral to consumer electronics products such as cell phones, digital cameras and solid-state drives for personal and cloud server computers.

The Chief Executive

Ravinder Singh Takkar has recently taken over reins of Vodafone Idea Ltd as chief executive officer in mid-August 2019. With the Vodafone Group for over 25 years, he has worked in several leadership positions across Vodafone's operating companies, the latest of which was

as CEO of Vodafone Romania for three years and CEO of Vodafone partner markets in London. He is not new to the Indian telecom sector either, having closely been with the Indian industry since 2007 when the Vodafone Group entered the Indian market.



It could be this knowledge of the market that can help the company claw back its position and market share, which Reliance Jio and Bharti Airtel are aggressively working to dominate. Besides cut-throat competition, sector watchers feel that Vodafone Idea's selective 4G strategy may not help, market share loss may continue and it may lose another 70 million subscribers over the next 18 months.

Ravinder Singh Takkar is currently Board member of Vodafone Idea and Indus Towers, where he is responsible for all Vodafone Group interests in India, a role which he took on in 2017. During the decade, he has held a number of senior roles in strategy and business development and he was CEO of the enterprise business of the company, and is one of the key people overlooking the integration process, part of the team that handles matters with the echelons of the Indian government.

The Ship's Captain

The MV *Thermopylae* is first of new generation of Post Panamax HERO (High Efficiency RoRo) PCTC vessels, with a displacement of a staggering 75,283 tonnes, one of the world's biggest and its first Captain is **Hitender Singh**.



The *Thermopylae* features 5 liftable car decks, allowing for more configurations for cargo of various sizes and hence increased capacity for cars, trucks, equipment and breakbulk. The vessel's more shallow draft allows her to call at ports with shallower depths, increasing her scope of service geographically.

Taking steps towards the Orcelle vision of zero-emission shipping, the *Thermopylae* design includes emission reducing features such as a streamlined bow,

new Promas rudder and an engine configured to allow the vessel to operate more efficiently in a wider range of speeds and drafts. In addition, the vessel is fitted with an Exhaust Gas Cleaning System that reduces sulphur emissions to below 0.1% in compliance with ECA regulations. This system also removes 70% of particulate matter, significantly reducing NOx emissions.

The Thermopylae's maiden voyage was from South Korea, where it was built, to Europe, via the port of Hitachinaka in Japan and finally sailing to Bremerhaven, Germany. The ship is capable of taking a car payload of up to 8,000 car-equivalent units (CEUs), compared to the 6,400/6,500CEU capacity of preceding pure car/truck carriers. It boasts a wider beam and greater cargo range and capacity than earlier ships. The HERO also includes a number of innovations to help reduce fuel consumption and its environmental impact, achieving a reduction of some 10-15% in fuel consumption per cargo unit.

The HERO vessel also includes a shallower draught, enabling it to dock even in developing countries, where depth can often be an issue. There are currently four vessels of this design in the world and four more expected to be built. These vessels are spread across a few trade lanes so there will be a few occasionally on the South African coast.

The Sportsman

Samrath Singh is a rising sophomore at Boston College and already a minority in a predominately Catholic, white university, he is the first notable Sikh in baseball this very American sport. While his classmates wear pastel shorts and a polo shirt, Singh wears a turban (light blue is his favourite colour) that adds a few inches to his 6-foot-4 frame. Samrath Singh believes he is the first Sikh to play college baseball, let alone in the ACC, a top tier conference. On top of all of this, he has a legitimate chance to become the first of his background to make it to the professional ranks.

His story is unique, yet started in a typical way. "My parents always pushed me to get involved in many sports," Singh said, who played golf, tennis, and baseball

growing up, and like many young kids, he gravitated to the activity in which he was most successful. "I always threw hard for my age, and I hit 30 home runs in my Little League career." By the time he reached middle school, he was playing on elite travel teams across New Jersey and taking pitching lessons twice a week. Once Singh matriculated to New Jersey's West Windsor High School South, he really began to excel on the diamond. As a freshman on the junior varsity team, Singh was named team most valuable player.

It was at this time that he realised he had the talent to play in college. He attended the Stanford baseball camp, and after a strong showing, developed a silent confidence that he could use baseball to help him achieve his goal of attending an elite college. "Academics have always come first," Samrath Singh said. "Excellence in school is a key part of Sikh culture".

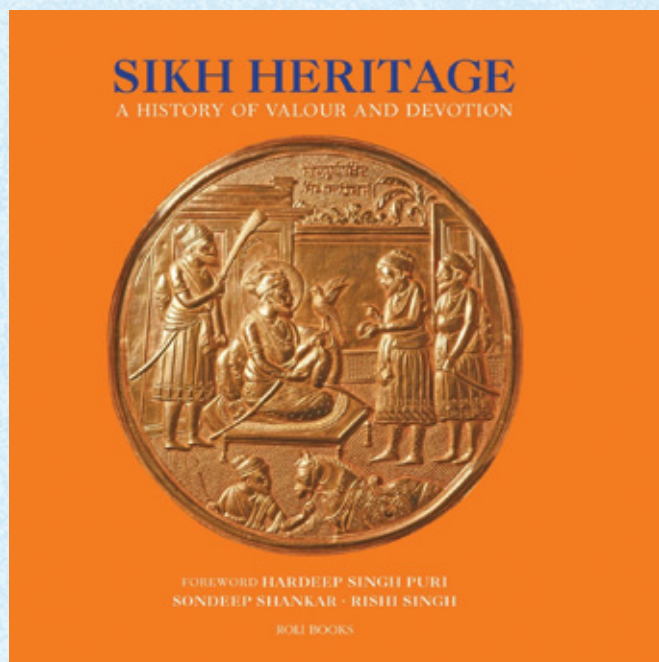
Samrath Singh's father works in finance, his mother is a dentist, and one of his sisters graduated from Carnegie Mellon University; the other goes there now. From a very early age, the standard was set for Singh to achieve academic success in addition to his athletic pursuits. One school did have an open spot, however. Boston College pitching coach Alex Trezza had seen him twice at tournaments in New Jersey, and invited him to Chestnut Hill for a visit to the campus in the summer of 2017. Singh and his parents were immediately impressed with head baseball coach Mike Gambino, who opened their meeting by talking about Sikhism and how it related to Boston College's Jesuit values. "That definitely sold my parents immediately," he recalled. "Mike was the first coach I talked to that really took a deep interest in my religion and made me feel really comfortable."

The Boston College baseball programme prides itself on a culture of brotherhood. "Because I am Sikh, I feel I have to prove I belong. It drives me through a tough practice, an exhausting workout, or a late night studying." As for advice to the next generation of Sikh athletes, Singh kept it simple. "I would just say to find what you're passionate about and chase that," Samrath Singh said. "My parents put me in a lot of different activities and baseball stuck. I've worked hard and made it because I enjoy it... "I just want to inspire the next generation," Singh said. "It's perfectly fine for a Sikh kid to wish he was Mike Trout or Bryce Harper. But I want them to see another Sikh at the highest level. I want kids to see someone that looks like them."



Sikh Heritage

A History of Valour and Devotion



This splendidly illustrated book by Sondeep Shankar and Rishi Singh is an overview of the history and traditions of the Sikh community whose roots are in the Indian subcontinent but its branches having now spread across the globe to all Continents. Statistically, Sikhs form just two percent of India's population of 1.2 billion but theirs is an ubiquitous presence, from Kashmir to Kanyakumari, not only standing out with their colourful attire but their *joie de vivre* which they have taken with them to whichever lands they chose to make their own. Sikhs are now a major visible minority in Great Britain, Canada, California, Australia & New Zealand but they are also citizens of Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand and Indonesia, apart from many other lands, in Europe, Africa and South America.

Specifically, the book in review is a photographic documentation of Sikh historicity through objects

both in time and space Sahib such as the beautifully captured images of Harmandir Sahib, its *toshakhana*, and *takhats* or temporal seats of the Sikhs, portraying a unique relationship between the edifice and the Sikhs : in a manner, every photograph is a story in itself. Such an approach aims at the conception of Sikh heritage not only as the sacred masterpieces of the past to be valued and conserved, but also as



Celebrating Bandi Chhor Divas, or Day of Liberation when the Sixth Guru of the Sikhs Hargobind returned to Amritsar in 1619 after being released from the prison in Gwalior by the Mughal Emperor Jahangir. The Guru only agreed to leave when the other 52 princes, imprisoned were also released with him. The day is coincident with Diwali and Harmandar Sahib in Amritsar is brilliantly lit up to mark the occasion



Reciting from the Guru Granth Sahib at Takhat Sri Hazur Sahib in Nanded, Maharashtra

emblematic and living spaces to be appropriated by the local communities, who are the bearers of a rich and active collective memory.

Sondeep Shankar is well known in the diaspora too with a photo exhibition under the same title having been held at the Gurdwara Sahib at Atlanta, in America in some years back. As recorded then, “this pioneering work provides a glimpse of rich Sikh heritage and traditions. He has been involved with this project for the past two decades. This painstaking work and commendable photography by Sondeep is fine contribution and presentation of the valuable Sikh Heritage to its devotees and admirers alike”.

Continuing, “Sikhism based on the teachings of ten Sikh gurus, from Guru Nanak Dev to Guru Gobind Singh, was founded in fifteenth-century Punjab, India. Sikhism advocates the pursuit of salvation through disciplined, personal meditation on the name and message of God. Its traditions and teachings are associated with the history, society and culture

of the Punjab. Guru Nanak Devji was the first Sikh Guru, born in 1469. He was followed by nine Gurus whose descendents and close followers are spread in large numbers all over Punjab. The Gurus gifted their personal belongings, arms and handwritten manuscripts to the Gurdwaras spread all across the country”.

Further, “Sikhs are ordained to follow the teachings of the ten Sikh Gurus, or enlightened teachers, enshrined in Guru Granth Sahib, which, along with the writings of six of the Sikh gurus, also includes the teachings of saints such as Kabir, Namdev, Ravidas, and Sheikh Farid, and several others. The Sikhs, over 26 million across the world, believe in the equality of humankind, the concept of universal brotherhood of man and One Supreme God (*Ik Onkar*)”.

The book is co-authored by Dr Rishi Singh, a Ph.D from the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London who completed his bachelor’s and master’s in Arts in the Persian

language and literature from Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi and has an M.Phil in Persian Language and Literature from the University of Delhi. Co-author of a well acclaimed book on Maharaja Ranjit Singh, he has been a Research Associate of books on Golden Temple, Anandpur Sahib and Hemkunt Sahib. His most recent and well-reviewed publication is *State Formation and the Establishment of Non-Muslim Hegemony : Post-*

Mughal 19th Century Punjab. Highly published in national newspapers, research journals, and magazines in India and Canada, Rishi Singh has an amazing talent in languages, speaking Persian, Punjabi, Hindi, Urdu and English, and was also instrumental in the structuring, planning and the execution of the project www.canadiansikhheritage.ca, under the auspices of the University of Fraser Valley.



An illustrated folio, the handwritten Guru Granth Sahib. The Holy Granth is written in Gurmukhi script. Literally meaning 'from the Gurus mouth', Gurmukhi was standardised by the Second Sikh Guru, Guru Angad Dev

In his Foreword to the book Hardeep Singh Puri, the distinguished diplomat and presently Cabinet Minister in the Indian Government, recalls origins of the faith, contextualising as to why and how the birth of Sikhism took place in the 16th century, the then Bhakti movement being largely a response to this spread of Islam in the subcontinent. To quote, “the spread of Bhakti as a response to the violent invasions was followed by the rise of a peaceful Islamic movement in India – what has today come to be described as Sufism. Pacifists from the Islamic faith who had come to India began to familiarise themselves with local religions, customs, and languages. They formed a uniquely Indian way of practicing Islam, which like the Bhakti movement, focused on reciting hymns and dance, in the belief that these customs were all one needed to be one with God”.

However, after yet another series of violent invasions in the early 15th century, the social and religious fabric of India was torn apart, the extraneous rulers pillaging the indigenous peoples of their wealth, with consequently a peaceful co-existence of the Hindus and Muslims coming to a virtual halt. Hinduism then reverted to its caste-dominated structure while Islam began conversion of the so-called ‘infidels’.

It was at this time, the birth of Guru Nanak in 1469 was to transform the subcontinent and his prophetic words “there is no Hindu, there is no Mussalman”, laid the foundation of this Faith, Sikhism which has evolved over the next 550 years.

Hardeep Singh continues, “a community, which began as a movement among farmers, over time, came to be associated with bravery in the battle zone. A traditionally



Ethereal : listening to Rehras Sahib, or Sodra Rehras, the evening prayer and part of Nitnem



Guru Granth Sahib being taken on a golden palanquin by devotees doing parikrama around the Sarovar which surrounds the Sanctum





peaceful religion, Sikhism faced an existential challenge when the Ninth Guru, Guru Tegh Bahadur, was executed for not converting to Islam. The dominance of the Mughal Empire under the extremist Aurangzeb necessitated a response. Under leadership of the Tenth Guru, Guru Gobind Singh, the son of Guru Tegh Bahadur, a warrior community among Sikhs, the Khalsa, was born. All four of Guru Gobind Singh's sons joined him in the battle against Aurangzeb's tyrannical rule – and all four sacrificed their lives to defend the egalitarian ideals of Sikhism”.

This then is not only a ‘coffee table book’ to adorn the homes of Sikhs and but those of humanity searching for peace and rationality at a time of *Kaliyug*, which is the fourth ‘epoch’ or ‘era’ within a cycle of four ages.

Finally a word on the publishers, Roli Books who have once more excelled in their profession, that of producing a veritable gem, designed, edited and laid out in India, but printed and bound in China, a telling example of the increasing global network.

SIKH HERITAGE

A History of Valour and Devotion

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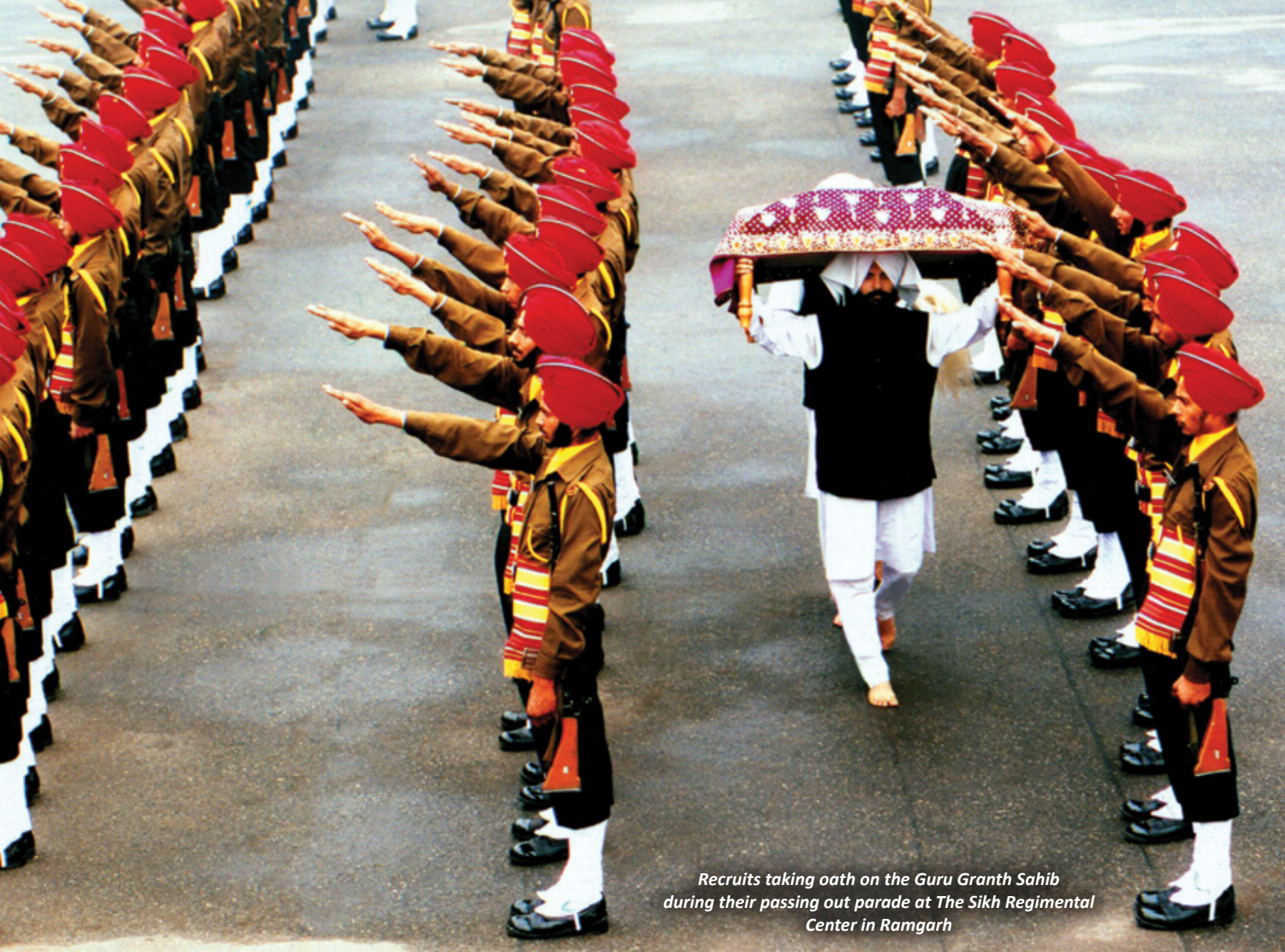
Sondeep Shankar's ode to The Sikh Regiment

Recognising the great talent and versatility of Sondeep Shankar, the photographer was requested to contribute images of Sikh troops in various environment, both at their Regimental Centre in Ramgarh, Jharkhand as also forward deployed in the defence of India. This was for a proposed illustrated history of the Sikh Regiment and involved travel to the high mountains, deep deserts and major air bases.

While the book awaits publication, some images taken by Sondeep are shared with readers.



Guarding the Kashmir valley



Recruits taking oath on the Guru Granth Sahib during their passing out parade at The Sikh Regimental Center in Ramgarh



Training for deployment from an IAF heavy-lift transport aircraft

The Tartan Turban

In Search of Alexander Gardner

In the 1860s, when British visitors first began to explore the high altitude pleasures of Kashmir, it was not just the beauties of the valley and the cool, pellucid waters of the Dal Lake which took their breath away. Living there was a legendary relic of an earlier age, who quickly became an object of pilgrimage for the curious sahibs puffing away at their cheroots on the sundecks of the houseboats.

Alexander Gardner was, in the words of his latest biographer, John Keay, “a be-turbaned colonel of uncertain nationality with a chequered past and a hole in the throat”. This throat wound was a dramatic souvenir of his days as last of the western freelancers and renegades who had fought for the Indian princes in the days before the Raj seized South Asia, and regulated colonialism replaced the anarchy of the disintegrating Mughal empire.

Gardner certainly looked the part. One observer described him as sporting a “fine white beard” and wearing a “turban, a wonderful Byronic shirt and brown dressing gown with brass buttons and a great red sash”. More usually, however, his sartorial choices paid homage to his Scottish ancestry, though he claimed also to have Spanish and even Aztec blood. One visitor commented on his “most peculiar and striking appearance...” clothed from head to foot in the 79th (Highlanders) tartan, but fashioned by a native tailor in a garment of his own invention.

Even his *pagri* was of tartan, and it was adorned with the egret’s plume, only allowed to persons of high rank. He lived entirely in the native fashion, was said to be wealthy and the owner of many villages.

In the celebrated 1860 photograph of him by Samuel Bourne, Gardner wears a sort of tartan trapping-jacket-cum-shalwar-kameez, a garment in which the sartorial habits of Wisconsin or Inverness crossed with those of



Pesha war or Kabul. It was perhaps the only possible garb for a man who claimed to have been born on the shores of Lake Superior, and who said he spent his teenage years between Ireland and the Highlands of Scotland; but who lived out his adulthood fighting first in Afghanistan, then for Ranjit Singh’s Empire, with Sikhs in the valleys of Kashmir and Peshawar and plains of the Punjab.

If much remained mysterious about Gardner, this was at least partly due to the difficulty in communicating with him. This visitors attributed variously to his lack of teeth, his liking for alcohol, his considerable age or the sing-song, lilt of his rusty English; it could equally have been caused by the gash in his throat which was the most obvious of his many wounds and which obliged him to clamp a pair of forceps to his neck whenever he ate or drank.

But once what Keay calls his “incomprehensible utterances” were decoded, Gardner’s stories proved even more remarkable than his dress sense. In a three decade-long career of “high plains drifting and Himalayan scrabbling” between what is now Turkmenistan, Afghanistan, Xinjiang and Tibet, he had “survived arrest in Khiva, fled retribution in Samarkhand, repeatedly forded the Oxus River and... married an Afghan princess”, before being “quickly widowed.... twice he penetrated the explorer’s Holy Grail of remotest Kafirstan and twice re-emerged to tell of it.” No other Himalayan explorer at that point had seen even a fraction of what Gardner appeared to have done.

But it was not just that Alexander had travelled widely. He made no bones about the fact that at low points in his travels he had spent many months in and out of jails, and to survive had become an outlaw and a mercenary, taking “unseemly pride in parading around sundry decapitated heads”. He also briefly became a slave-trader, robbing his enemies and selling them into captivity in the terrible Uzbek slave marts. One observer described the “diabolical contrivance” by which these Uzbeks literally sewed their captives to their saddles: to oblige the prisoner to keep up, a strand of horsehair is passed by means of a long crooked needle, under and around the collar bone;

with the hair a loop is formed to which they attach a rope that may be fastened to the saddle. The captive is constrained to keep near the retreating horseman, and with his hands tied behind his person, is altogether helpless.

Like some damaged, psychotic drifter from a Cormac McCarthy novel, Gardner was certainly no angel. And this was only the first half of his career. At that point in life when most men begin to look for the ease of retirement, Gardner took service as a colonel of artillery in the last of the great Indian empires, that of the Sikh Maharajah, Ranjit Singh. Here he fought against the Afghan Emir Dost Mohammad and went on to play an often pivotal role in the Sikh civil war which followed Ranjit Singh’s death. As the Sikh empire disintegrated into what Keay calls “a vortex of recrimination and chaos... three Maharajahs were assassinated in quick succession and three Waziers murdered just as rapidly”. Gardner was often a witness to, and usually a participant in, much of this violence.

In his final retirement at Kashmir, he became an object of veneration for a younger generation of explorers, who sought his guidance before heading off on their own expeditions into the Himalayas. But there were always a few who remained sceptical. Gardner’s

notes of his youthful journeys were brief, cryptic and often written up many years after the events they described. Keay writes that “connected stories were as alien to the Colonel as pithy prose” and that his travel diaries were notable for their erratic punctuation, parenthetical embellishments and an extraordinary way with adjectives. Some sentences run into one another, others expire mid-utterance. Sparks of eloquence and embers of the colonel’s schooling may be detected, but they lie smothered in verbiage. Gardner’s fondness for self-mythologising did not lend credibility either.



But a few found more serious problems with his accounts. So erratic were Gardner's notes of his crossing of the Pamirs that the great 19th-century authority on Marco Polo, Sir Henry Yule, concluded that "geography, like Divinity, has its Apocrypha" and felt obliged to "include under this head the diary of Colonel Gardner". Finally, at the beginning of the 20th century, and some 20 years after the death of the colonel, two historians went further. After finding a reference in the archives of Ranjit Singh where Gardner, seeking employment with the Sikh Maharajah, claimed to be a deserter from a British warship, Charles Grey and Herbert Garrett, Keepers of Records for the Punjab, declared Gardner to be a fake, an Irish deserter from the forces of the East India Company who had made up his nationality, his background and most of his travels. Gardner, they concluded, was nothing more than "a prize liar who passed off other men's adventures as his own".

So extensive and devastating was the critique of Garrett and Grey that Gardner has ever since been dismissed as an exotic fraud. Despite his claims to have been the first western explorer of much of the western Himalayas, he was, for example, completely ignored in the 1991 Royal Geographical Society's *History of World Exploration*. The editor of that volume was none other than John Keay and *The Tartan Turban* is in many ways an act of contrition for the omission. For subsequent research has brought out of the archives many more of Gardner's travel diaries and other documents which completely vindicate claims once considered too extraordinary to be credible. There are certainly passages in the diaries as erratic as anything else Gardner produced, but there are others which prove beyond all reasonable doubt the authenticity of many of his claims: the place names and routes he followed were completely unknown at the time and, as one subsequent traveller has pointed out, "had Gardner not travelled over a great part of the ground he professes to describe... he could not have known even the names of the places and tribes". Though far from the Victorian ideal of the



Alexander Gardner with elite Sikh troops
(SikhSangat.org/sans/Rss)

detached scholar-explorer who took scientific readings throughout his travels, Gardner is now shown to be a crucial, if erratic and sometimes criminal, pioneer of Himalayan exploration.

Keay has been writing about Himalayan history for almost as long as Gardner spent on his adventures, but *The Tartan Turban* is one of the most enjoyable of all his many marvellous books on south and central

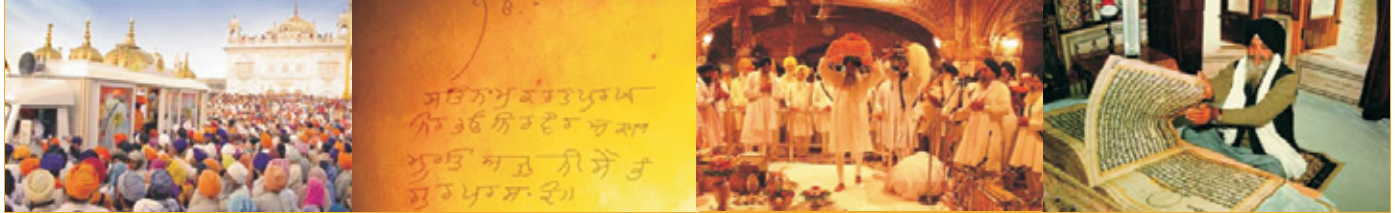
Asia. Mysteries remain: Keay admits he is still uncertain where Gardner was born, or how he really made his way to Central Asia. But *The Tartan Turban* nonetheless brings back from the dead and largely vindicates the reputation of one of the most extraordinary, eccentric and remarkable figures in the history of travel and exploration. Minutely researched, wittily written and beautifully produced, it is one of John Keay's most memorable achievements.

William Dalrymple
[From *The Spectator*]

The Book



Kashi House,
£25, pp. 324

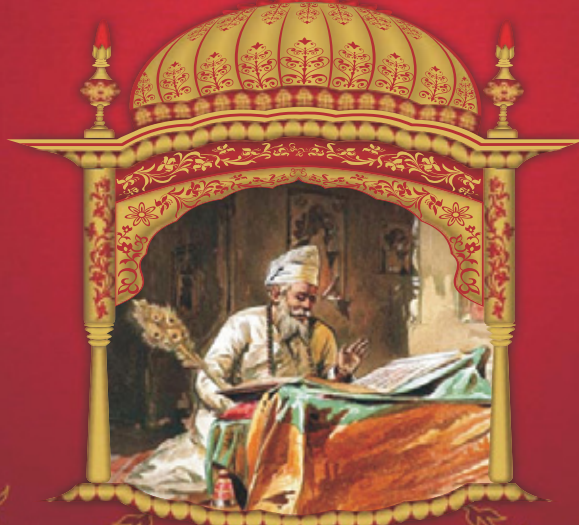


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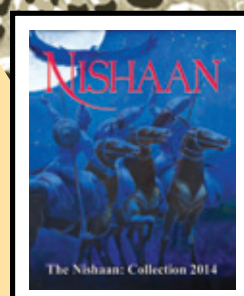
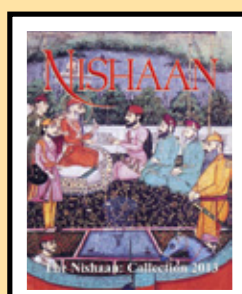
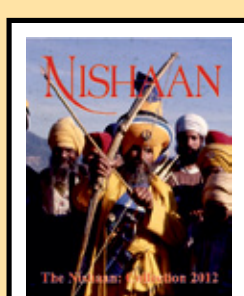
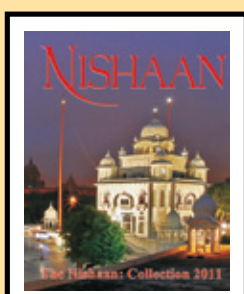
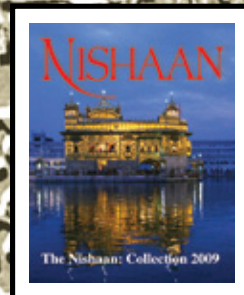
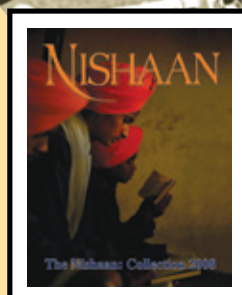
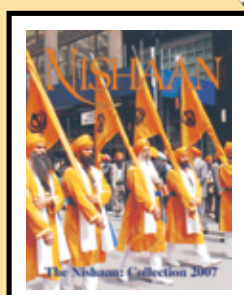
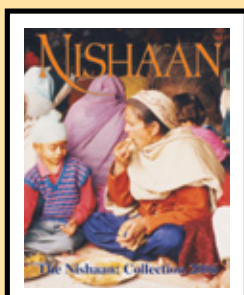
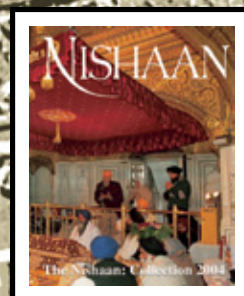
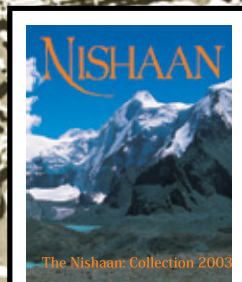
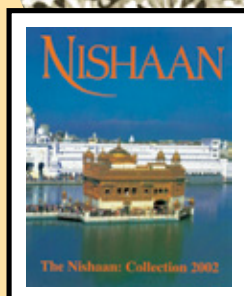
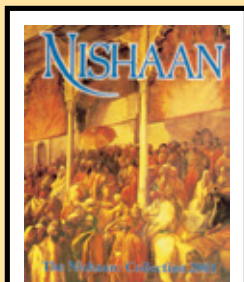
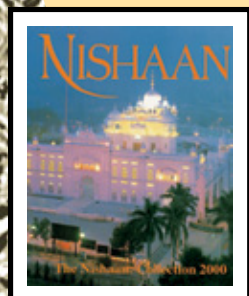


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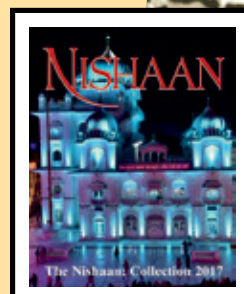
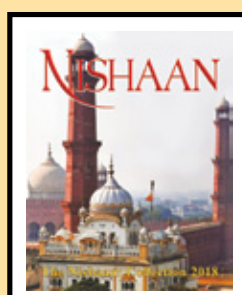
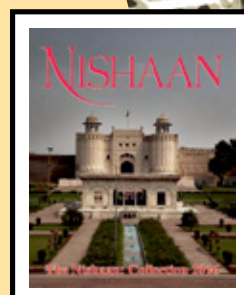
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