

I/2021

NISHAAN

NAGAARA

**The Farmers Protest
Commemorating 400 years of
Guru Tegh Bahadur ji**



The Eighth Annual Conference on Sri Guru Granth Sahib, organised by the Chardi Kalaa Foundation, the San Jose Gurdwara Sahib and SikhNet was held on 7 September 2019 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.



CHARDI KALAA
FOUNDATION



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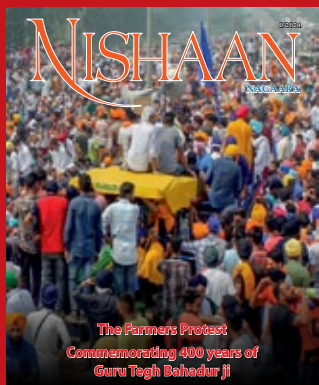


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Farmers agitating against the farm laws gathered at Tikri Border. Image from the internet.

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

Associated with
The Chardi Kalaa Foundation
San Jose, USA

Printed by
Aegean Offset Printers

Please visit us at :
www.nishaannagaara.com

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

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

Benign Neglect

There are important matters in life that we all overlook, despite the best of intentions – such as credit cards, unpaid bills, birthdays and anniversaries, and timely medical advice, even matters of race and gender that have become the lightning rods of our times.

We brush them aside with a lightness of spirit and invariably rue the cost later. This kind of neglect turns out to be not so benign, after all. People who are demonstrably intelligent are not always wise, and even those who are otherwise smart sometimes act such that their behavior belies their intelligence.

So then, what exactly is wisdom and how does it differ from intelligence?

It is easier to talk about people or things, not so easy to dissect complex ideas, and concepts about what is wisdom or what makes love are about as abstract as they can get. The issue - parsing the difference between IQ and wisdom - is not only difficult, it is also universal, eternal, esoteric, complex, and without beginning or end. It has occupied the best minds in ages past and will continue to do so for ages to come. Interested readers may explore our current general understanding of the issues of intelligence and wisdom in the New York Times, Magazine section, May 6, 2007.

What we think is “being wise” often depends upon the culture around us. We cannot judge wisdom outside the cultural context. But there are elements in it that transcend geography and culture.

Philosophers and sages have debated it forever, and there are as many answers as there are wise talking heads. Can wisdom be quantified? Is it different from intelligence? Can it be taught? Is it always a product of age or experience?

The connection of wisdom to age is not unexpected, but we all know that it does not always hold. The world abounds in foolish old people, as well as in those that are wise beyond their years. Remember that a number of Gurus – Hargobind,

Harkishan and Gobind Singh - were exceedingly young when they ascended to the office. Jesus was hardly an old man, though he was wise. Certainly Socrates and Guru Amardas make the case for the age-old wisdom that wisdom might be a gift tied to age.

Keep in mind that although good judgment may come from experience, experience itself is often a product of bad judgment. Even these tautologies reflect probabilities, not certainties.

The formal study of intelligence has been with us for over a century, ever since Binet reported on learning-impaired Parisian children in the early 1900s. Now, there are as many critics and new technologies as there are practitioners. The currently accepted view based on the cognitive psychologist Robert Sternberg’s “Triarchic” theory attempts to measure intelligence from three independent abilities: Analytic, Practical and Creative.

Socrates may have been trying to define wisdom as knowledge combined with virtue. Wisdom, however, has no clear path to a definition or measuring technique a formal academic exploration of “wisdom” in western academia might be no older than 50 to 60 years. It is often credited to a New Yorker, Vivian Clayton, who pursued it as a graduate student at the University of Southern California in the early 1970s.

Clayton looked at wisdom as a three-legged stool, comprising cognition or the acquisition of knowledge, reflection or analysis of information, and for both to be filtered through emotion, which would be the affective component.

IQ tests perhaps only measure one or two features, not all three. Even if they do measure all three, IQ tests neglect their interaction that is critical. That quality of interaction deserves a name, and that is “wisdom.”

The Hebrew word for wisdom is *chochmah*, which evokes properties of both the heart and mind. That sounds nice, but does not make it any easier to comprehend. One way is to look at the word

as encompassing both judgment and compassion. Since judgment and compassion both come from experience, wisdom is often associated with age. But age is no guarantee of wisdom. The old are not always wise, the young not always foolish or impulsive.

Since knowledge results from information, it would show an inverted “U” curve with diverging arms, degrading rapidly over a lifetime after its peak is attained - so much for looking for the enlightenment that comes with age.

Information is essential to knowledge, but wisdom seems to transcend this requirement too. Some of those that we think of as the wisest of humanity – Solomon, Socrates, Buddha, Jesus, and Nanak – never went to college. My almost half a century of experience in academia assures me that not all those who have earned PhDs are wise, even though they may have a sky high IQ. In other words, it is not wisdom when a person’s IQ is off the chart but one can barely detect a heartbeat.

If one cannot earn wisdom by taking a course in college, and experience doesn’t guarantee it, how, then, do you get it?

Does wisdom then become a gift that comes to us as Grace – unexplained, perhaps even unearned?

In an incomplete but final analysis, we are looking at a complex interaction of IQ and experience that results in wisdom that, almost like a sixth sense, is greater than the sum of its parts. In wisdom, knowledge lays the groundwork, but it is coupled with an understanding of the uncertainty of knowledge; emotion is central, but detachment in action is essential. In many ways, in exploring wisdom, we stand astride the nexus of intellect and emotion.

In many places and in many ways, Guru Granth tells us to discard intellectual gymnastics and mental acrobatics in the pursuit of wisdom. Thus is a distinction drawn between wisdom that acts with calm deliberation and the cleverness of the mind that can sometimes make its own dead-end maze!

The Sikh savant, Bhai Gurdas (Vaar 28, Pauri 5, Line 5) tells us “*Gurshikhi da bujhnaa(n) bujh abujh*

hovae lae bikhey”; literally, he asks us to use the intellect to acknowledge the limits of knowledge; in other words, the roots of wisdom lie in the admission of ignorance. I am not a fan of Mahatma Gandhi, but I agree with him that “It is unwise to be too sure of one’s own wisdom.” I believe that the message of Gurbani repeatedly points out that mere IQ is not enough, and may even mislead us; it becomes wisdom when humility and compassion direct and guide it.

Compassion is the beginning of wisdom. Wisdom takes root when we learn to treat the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune, and the foolishness of friends, with benign neglect. And that brings me to the idea that wisdom is calmness in action. To me that describes the concept of *sehaj* that underlies a Sikh life, which we Sikhs often define as an existence of equipoise and balance – a centered life as the Zen might say. “Older people “disattend” negative information, claims Laura Cartensen of Stanford University, in a discussion of age-related wisdom. Substitute “age” with “wise” and I would agree that the wise blank out negativity, as the basis for action.

Flailing around such contradictions took me to William James, who in his 1890 classic *The Principles of Psychology* said, “The art of being wise is the art of knowing what to overlook.”

And from there we step back into time with a similar idea. Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us, says the Bible (Mathews, 18-35).

And then, in a magical leap, my mind went to the period in the 17th and 18th centuries when Sikhs were hunted by the government of that time. There was no judicial process in that unjust society. Yet, Sikh teaching taught them to treat the enemy kindly and fairly, and remain ready to forgive.

Today, centuries later, we remember those times and the people in the daily *Ardaas* - congregational prayer - of the Sikhs. A mandated line in it exhorts us to honor and remember those who overlooked the injustices done to them – *dekh kay unditth keeta*.

This line stands just as true today.

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The Farmers' Protest in India

What the Farmers' Protest in India teaches us about Leadership, Agility & Resilience and the Indomitable Spirit of the People



Farmers protesting against the controversial agricultural laws at Singhu border, Delhi. (Photo: Amarjeet Kumar Singh)

The pandemic has failed to deter their spirit as these sons of the soil are united in their fight for a cause. Here is a humane account of the ongoing farmers' protest that is a revolution in the making.

What gives 70 and 80-year old adults as well as youngsters the strength and resilience to protest day after day, notwithstanding the bitterly cold days or extremely hot nights, often with temperatures as low as 3°C or as high as 44°C? What has ignited the passions and strengthened the resolve not only of the protestors but the millions who are supporting, volunteering, and serving them? Why is this movement gaining momentum? How do you cater to and manage the day-to-day living needs of a quarter-million protestors?

The farmers' protest in India has completed six months. More than 250,000 – 300,000 protesting farmers and their supporters have converged at various border points and laid a siege of sorts around New Delhi, much of which still continues even after all this time. Much of the news media and politicians are focused on the pros and cons of these farm acts and their political ramifications. But missing from these narratives is the strength of the human spirit, the passion, agility, and resilience of the people in an evolving movement running

Farmers hold tractor rally to protest against farm laws



very efficiently – with no formal organisation, no traditional structure, and no single leader or farmers’ union.

Also lost in these discussions is the significance of farming in Panjab. The way it is woven into the community’s cultural fabric and psyche. It is at the core of the stories passed down from generation to generation. The music, the festivals, the dancing, and life – all revolve around and are rooted in the farming seasons and traditions.

What are these ongoing protests about?

They are three Farm Acts passed by the Indian parliament in September 2020. The government maintains that these three Farm Acts will streamline the farmers’ efforts to sell their produce directly to private buyers. However, the farmers and their unions maintain that these laws will gradually end the *mandi* system and minimum support price guarantees and leave them at the large corporates’ mercy and whims. The three Farm Acts were passed into law with wide-ranging ramifications for the

country’s economy without any consultations with or buy-in from the key stakeholders – particularly the farmers and the farmer unions. “We will lose our lands; we will lose our income if you let the big business decide prices and buy crops. We don’t trust big business. Free markets work in countries with less corruption and more regulation. It can’t work for us here,” the farmers opine.

How is this growing ‘virtual’ organisation functioning?

Khalsa Aid, an international NGO, displayed incredible agility in setting up and organising ‘Kisan Malls’ at the Tikri and Singhu borders and a system for distributing daily essentials. These Malls provide toiletries and everyday essentials free of cost to the protesters – including toothbrushes, toothpaste, soap, shampoo, oil, combs, mufflers, heating pads, knee caps, thermal suits, shawls, and blankets. All this is being funded by the larger community’s generosity and is run by volunteers whose mission is to serve – and they are doing it with military precision that many organisations and corporations would envy.

International Women's Day celebrated in honour of Farmers' Protests



Women farmers attend a protest against farm laws on the occasion of International Women's Day. (Photo: Varinder Maddoke)

Thousands of women protestors of the farmers' movement participated in the ongoing agitation at the Singhu, Ghazipur, and Tikri borders on 8 March 2021, observed as International Women's Day. They were joined by students and activists to take the centre stage on this significant occasion.

Nearly 40,000 women from various parts of Haryana, Punjab, and Uttar Pradesh were witnessed at the protest sites in colourful dupattas and scarves. Bhartiya Kisan Union (Ugrahan), which has the largest women wing, had arranged 500 buses, 600 minibuses, 115 trucks besides 200 small vehicles to ferry women protestors.

Interestingly, women agitators who are a part of the farmers' protests at Delhi's borders also made it to the cover of the much acclaimed TIME magazine. The magazine's new international cover reads, "I cannot be intimidated. I cannot be bought." The cover shows women farmers raising slogans while



(Photo: Varinder Maddoke)

carrying their children. It also features old women protestors who have been a constant at the farmers' protest sites for months.

Varinder Maddoke is a freelance photographer who has been covering the farmers protests since November 2020. You can follow his work on Instagram at [@varindermaddoke](https://www.instagram.com/varindermaddoke) and at [varindermaddoke.Wordpress.com](https://www.varindermaddoke.wordpress.com)

Extracted from a report in 'Business Today' (8 March 2021)



Farmers prepare 'langar' for their fellow farmers and anyone else who is hungry during their protest against the new farm laws.

Ordinary citizens, such as the Mansa Cyclist group, have provided hot water geysers, washing machines, generators, and truckloads of wood (to light fires for cooking and keeping warm) to the protest sites. Retired athletes are running a laundry service. Protesters are setting up schools on the pavements for underprivileged children and libraries to inspire and nurture minds. Solar panels are attached to tractors and trolleys for charging mobile phones and running washing machines. Sanitation, cleanliness, patrolling of streets is being managed by the youth as well as the farmers. Medical and dental clinics staffed by volunteer doctors have sprung up all over the border area. It seems like everyone is aware of their “purpose” and believes that their presence and efforts can make a difference.

Langar seva (free food distribution and service) is in abundance, thanks to the nearby gurdwaras, and is being conducted by the volunteers as well as the farmers. Makeshift open-air kitchens have sprung up all over the border. Nearby villages are sending milk and fresh produce daily. Women are making food and *pinnis* (round ball-shaped sweets made from wheat flour,

jaggery, and almonds - a quintessential winter snack) and sending them to the front lines of the protest. All this is happening with the humbling generosity of supporters who, along with the farmers, are fighting for social and economic justice. This is the epitome of leadership and volunteerism rooted in servitude. Each one of these volunteers is a grassroots leader - leading the movement towards a common purpose.

Trolley Times, a newsletter from the protest site headquarters in Tikri, has emerged at the Delhi-Haryana Border, founded by a brother and sister – to voice the farmers’ movement, their struggles and counter the government and mainstream media maligning and misrepresenting the farmer’s struggles. The team includes a film writer, a video director, two documentary photographers, and a farmer. The paper began in Panjabi and Hindi; an English edition has been added. The protesters are the translators, the photographers, and the printing press operators.

The eighty-year-old iconic Indian photo-journalist, Raghu Rai, who has been documenting the country’s history for the last fifty-five years, was

spotted at the Singhu border, capturing the sights of the protest. He said, “For the last thirty-odd years, globalisation has changed our clothes, our looks, the way we speak and act and our way of life to Western influences. As I look around, I see farmers from Panjab, Haryana, Rajasthan, and the Khalsas all



Mitti Satyagrah Yatra



(Photo: Varinder Maddoke)

Members of the Folklore Research Academy (FRA) and Pragatisheel Lekhak Sangh collected soil from Kaliyan Wala Shaheedi Khoo (martyrs’ well) and gurdwara Guru Ka Bagh, both in Ajnala, on 12 March 2021. The soil was part of the ‘Mitti Satyagrah Yatra’ organised by farmer unions at Kundli border.

Ramesh Yadav, chief, FRA, said activists led by senior leader Harjit Singh Sarkaria and Gurbaz Singh Tolla Nangal of the Pragatisheel Lekhak Sangh collected soil from the martyrs’ well and historic gurdwara Guru Ka Bagh.

On 6 April, The Mitti Satyagrah Yatra, carrying soil from several states, arrived at the Tikri border. The yatra, comprising 40 persons led by eminent social activist Medha Patkar, was received by protestors at the main protest site in Tikri by the Samyukt Kisan Morcha leaders Yogender Yadav, Purushottam, Inderjit Singh, Amrik Singh, Jasbir Kaur, Jia Lal, Balbir Thaken and Harbhagwan.

“A statue made by West Bengal sculptors has become the centre of attraction at Tikri. The soil was placed as a mark of homage for martyrs at the statue. The yatra has already visited Singhu and Shahjahanpur borders and installed memorials to mark the martyrdom of kisans during the four-month agitation,” an activist stated.

Extracted from a report in ‘The Tribune’ (5 April 2021)



sitting together with love and respect. That Bharat that I thought we had lost to globalization is alive and well at this protest. I have never witnessed anything like this in any of the other protests that I have covered in my lifetime.”

And the women? Thousands of women have joined the army of protesters, and their numbers have started to swell – students, teachers, nurses, homemakers, grandmothers. They are not just cooking *rotis* in the background but are at the front lines actively participating on the stage, addressing the crowds, organising, and being present at the daily briefings. Women farmers like Sunita Rani from Haryana have been at the protest since the beginning. She says, “Women are never counted as farmers ... We are always counted as housewives, but not farmers. I am here to change that perception.” They are the “invisible” workforce, and they are hoping to protect their livelihoods, change perceptions, and gain due recognition as farmers. Many are well-educated daughters of farmers and are social media savvy.

They want to be at the front lines and are giving the movement a new dimension. Their tenacity has defied the common perception of the docile rural woman.

Regardless of the outcome, the Indian farmers’ movement has taught us much about the essence of service and leadership, organisation and purpose, agility and ingenuity, and community philanthropy. The movement has ignited a passion and raised the people’s consciousness of the farmers’ economic plight and hardships. It has touched a deeper chord among the masses than the government would care to admit. This movement’s social ramifications are far more significant than just calling it a *kisan andolan* (the farmers’ protest). Movements offer a new and different language of justice, political engagement methodology, and revisions of social contracts. Whether this Movement receives “real world” media attention or not, the farmers have won. This is healthy citizen empowerment in the face of “extremely sophisticated opponents.” The *kisan andolan* has become far more prominent than a protest or movement – one could consider it a social revolution.

Despite everything India has been through with the pandemic, the human values and indomitable spirit are very much alive.

Inni Kaur is the Creative Director at the Sikh Research Institute (SikhRI). She is a passionate author, poet, and painter.

Ravi Singh Dhingra is Adjunct Professor of Management at Sacred Heart University and President at Spectrum Marketing Communications Inc.

Chronicles from the protest site

Gadari Flag

“This flag is mine. I put it here. I am 83 years old. I witnessed 1947. I provided refuge to Muslims in my home back then. When the people from the nearby villages came and said, “You are breaking bread with Muslims, sheltering them, we’ll kill you”, I said, “kill me then, I will keep feeding them. They are hungry.”

This is what Bapu Joginder Singh said. We tried to converse with him when we saw a Ghadarite flag on his trolley. He opened his heart to us and narrated anecdotes from his life.

From the Partition of 1947 to the Farmers’ Movement, Bapu Ji has contributed in almost every struggle.

In 1947, Bapu Ji hid a Muslim man to save his life and arranged food for him. Bapu Ji used to call him ‘Uncle’. ‘Uncle’ did not have any children of his own and he adored Bapu Ji immensely. Bapu Ji tells with teary eyes that when fanatics of a nearby village got to know about it, they murdered the ‘Uncle’ he had been protecting.



“I spent a month and a half in Bahadurgarh jail for political protests. I sat outside Barnala jail for 40 days to free Manjit Dhaner. I went to Shaheen Bagh for six days too.”

Bapu Ji told us that the Muslims treated him extremely well at Shaheen Bagh. When he was feeling cold, sleeping in a *loi*, a tall, young woman wearing a burqa put a blanket over him and said, “Bapu Ji, you were shivering. So I covered you with a blanket.”

Bapu Ji was amongst the first protestors to reach the farmer-labourer protests. “Now we’re fighting to protect our land. This land belongs to our children. We inherited it from our ancestors. They left it to us, we’ll leave it to our children. And he’s trying to snatch it.”

Story by: Bikramdeep Singh, Tanny Kaler and Ganeev Kaur

Translated by: Sahib Singh

First published in the 5th edition of Trolley Times (5 January 2021)

‘Trolley Times’ Captures Imaginations, Punjab Remembers Historic Newspapers of Protest

From the 1907 struggle against British land revenue rates, to the 2020-21 agitation against the new farm laws, at least five newspapers were launched to provide platforms for those fighting for their rights.



A group of protesters read the *Trolley Times* at Singhu border. (Photo: Kusum Arora)

Nearly a century ago, when desperate farmers and labourers in Punjab agitated for their rights in British-ruled India, they found a platform in a newspaper called *Kirti (Labourer)*. This newspaper not only led to the formation of the Kirti Kisan Party but also caught the attention of the national and foreign press. In its 11 February 1928, edition, *Pravda*, a Russian newspaper then the official mouthpiece of the Communist Party of Soviet Union, wrote: “Good news from Punjab. They have a paper of their own to organise the peasantry”.

Today, *Trolley Times*, a bilingual newspaper for farmers that was launched on 17 December 2020, appears to be the new *Kirti*. With its first headline – ‘Unite, Fight and Win’ – and its name based on the tractor trolleys on which Punjab’s farmers arrived at the borders of Delhi to protest the new farm laws, it caught the imagination of the national and international media immediately.

Though not the farmers’ official mouthpiece, *Trolley Times* has so far printed six editions, launched a digital edition and is soon to launch an official website.

Do protests pave the way for newspapers? Do newspapers birth protest movements? Whatever the answer might be, history shows us that protests and newspapers often work in tandem.

Below are some of the historic protests in Punjab and the newspapers associated with them.

Movement: Farmers vs. the New Farm Laws
Newspaper: Trolley Times
Year: 2020

Ajay Paul Natt, one of the *three co-founders* of *Trolley Times* based at the Tikri border, said, “We reached the Delhi border on tractor trolleys, live in them here and decided to start a newspaper called *Trolley Times* from a trolley.”



Ajay Paul Natt, one of the co-founders of the initiative, holds up a copy of ‘Trolley Times’. (Photo: Kusum Arora)

Every week, 5,000 copies of *Trolley Times* are printed, distributed free of cost and open to anyone for re-prints.

“None of us, including my co-founders Gurdeep Dhaliwal and Surmeet Maavi, are from the field of journalism,” said Natt.

“The response of non-resident Indians from the US, Canada, the UK, Australia and Europe through our digital platform is enormous. One supporter printed 10,000 copies of *Trolley Times* and distributed it in Australia.”

The print edition of *Trolley Times* is mostly read by the older farmers, said Natt. “The youth read the digital edition, but older men and women still enjoy reading a newspaper,” he said.

People who visit the protest sites are always keen to acquire a copy of *Trolley Times*. When Jasdeep Bhogal from Rurka Kalan village in Jalandhar visited the protesting farmers at the Singhu border, he got himself a copy.

“*Trolley Times* is a big boost to the farmers’ protest,” Bhogal said.

“Though a campaign for the farmers’ protest called Kisan Ekta Morcha has been launched on social media, this is the first time that the farmers have a newspaper of their own. I will keep my copy as a prized possession.”

Trolley Times is very empowering, said Maninder Singh Sandhu, who accompanied Bhogal to the Singhu border. “I come from a farming family. I can’t recall seeing any newspaper on farmers’ issues in all these years. *Trolley Times* has renewed our identity and we are glad it has made its presence felt among the mainstream media,” he said.

Movement: Labour Rights/Independence for India
Newspaper: Kirti
Year: 1926

The first issue of *Kirti*, a newspaper dedicated to farmers, labourers and the working class, was published in February 1926 in Amritsar. According to *Hindustan Ghadar Party – A Short History* by Sohan Singh



“Kirti.” From the archives of Desh Bhagat Yadgaar Memorial Hall, Jalandhar

Josh, the newspaper had a dedication on top of its front page: “Dedicated to those martyrs who came forward for service when sacrifice was costlier than it is today.”



Urdu edition of ‘Kirti Lehar’ published from Meerut. From the archives of Desh Bhagat Yadgaar Memorial Hall, Jalandhar

London’s *The Times* reproduced Josh’s lines in its edition of 15 May 1928, and Calcutta’s *The Statesman* reproduced it from the *Times*. According to Josh’s book, the 1926-27 India Government Report said: “Soviet Russia has established relations with the turbulent Sikhs. As a result of this, a paper named ‘Kirti’ has come out from Amritsar.”

“The profound impact of *Kirti* can be gauged from the fact that the Kirti Kisan Party was named after it,” said Charanji Lal Kangniwal, resident writer at Desh Bhagat Yadgaar Memorial Hall, Jalandhar. “It was published in Urdu and Punjabi from Amritsar. Bhai Santokh Singh, who had some training in newspaper publishing in Russia, led the newspaper.”

Kirti enjoyed cult status till the end of World War II. “The newspaper’s offices were often raided and the newspaper was sometimes banned, but its editors never bowed to the British,” said Kangniwal. “Later, *Kirti Lehar* was started from Meerut in Uttar

Bhai Hardit Singh was the editor of *Kirti*, with Bhai Bhag Singh from Canada and Bhai Santokh Singh from the US as his joint editors.

The Kirti Kisan Party, founded in 1928 by Sohan Singh Josh, was named after the newspaper. Josh wrote in his book: “The publication of *Kirti* was a big political event. It could not go unnoticed either in Moscow or in London or in India.”

Pradesh, but it soon discontinued. Another weekly newspaper, *Mazdoor Kisan*, was also launched in Punjabi in 1931.”

Today’s farmers’ protests are getting a fillip from *Trolley Times*, said Kangniwal. “Many changes at the political, social and cultural levels are taking place, but one thing is clear: the farmers’ protest will leave a deep impact on the country,” he emphasised.

Movement: Gurdwara Reform/Jallianwala Bagh Massacre Protests Newspaper: The Akali Year: 1920

Launched in Punjabi and Urdu from Lahore in 1920, *The Akali* emerged as a platform for the Gurdwara Reform Movement in Punjab and to protest the massacre that had taken place in Amritsar’s Jallianwala Bagh in 1919. It continues to be published today from Jalandhar, but its name has been changed to *Akali Patrika*.



The historic ‘Mazdoor Kisan’ published from Amritsar in 1931. From the archives of Desh Bhagat Yadgaar Memorial Hall, Jalandhar

“*Akali te Pardesi*, an Urdu daily, was also started during the Gurdwara Reform Movement,” said Gurmeet Singh, a member of the Desh Bhagat Yadgaar Committee, the Ghadar Party’s headquarters in Jalandhar. “Among other newspapers launched at that time, the Punjabi newspapers *Desh Sewak*, led by Comrade Harkishan Singh Surjeet, and *Nawa Zamana*, founded by Sohan Singh Bhakna, still function from Jalandhar.”

Kusum Arora

Kusum Arora is a journalist, currently writing for *The Wire*. Previously she worked with the *Hindustan Times*, the *Tribune* and the *Daily Post* newspapers, Punjab.



Punjabi singer Kanwar Grewal (C), with Harf Cheema and Sonia Mann, performs during their visit to Ghazipur border to support farmers protesting against Centre's farm reform laws

The Farmers' Protest - Through Poetry and Song

ਦਿੱਲੀਏ ਦਿਆਲਾ ਦੇਖ
ਦੇਗ'ਚ ਉਬਲਦਾ ਨੀ
ਅਜੇ ਤੇਰਾ ਦਿਲ ਨਾ ਠਰੇ
-ਸੰਤ ਰਾਮ ਉਦਾਸੀ

*Dilliye Dyala dekh
degh'ch ubalda da ni
Ajay tera dil na tharay*

-Sant Ram Udasi

O Delhi, see Dyala is boiling in
the cauldron
But your heart remains yet
unmoved

-Sant Ram Udasi

Sant Ram Udasi's iconic poem *Dilliye Dyala Dekh* uses the imagery of the martyrdoms of Guru Tegh Bahadur and his companions, Bhai Dyala, Bhai Mati Das and Bhai Sati Das at Chandni Chowk, down the road from the Red Fort

at Delhi, to call out the apathy of the government. It became associated with the farmers' protest as they marched towards Delhi, and was especially apt as a similar fate confronted them at the capital's borders.

Around 110 years ago, Ajit Singh (Bhagat Singh's chacha) rallied the Panjab farmers around the cry of Pagdi Sambhaal Jatta (safeguard your turban, O peasant), the slogan taken from the defiant song first sung by Banke Dyal at Lyallpur (now Faisalabad) in 1907. That movement was also against land law reforms introduced by the British - the Punjab Land Colonisation Act, the Bari Doab Act and the Punjab Land Alienation Act - and this song along with many other historical songs, as well as historical Panjabi figures, have come to the fore during the current protests. Photographs of Ajit Singh and Sir Chhotu Ram can be seen on posters and badges, Kartar Singh, Udham Singh, and Bhagat Singh are remembered, and old *vars* (ballads) and songs (*Tu parkh jaabra oye, saada sidak tainu lalkaaray* by Sadhu Singh Takhtapura) have reemerged in full strength.

When the Protest first reached Delhi in late November 2020, almost every Panjabi singer jumped on the bandwagon and a deluge of songs were released with passionate lyrics challenging the government, alluding to Sikh history and singing praises of the hardy Jatt farmer. However, in the

seven months since, most of these singers have moved on with their lives and in many cases, continued their collaborations with the very companies and organisations that are responsible for the farmers' troubles.

But the folk songs from the protest continue to emerge. These are written and sung by everyday people, many of whom have been at the protest site for months, as well as countless individuals uploading their songs on their personal YouTube and Instagram accounts, from their homes across the country. While Panjabi songs are the most numerous by far, songs in support of the farmers' protests can be heard in languages found across the length and breadth of India - in Haryanvi, Marwari, Tamil, Bengali, Telugu, Malayalam, Marathi, Assamese, and Bhojpuri. The famous Italian resistance song, *Bella Ciao*, has also been translated into Panjabi for the protests.

Traditional folk forms, such as *chhalla*, *jugni*, *dhola*, *jaago*, *tappe*, *boliyan*, *gidha*, *vaara'n*, *kavishree* and *dhadhi-jathay* are an integral part of the protest:

ਸ਼ਾਲਾ ਮੇਰਾ ਜੀਵੇ ਢੋਲਾ ਉੱਠੀ ਪਿੰਡਾਂ ਵਿੱਚੋਂ ਨੇਰੀ'ਏ ਓ ਜੇੜੇ ਕਦੇ ਸ਼ਹਿਰ ਨੀ ਗਏ ਉਹਨਾਂ ਦਿੱਲੀ ਘੇਰੀ'ਏ -ਇਪਟਾ ਮੋਗਾ	<i>Shaala mera jeevay dhola</i> <i>Uthi pinda'n vichon nehri'ae</i> <i>O jehray kadday shehr ni gaye</i> <i>Ohna Dilli gheri'ae</i> -IPTA Moga	May my Dhola live long A storm has risen from the villages Those who had never seen a city Have today surrounded Delhi -IPTA Moga
ਬੱਲੇ ਬੱਲੇ ਨੀ ਦਿੱਲੀ ਨਵਾਂ ਪਿੰਡ ਵੱਸਿਆ ਸ਼ਾਵਾ ਸ਼ਾਵਾ ਨੀ ਦਿੱਲੀ ਨਵਾਂ ਪਿੰਡ ਵੱਸਿਆ ਪੁਣੀ ਸੇਕ ਦੇ ਖੁਡਿਆਂ ਵਾਲੇ ਦਿੱਲੀ ਨਵਾਂ ਪਿੰਡ ਵੱਸਿਆ -ਰੰਗਲੇ ਸਰਦਾਰ	<i>Balle Balle ni Dilli navaa'n pind</i> <i>vasseya</i> <i>Shaava shaava ni Dilli navaa'n</i> <i>pind vasseya</i> <i>Dhooni sek dey khoondeyaa'n</i> <i>waalay</i> <i>Dilli navaa'n pind vasseya</i> -Rangle Sardar	Balle Balle a new village is flourishing in Delhi Shaava Shaava a new village is flourishing in Delhi The old men with their khoondas are enjoying the warmth of the bonfire There is a new village in Delhi -Rangle Sardar

This protest has brought the young and old, urban and rural Panjabis closer together. If the tumbi is heard, so is the guitar. Poets and writers, famous

(Surjit Patar, Jaswant Zafar, Madan Gopal Singh) and many unknown, have expressed solidarity with and support for the farmers through their writings:

ਸਾਡੇ ਲਹੂ ਨਾਲੋਂ ਮਹਿੰਗਾ
ਤੇਰਾ ਬਜ਼ਾਰ ਹੋ ਗਿਆ
ਸਾਡੀ ਜਾਨ ਤੇ ਬਣੀ
ਤੇਰਾ ਵਪਾਰ ਹੋ ਗਿਆ

-ਨੂਰ ਚਹਲ

*Saaday lahu naalo'n mehenga
tera bazaar ho gaya
Saadi jaan tay bani,
tera vyapar ho gaya, sarkaare*

-Noor Chahal

Your profits are costlier than our blood
It's business for you, it's a threat to life for us

-Noor Chahal

ਓ ਦਫ਼ਤਰਾਂ ਵਿੱਚ ਬੈਠੇ
ਮੁਲ ਸਾਡਾ ਪਾਂਦੇ
ਕਦੇ ਬੈਠਿਓ ਦਿਹਾੜੀ ਕਿਸੇ ਜੱਟ ਨਾਲ
ਪੁੱਛਣਾ ਉਹਨੂੰ ਕਿੰਨਾ ਆਉਂਦਾ ਖਰਚਾ
ਥੋਨੂੰ ਪਤਾ ਲੱਗੂ ਅਸੀਂ ਕੀ 'ਏ ਖੱਟਣਾ
ਜਿੰਦੇ ਓਏ ਸਿਸਟਮ ਹਿੱਲਿਆ ਪਿਆ
ਓ ਲਾ ਲਾ ਧਰਨੇ ਸੜਕਾਂ ਤੇ ਅੱਕੇ
ਪਏ'ਆਂ
ਬੱਸ ਕਰ ਸਰਕਾਰੇ ਸਾਨੂੰ ਹੋਰ ਨਾ ਤਪਾ
ਅਸੀਂ ਸੱਚੀ ਹੁਣ ਤੈਥੋਂ ਬੜੇ ਅੱਕੇ
ਪਏ'ਆਂ

-ਜਿੰਦਾ ਰੁੜਕੀ, ਜ਼ਿਲਾ ਸੰਗਰੂਰ

*O daftaraan'ch vich baithay
mul saada paanday
Kaday baitheyo dihaarhi
kisse jatt naal
Puchh na ohnu
kinna aunda kharcha
Thonu pata lagu
Asee'n ki hai khatna
Jinday oye system hilleya peya
O la la dharnay sarhkaa'n tay
akkay paye aan
Bas kar Sarkaaray saanu hor ta
tapaa*

*Asee'n sachchi hun taitho'n barhay
akkay paye aa'n*

-Jinda Rurki from district Sangrur

Those sitting in offices put a value on our work
They should come spend a day with a farmer in the fields
And ask him how much his inputs cost
And then understand how little we earn
This whole system is all wrong
We are tired of time and again protesting on the roads
Don't make us any angrier, O Government
We are on the verge of rebellion.

-Jinda Rurki from district

Sangrur



A punjabi singer performs on the stage at the protest site

Punjabi folklore is replete with examples of resistance to authority that are celebrated in our festivals, melas, songs and poetry. Dulla Bhatti and Jagga Jatt are the two famous examples that immediately come to mind, but even the spiritual leaders of Panjab, from Baba Farid to Baba Nanak and Guru Gobind Singh, have always exhorted people to stand up for the downtrodden and to fight against oppression. Punjabi folk music has always celebrated the individual who stands up to tyranny, irrespective of the result of their action. At the protests, the *zulm* of the government and the fight for *haq* is the continuous refrain:

ਜ਼ੁਲਮ ਕਦੇ ਵੀ ਖਤਮ ਨਾ ਹੁੰਦੇ
ਹੱਥ ਬੰਨ ਕਰੀਆਂ ਮਿੰਨਤਾਂ ਤੋਂ
-ਬਾਬਾ ਜਗਰਾਜ ਧੌਲਾ

*Zulm kadday vi khatam na hundey
Hath ban kareeya'n mintaa'n to'n
-Baba Jagraj Dhaula*

Oppression never ends
By begging for justice
-Baba Jagraj Dhaula

ਅਸੀਂ ਇੰਨੀ ਛੇਤੀ ਹਰਨਾ ਨੀਂ
ਤੇਰੇ ਜ਼ੁਲਮ ਦੇ ਕੋਲੋਂ ਡਰਨਾ ਨੀਂ
ਸੱਚ ਇੰਨੀ ਛੇਤੀ ਮਰਨਾ ਨੀਂ
ਤੈਨੂੰ ਕਹਿ ਕੇ ਜਾਂਵਾਂਗੇ
ਤੇਰੇ ਹਿੱਕ ਤੇ ਬਾਲ ਕੇ ਲੋਹੜੀ ਨੀਂ
ਹੱਕ ਲੈਕੇ ਜਾਂਵਾਂਗੇ

- ਸਤਨਾਮ ਸਿੰਘ

*Asee'n inni chheti harna ni
Teray zulm dey kolo'n darni ni
Sach inni chheti marna ni
Tenu keh kay jaawa'ngay
Teray hikk tay baal kay Lohri ni
Haq laikay jawaa'ngay*

- Satnam Singh

We will not be defeated easily
Your tyranny will not scare us
We will not let truth die
We will make you listen to us
We will celebrate our Lohri at
your doorstep
And we will return only after
getting our rights

- Satnam Singh

When the farmers made their way to Delhi, December, the month of martyrdom in Sikh history, was around the corner. From Guru Teg Bahadur's martyrdom in Delhi at Chandni Chowk, the Battle of Chamkaur and the martyrdoms of the elder Sahibzadas, to the bricking alive of the younger Sahibzadas, and Mata Gujri's imprisonment in the thanda burj at Sirhind, their sacrifices connected the

present with the past, motivating and encouraging people to face the harsh winter with cheer and *charhdi kala*. The Zafarnama, Guru Gobind Singh's powerful letter in Persian verse to Aurangzeb after the Battle of Chamkaur, in which he rebuked Aurangzeb's actions, the broken promises by the Emperor's representatives, and claimed moral victory over him, is referred to again and again:

ਫੇਰ ਦਿੱਲੀ ਨੂੰ ਜ਼ਫ਼ਰਨਾਮਾ
ਅੱਜ ਲਿੱਖਿਆ ਜਾਣਾ ਚਾਹੀਦਾ

*Fer Dilli nu Zafarnama
Ajj likheya jaana chahida*

Another Zafarnama needs to be
sent to Delhi today



Women and children get together under makeshift night shelters at a farmers' protest site at the Delhi-Haryana border at Singhu

The tradition of langar that is open to everyone and the 24/7 sewa that was visible at the protest sites caught the attention of the nation. India had not seen a protest at this scale with such intense zeal for service palpable amongst the volunteers. People from Delhi thronged to Singhu, Tikri and

Ghazipur, first, almost as tourists gaping at rural Panjab that had suddenly appeared at its doorstep. But the warm welcome extended by the farmers to everyone motivated people to return to become a part of the protests. I keep returning to Sant Ram Udasi's words:

ਲੋਕਾਂ ਦੀਆਂ ਭੁਖਾਂ ਉੱਤੇ ਫਤਿਹ ਸਾਡੀ ਦੇਗ ਦੀ ਲੋਕਾਂ ਦੀਆਂ ਦੁਖਾਂ ਉੱਤੇ ਫਤਿਹ ਸਾਡੀ ਤੇਗ ਦੀ ਅਸੀਂ ਤਾਂ ਆ ਮੌਤ ਦੇ ਚਬੂਤਰੇ ਤੇ ਆਣ ਖੜੇ ਇਹ ਤਾਂ ਭਾਵੇਂ ਖੜੇ ਨਾ ਖੜੇ	<i>Lokaa'n deya'n bhukhaa'n utay fateh saadi degg di Lokaa'n deya'n dukha'an utay fateh saadi tegh di Asee'n ta'an aa maut dey chabutravay tay aan kharhay Eh taan bhaanvei'n kharhay na kharhay</i>	The victory of our feeding spirit over the hunger of the people The victory of our sword over the troubles of the people We have come here ready to face death Whether death comes or not.
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One of the striking visuals about the protests is the prominent presence of women. They have been there from the beginning, standing shoulder-to-shoulder with the men, and often at the forefront in the run-ins

with the police. They have been recorded singing while cooking on a sanjha chulla, giving sithaniyan to the government while hanging out in a group, and poking fun by adapting traditional boliyan and performing gidha:

ਕੱਲੇ ਕੱਲੇ ਨੂੰ ਤਾਂ ਤੂੰ ਦਬਾਉਣਾ ਜਾਣ ਦੀ ਪਰ ਅੱਜ ਜਾਗੇ ਸਾਡੇ ਸਾਰੇ ਪਿੰਡ ਦਿੱਲੀਏ ਅਸੀਂ ਭੰਨ ਦੇਣੀ ਅਸੀਂ ਭੰਨ ਦੇਣੀ ਤੇਰੀ ਇਹ ਹਿੰਡ ਦਿੱਲੀਏ ਅਸੀਂ ਭੰਨ ਦੇਣੀ (ਦਿੱਲੀ ਬਾਰਡਰ ਤੇ ਬਜ਼ੁਰਗ ਔਰਤਾਂ ਬੋਲੀਆਂ ਅਤੇ ਗਿੱਧਾ ਪਾਂਦੀਆਂ ਹੋਈਆਂ)	<i>Kallay kallay nu taa'n tu dabaona jaan di Par aij jaagay saaday saaray pind Dilliye Asee'n bhann deni Asee'n bhann deni teri ehay hindd Dilliye Asee'n bhann deni (Elderly ladies singing bolis and performing gidha at the Delhi borders)</i>	You know how to suppress individuals, O Delhi! But today all our villages have risen We will break this arrogance of yours, O Delhi, We will break it (Elderly ladies singing bolis and performing gidha at the Delhi borders)
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ਰਾਈਆਂ ਰਾਈਆਂ ਰਾਈਆਂ ਬੂਹਾ ਖੋਲ ਮੋਦੀਆ ਫੌਜਾਂ ਦੂਰੋਂ ਚੱਲ ਕੇ ਆਈਆਂ (ਦਿੱਲੀ ਬਾਰਡਰ ਤੇ ਬਜ਼ੁਰਗ ਔਰਤਾਂ ਬੋਲੀਆਂ ਅਤੇ ਗਿੱਧਾ ਪਾਂਦੀਆਂ ਹੋਈਆਂ)	<i>Raiyaa'n rayiyaa'n rayiyaa'n Booha khol Modiya Faujaa'n dooron chal kay aayiaa'n (Elderly ladies singing bolis and performing gidha at the Delhi borders)</i>	(Raayi = mustard seed, a traditional rhyming scheme in the first line) Open the door, O Modi The armies have marched from afar (Elderly ladies singing bolis and performing gidha at the Delhi borders)
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The Dalit presence in the Farmers' Protest is also a notable feature that has been witnessed. Dalits have been strong and vocal and brought to the fore many of the issues underlying Panjab's agricultural and social fabric. One has to recognise and accept that all struggles are intersectional and the caste problem continues to plague even the protest spaces, where the upper-caste farmers have not always welcomed Dalits to raise their own issues at the same platform. This inequality of power needs to be challenged

alongside the protest. Sant Ram Udasi, who emerged as the first and loudest voice of the protests is the pre-eminent Dalit poet of Panjab. Though he died in 1986, his poetry, which confronts oppression and oppressors in all forms, continues to resonate even today. The Dalits have indicated that this fight is the more important one for now, but have ensured that their presence and their voices continue to be visible from the protest sites. Hardev Singh Bhatti who has worked in brick kilns in Panjab sang:

ਨਹੁੰ ਮਾਸ ਦੇ ਰਿਸ਼ਤੇ ਨੇ ਜਦੋਂ ਅਪਣਾ ਰੰਗ ਵਖਾਇਆ ਮੋਦੀ ਵੇਖ ਕੇ ਦੰਗ ਰਹਿ ਗਿਆ ਹੜ ਦੁਨਿਆਂ ਦਾ ਆਇਆ ਰੰਗ ਬਰੰਗੇ ਝੰਡਿਆਂ ਦਾ ਦਲ ਰੱਖ ਦਊ ਜੁੱਗ ਪਲਟਾ ਕੇ ਮੈਂ ਮਜ਼ਦੂਰ ਕਿਸਾਨਾਂ ਦੇ ਨਾਲ ਲੜੁੰਗਾ ਮੋਢਾ ਡਾ ਕੇ	<i>Nau maas dey rishtay ney jado'n apna rang vakhaaya Modi vekh kay dang reh gaya harh duniya da aaya Rang-barangay jhandeyaa'n da dal rakh du jug palta kay Main mazdoor kisaana'n dey naal larhoonga modha dha kay</i>	When the strong camaraderie showed its colours Modi was stunned to see the flood of people The union of multi-coloured flags will turn the world upside down I will fight standing alongside labourers and farmers
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Another song addresses both the farmers and the labourers and their joint troubles:

ਕਿਸਾਨਾਂ ਤੇ ਮਜ਼ਦੂਰਾਂ ਹੁਣ ਆਪਣਾ ਪੇਟ ਨਹੀਂ ਭਰਨਾ ਪੂਰਾ ਗੱਲ ਸੁਣ ਲੈ ਮੇਰੀ ਕੰਨ ਖੋਲ ਕੇ ਆਪਾਂ ਜ਼ਿੰਦਗੀ ਗਵਾਤੀ ਕਾਮਿਆਂ ਰੋਲ ਰੋਲ ਕੇ -ਦਿੱਲੀ ਦੇ ਬਾਰਡਰ ਤੇ ਇੱਕ ਬਜ਼ੁਰਗ ਕਿਸਾਨ	<i>Kisaana tay mazdoor hun apna paet nahi'n bharna pura Gal sun lae meri kann khol kay Apaa'n zindagi gawaati Kammeyaa'n rol rol kay -An elderly farmer at the Delhi border</i>	Farmers and Labourers We no longer have enough to even fill our stomachs Listen to me carefully We have wasted our life away Working in the fields -An elderly farmer at the Delhi border
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A dhadhi-jatha at Tikri sang from the stage:

ਕਿਰਤ ਏਸਦੀ ਸੱਭ ਕਿਰਤਾਂ ਤੋਂ ਬੜੀ ਸੱਖਤ ਤੇ ਸੁੱਚੀ ਏ ਬਾਬੇ ਨਾਨਕ ਦੇ ਪਰਥਾਏ ਜਾਤ ਏਸਦੀ ਉੱਚੀ ਏ ਕਾਣੀ ਵੰਡ ਨੂੰ ਏਥੋਂ ਦਾ ਦਸਤੂਰ ਆਖਿਆ ਜਾਂਦਾ ਏ ਨਾਨਕ ਦੇ ਇਸ ਲਾਲੇ ਨੂੰ ਮਜ਼ਦੂਰ ਆਖਿਆ ਜਾਂਦਾ ਏ -ਕਵੀਸ਼੍ਰੀ ਜੱਥਾ ਰਸੂਲਪੁਰ	<i>Kirrt aesdi sabh kirrtaa'n to'n barhi sakht tay suchchi'ae Babay Nanak dey parthaay jaat aesdi uchi'ae Kaani vand nu aitho'n da dastoor aakheya jaanda'ae Nanak dey iss Lalo nu mazdoor aakheya jaanda'ae -Kavishri Jatha Rasulpur</i>	His labour is the hardest and purest of all Baba Nanak has called him as the highest of the high The discrimination he faces is called the the custom of the land This Lalo of Nanak is denigrated as a labourer here -Kavishri Jatha Rasulpur
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Spending seven months on the road is not easy but the farmers have kept up their spirits even as mainstream news moved on. For the farmers, this fight is not for headlines or social media posts - they are fighting for their lives and livelihood. At the protest sites, libraries and sathhs have come up

and become social spaces where people sit and chat, drink tea, read newspapers and share their thoughts and creative impulses. A man with an iktara might begin to sing, another read his poem, a third share his opinion on the latest action plan of the farmer unions:

ਅੱਖਾਂ ਦੀਆਂ ਲੋਆਂ'ਚ ਸਾਹਾਂ ਦੇ ਥਾਣੀ
ਚਿੱਟੇ ਜਹੇ ਕੇਸਾਂ ਦੀ ਸੁਣ ਲੋ ਕਹਾਣੀ
ਲਹੂਆਂ ਦੇ ਭਿੱਝੇ ਹੋਏ
ਚੱਕ ਲਏ ਨੇ ਝੰਡੇ
ਮਿੱਟੀ ਤੋਂ ਉਪਜੇ ਨੇ ਸੋਹਣੇ ਜਹੇ ਬੰਦੇ
-ਦਿੱਲੀ ਦੇ ਬਾਰਡਰ ਤੇ ਇੱਕ ਕਿਸਾਨ

*Akhaa'n diyan loaan'ch saaha'n
dey thaani
Chittay jehay kesaa'n di sun lo
kahaani
Lahuaa'n dey pijhay hoye
Chak laye ney jhandey
Mitti ton upjay nay sohnay jahay
bande*

-A farmer at the Delhi border

By the glow of the eyes,
Through the breath of the
grey-haired,
Listen to their story
They've picked up their flags
drenched in blood
These beautiful people who are
one with the soil

-A farmer at the Delhi border



(Photo: Nanak Hut & Library, Tikri Border)

The protests continue and remain strong. As of June 2021, Haryana villages have sent tractor loads of wheat crop to the farmers stationed at Delhi's borders and declared, once again, that they are ready to remain here until the next Parliamentary elections in 2024. On 26 June, to commemorate seven months of the protest, farmers across the country gheraoed the Raj Bhavans. Once again, barricades, water cannons and lathi charges were faced calmly and non-violently. Labh Singh, an 80-year old Nihang Singh, has placed himself at Matka Chowk, Chandigarh since 6 March 2021. He has refused to move, and every time the police has tried to remove him forcibly, Chandigarh has rallied around him. While others come and go, he is always there - alone and sawa lakh. In so many ways, he is representative of every farmer at every site - Singhu, Tikri, Ghazipur, Shahjahanpur and the innumerable other small sites that never make the news - who has refused to be cowed down.

ਲੋਕ ਇੰਨੇ ਸੰਘਣੇ ਨੇ
ਲੱਖੀ ਦੇ ਜੰਗਲ ਵਾਂਗੂੰ
ਸਿੰਘ ਤੈਥੋਂ ਜਾਣੇ ਨਾ ਫੜੇ

-ਸੰਤ ਰਾਮ ਉਦਾਸੀ

*Lok aienay sanghnay nay Lakhi
dey jungle vaangu
Singh tetho'n jaaney na farhay*

-Sant Ram Udasi

There are such throngs of
people, like the Jungle of Lakhi
You won't be able to catch the
Singhs

-Sant Ram Udasi

Ganeer Kaur

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New Light on Guru Tegh Bahadur's Martyrdom



Historical events recorded by Mehtab Rai (Mahan Singh), a Noble of Aurangzeb's Court who met Guru Tegh Bahadur in prison and became a dedicated disciple of Guru Gobind Singh

There were many Rajput Kshatriyas and scholarly Brahmin families who served as highly competent administrators either in Mughal courts or other Indian states. Those who came into contact with the Sikh Gurus, soon

became very devout and dedicated disciples, whose sacrifices and role as leaders of the Sikh peoples are well known in Sikh history. Bhai Mani Singh and Bhai Mati Das and their children and grand children played conspicuous roles as leaders in the

Guru's durbar. Most of them suffered martyrdom for the Sikh Faith. We now have considerable material on these families in early Sikh history.

There were also some families, who after accepting Sikhism, continued to serve in the Mughal courts of Lahore and Delhi as bankers, contractors, soldiers and administrators with stupendous moral courage under the most difficult situations. They upheld their commitments to the Sikh Gurus with great conviction and determination, always giving the highest place in their hearts and conscience to their primary and supreme loyalty to the Gurus, for whose religious principles and human ideals they were ready to sacrifice their life and property. The names of Shabeg Singh, Subeg Singh, Surat Singh are well known in the Lahore Court and Lakhi Shah and a number of Rajput Kshatriyas in Delhi under Aurangzeb.

Mehtab Rai (later Mahan Singh) was one such eminent Sikh who was highly respected for his sincerity, military prowess, administrative ability and integrity, even by Aurangzeb and the Mughal nobility of the Lahore and Delhi Courts. One of the reasons for such respect in the court of the otherwise highly suspicious Emperor Aurangzeb was that his great grandfather had served Humayun and Akbar under very difficult circumstances; his grandfather, Prahlad Shah had served in Jahangir's court and his father Moti Shah was a courtier in Shah Jahan's court. Mehtab Shah was one of those few fortunate Sikhs who met Guru Tegh Bahadur in prison and went to Anandpur to be baptised as a Khalsa by Guru Gobind Singh himself and attend to his daily sermons. He had the moral courage to serve in the Delhi Mughal Court in the Khalsa form and to uphold the *Khalsa Rehat Maryada* (Code of Conduct).

Prahlad Shah, Moti Shah and Mehtab Rai maintained personal diaries in which they recorded major events of their lives and some family affairs. Mehtab Rai's great-great-grandson Sunder Singh prepared their family history basing his chronicle

entirely on the personal diaries of Prahlad Shah, Moti Shah and Mehtab Rai, frequently quoting them verbatim. The original diaries were in Persian, while Sunder Singh has recorded them in Urdu and thereby prepared a 328 page family record. Although we are discussing the role of Mehtab Rai in Sikh history, it may not be out of place to mention that when Rani Jindan wished to be accompanied by very loyal Sikhs during her imprisonment and escape, she selected a scion of this family, Kishan Singh, who remained with Rani Jindan unto the last and cremated her with his own hands. His son Kashmira Singh had in his possession many personal documents of Rani Jindan.

Prahlad Shah and Moti Shah

Prahlad Shah's father, Harbans Rai, was a trusted courtier of Humayun. He was with the Emperor's family when Akbar was born and gave every moral and material support when the emperor was in exile. When Humayun regained his throne, he invited Harbans Rai to the court and gave him a khilat, a palatial building to live in Delhi and other royal prerogatives and facilities only given to Mughal nobles. The chronicler says that family documents of this period were worn out and he has not been able to decipher them. So he begins his well authenticated story from Prahlad Shah and bases his narrative exclusively on facts recorded in the diaries of Prahlad Shah, Moti Shah and Mehtab Rai.

Prahlad Shah was posted at Dangeli, a ferry outpost where the main road crossed the river Jamuna. He was granted a fief and Dangeli virtually became an ancestral home for three generations. He lived upto the age of 98—there were very few grey hair on his head and all his teeth were intact. His diaries report that Nawab Zafar Khan and two more Mughal officers were responsible for poisoning the mind of Aurangzeb against the Sikhs and Marathas. He cautioned Aurangzeb against the policy of persecuting Hindus, writing a long, polite letter to the Emperor, which was instrumental in decreasing persecution of the Hindus, at least in the area of Rawalpindi and the Pothohar region.

When Prahlaad Shah retired from active service in the Mughal court, his tall and handsome son Moti Shah was accepted as a Mughal courtier of considerable importance. His first assignment was to go to Lahore and report on activities of the Subedar of Lahore. Instead of reporting against him, he cautioned him, pulled him up and persuaded him to repair the monuments built in the memory of Jahangir and Nurjahan and other Mughals. Moti Shah was a scholar and a great lover of architecture and music. He worked against the custom of Sati and persuaded people to give up child marriage. He also got permission for Hindus to go on pilgrimages.

Aurangzeb was pleased with Moti Shah's performance in Lahore and summoned him to Delhi where the atmosphere was suffocating. Moti Shah recorded that Emperor Aurangzeb did not like knowledgeable Hindus and soon retired to his fief in Dangeli.

Mehtab Rai (Mahan Singh)

Moti Shah had a son Mehtab Rai and two daughters Jamuna Devi and Ganga Devi. Mehtab Rai was given this name because he had a very beautiful face which even in childhood was like *Mehtab* - 'splendour of the moon'. He was given the best education in Sanskrit, Brij, Persian and Arabic and was trained in all the accomplishments of a soldier, leader and administrator. He was posted in his ancestral fief in Dangeli from where he was expected to provide military and material help whenever the Courts of Lahore and Delhi demanded.

To enhance his income, he invested in trading of precious goods at the frontier regions. Partly because of inexperience and partly because of unreliable persons employed by him, he lost much money in the two attempts he made. In despair he decided to give up trade-business but his parents advised him never to be crushed by failures and not worry about losses but make more effort to make his trade ventures successful. With the moral courage received from his parents he made

another effort to import precious goods from a neighbouring country and this business was so successful that he repaid all his debts and earned large profits.

He received a *farman* from the Lahore Nazim to present himself in court for some official duties, but as his father had just died at the age of 98, he had to perform the last rites. He politely expressed his inability to present himself at the court which annoyed the Mughal authorities. When Mehtab did go, the Nawab was annoyed, but finding Mehtab Rai dutiful and diligent in his duties, the Nazim did not express any displeasure and Mehtab Rai also tactfully ignored his attitude.

After sometime Mehtab Rai returned to his fief but soon received orders from Aurangzeb to muster forces and help the Lahore army attack the unruly Ghakhar tribes. As the leaders of this tribe were friends of Mehtab Rai, he did not wish that they should be attacked by the Mughal army. So he started negotiations and reached an agreement with them. Aurangzeb was at first disturbed but when he received the details of settlement he was immensely pleased. He asked Mehtab Rai to remain in the Delhi Court where he then served as a highly respected Noble. Mehtab Rai was married to Kulwanti, daughter of Dilbag Rai of Lahore, who was also known as a good Persian scholar. Kulwanti was a very wise, enlightened and courageous young lady who was quite intimate with the Begams of the Mughal Court.

Guru Tegh Bahadur Imprisoned

From Mehtab Rai's diaries is revealed: "When Guru Tegh Bahadur went to Delhi, it was he who revealed his identity, and was then imprisoned by Aurangzeb". Thus he was not arrested anywhere in the Punjab but went to Delhi and offered himself for arrest for the freedom of worship of the persecuted Brahmins, who were custodians of Hindu faith, even though ideologically, Sikhism was opposed to Brahmin rites and ceremonies.

Mehtab Rai writes, “I met (Guru Tegh Bahadur) and saw his divine personality. He was fair and tall, having flowing beard and appeared as a perfect Kshatriya warrior in his appearance and demeanour.”

“I accompanied a deputation of prominent citizens to Aurangzeb and implored that Guru Tegh Bahadur was a saintly *fakir*-we will give as much money to secure his freedom.” Aurangzeb replied that he would free Guru Tegh Bahadur only on one condition, and that he should show some *karamat* (miracle). And he would thereafter live in honour and glory. I do not agree to any other proposal”.

Guru Tegh Bahadur disdains miracles

Guru Tegh Bahadur said, “To show miracles is to think and act against the will of God. True fakirs (saints) do not indulge in such actions. True saints do not consider their body of any importance. Let the Emperor (Aurangzeb) do what he wishes to do and watch the wonder-working divine play of God.”

Aurangzeb saw that public anger and zealous concern (about Guru Tegh Bahadur’s fate) was fast spreading. He feared that people would revolt and cause trouble. Guru Tegh Bahadur also felt that his devotees were feeling restless and seriously disturbed. He feared that people would revolt leading to unnecessary loss of life and property.

When Aurangzeb gave the only choice between death or showing *karamat* (miracle) the Sikhs and non-Sikh devotees of Guru Tegh Bahadur were shocked and seriously upset. There was revolutionary fervour. Guru Tegh Bahadur also learnt about such tense atmosphere and feared that if there were a public protest Aurangzeb would give orders to kill the protesters and burn their houses. About such a situation Mehtab Shah writes in his diary.

“Aurangzeb saw that anger and passionate fury was raging in the minds of the people (Sikhs and non-Sikhs). Raging bitterness was

spreading. He feared an uprising and trouble. Guru Tegh Bahadur also felt that his devotees were restless and seriously disturbed, may well express their fury leading to loss of life and damage to property.”

The execution and aftermath

A sweeper devotee Bhai Jiwan, who was in the *kotwali*, remained very close to Guru Tegh Bahadur. To onlookers it appeared he was assisting the executioner and was a Mughal employee in the process of execution. But he actually wished to be as close as possible to the Master during his last hours.

About this Mehtab Rai writes: “The execution (of Guru Tegh Bahadur) took place with the help of a Maghabi lad. This *jawan ladka* then took the head of Guru Tegh Bahadur to Anandpur. When Guru Gobind Singh saw his father’s head he said, ‘This was the Will of God. Let everyone accept this Will of God with patience and fortitude. The martyrdom of Guru Tegh Bahadur is meaningful. Today in this *Aryavarta* (the entire country) the head of Islamic Empire (Aurangzeb’s *Darul-Islam*) has been cut off. Where saintly and virtuous people are persecuted and oppressed, it is the head of the oppressors and tyrants that is cut off. Such is the divine law and Will of God.”

Meeting with Guru Tegh Bahadur and his martyrdom completely changed the inner life of Mehtab Rai. He studied the life of the Gurus and recorded these in his Diary. As a dignitary of the Mughal court, he continued to receive inspiring reports about the unique character and achievements of Guru Gobind Singh through the many Sikhs of Delhi who regularly went to Paonta Sahib and Anandpur. On moral and political principles, the Guruji fought battles with the Hill Chiefs and the Imperial forces, winning the battles but forgiving the Hill Chiefs. He was anxious to meet the young Guru, but these armed conflicts with Imperial forces prevented him from going to Anandpur. When Prince Muazzam was appointed Viceroy of Punjab, he convinced

Emperor Aurangzeb that the Shivalik Hill Chiefs were actually mischief-mongers: from 1696 to 1699 there was peace and amity in this region which pleased Aurangzeb who was then camped in the South.

Mehtab Rai meets Guru Gobind Singh

When the Khalsa was proclaimed, Mehtab Rai felt a strong urge to meet Guru Gobind Singh. When he met the young Guru, he was struck by the dynamic glowing, kingly personality of this unique prophet. He begged the Guru to accept him as his humble disciple and give him baptism too. Guru Gobind Singh was pleased by the many moral and spiritual qualities of Mehtab Rai and so baptized him into the Khalsa Holy Order with his own hands. Guru Gobind Singh named him as Mahan Singh.

Mehtab Rai recorded thus: ‘When I took *amrit* (baptism) from the gracious Guru Gobind Singh Maharaj, he gave the following sermon on the Khalsa code of conduct: *“Now you are not a Hindu. You have accepted a new religion (mazhab). You will not believe in any god or goddess. You should have faith only on one God. Guruji instructed me to keep kesh (hair), kirpan (sword), kada (iron bangle), kachh (under wear) and kanga (comb). I was instructed to lead a morally pure life, be charitable and help the needy. Sincerity, honesty were emphasised. All Sikhs were to be considered as brothers. Whatever you earn you must share with others. Always inculcate the virtues of compassion, mercy and justice and let them be part of yourself. God is neither born nor ever dies. He who is born and dies (the avatars) should not be considered as a God. You should never take bhang (hemp), nor alcohol nor drugs should be taken by a Sikh. Treat women other than your wife either as mothers or sisters or daughters.”* A number of other instructions are given which are in most of the authentic *Rehatnamas* (Code of Conduct) of the Khalsa Holy Order.

Mehtab Rai in Khalsa Appearance

When Mehtab Rai returned to Delhi everyone was struck by his changed life. He was now a *Munsif* (Judge), attended the court and performed all his duties with greater energy and utmost sincerity. He

lived and moved about in the court in his distinctly changed avatar of Khalsa appearance and dress. He stopped attending services in Hindu *mandirs*, stopped performing Hindu ceremonies, gave up idol worship and all that goes with it.

A distinct change had come in the appearance, religious and social habits and life of Mahan Singh. The pious and gentle looking Mehtab Rai was now changed into the dynamic personality of Mahan Singh. The distinct change was the cause of a whispering campaign against him in society and the Mughal court. His biographer writes, “Mahan Singh got up early in the morning at 4 am and after his morning ablution, he prayed and recited Gurbani. He then went to the court to perform his duties as a judge, passed his judgements with discerning wisdom. He gave relief and joy to the poor and oppressed, and punished those who were liars and indulged in trickery.”

“Besides contemplating on the Name of God, Mahan Singh recited the Japji, Jaap Sahib, and Akal Ustat. His dress and appearance was now unique and impressive like that of the Sikhs. He clearly greeted people with *“Waheguru ji ka Khalsa, Waheguru ji ki Fateh”*.”

Even as the whispering campaign against him became active, the God-fearing, spiritually enlightened and fearless Mahan Singh remained unconcerned at first, because no one had found any fault in his work or performance of his duties. No one complained against him to the Nawab (Governor of Delhi) regarding his work, sincerity or loyalty. But as he got wind of the whispering campaign against him, he confided some worries to his devoted wife Kulwanti. She was born and brought up in Punjab and was immensely pleased that her husband had become such devoted disciple of Guru Gobind Singh. To know the truth about the complaints, she met influential Begums of the court, telling them about his becoming a disciple of Guru Gobind Singh, his Khalsa appearance and disassociation from Hindu religious practices. His fearless decisions

in favour of the poor and the destitute and his strong attitude towards those who were corrupt had of course created many enemies.

Those who considered Guru Gobind Singh an opponent of the Mughal Empire had by now reported the matter even to Aurangzeb, who asked the Prime Minister to make enquiries and send a factual report. Kulwanti said to her husband, "There is nothing against you so far as official duties are concerned. Everyone praises your honesty and integrity. You are brave, truthful and have such a spirit of sacrifice, you should be proud of being a disciple of Guru Gobind Singh. If necessary, sacrifice everything to keep your faith. What are wealth and position? The grace and blessings of God and the great Guru is all we need. What harm can come to you if the grace of God is with you. *"Parmatma ki kirpa ho to aap ka kya bigad sakta hain."*

A few days later the Nawab requested Mahan Singh to meet him. The Nawab was struck by a dynamic change in his personality and demeanour. In place of a meek simple Hindu he saw a fully bearded and turbaned Sikh in different dress, a convincing impression of a Sikh of Guru Gobind Singh. The Nawab expressed his fears and apprehensions to which Mahan Singh said that it was Guru Gobind Singh who has turned a morally and spiritually dead people into a living nation.

The Nawab then came to the real point. "I wish to place for your serious consideration information that Guru Gobind Singh is a rebel fighting against the Emperor. He calls himself a *Sacha Patshah* (True King of Kings) while he considers Aurangzeb to be only a provisional king (*arzi*). He has created a military organisation of Sikhs to fight against the Emperor, and also the Hindu Chiefs. He is becoming popular among the common people. We are informed he has spread the belief that goddess (Chandi) has blessed him and has manifested her power (of destruction) in him."

Mahan Singh promptly replied, "Guru Gobind Singh and his Sikhs do not believe in any

god or goddess, besides the One Absolute Lord; his Sikhs make all offerings in the name of the Guru." The story spread by some Hindus about Guru Gobind Singh being a worshipper of Chandi was absolutely false. Who could know better about that than Mahan Singh who had received Khalsa baptism and its *Rehat Maryada* (code of conduct) from Guru Gobind Singh and who daily recited *Akal Ustat* in his daily prayers (*nitnem*)?

The Nawab then talked about the Sikhs of Guru Gobind Singh. "They have deep affection and sincere love (*muhabat*) for one another. If one Sikh is happy, all feel very happy. If one Sikh suffers, all rush with sorrow and agony to share his sorrow and help him. They have remarkable unity and mutual trust. They have become a strange national organisation. No one can be tempted and drawn away by offering them wealth, or feeding on greed. They do not feel any necessity of wealth and jagirs. They are prepared to give up everything if they can win love of the Guru and seek only his grace'.

Exercising great control within himself, Mahan Singh replied in very friendly tone, thanked the Nawab and the Mughal Emperor for bestowing extraordinary favours on his forefathers and on him, but he was not prepared to accept nor did he expect the learned and judicious Nawab to accept these reports. "Guru Gobind Singh believes in warrior ideals, and calls himself a slave of Almighty God. He repeatedly preaches to the Sikhs not to depend on any one except on Almighty God; people must defend their homes and freedom against oppression".

He then explained how the Hindu Hill Chiefs had repeatedly attacked Guru Gobind Singh, but who, even after winning all battles against them, did not occupy an inch of their territory. "He teaches us to love Truth, only Truth".

Mahan Singh further elaborated that all human beings have earthly duties, but more importantly by, a person has religious and spiritual

responsibility. For worldly duties, a person is responsible to his earthly Masters, as long as he serves them. But for religious and spiritual matters, he is responsible to his Pir, spiritual guide only. "Human body is transient and so are the fruits of service of the body to earthly Masters. But the soul is immortal. The soul and the inner self (Zat) serves only the Pir and God. I have given my body in service of the Emperor, but my conscience and soul are dedicated to my Pir and God. My relations with Guru Gobind Singh are spiritual and firmly unbreakable (*pukhta*). The Guru has taught me to stand firmly for truth and oppose injustice. If you desire that I should deny him as my Pir and refuse to be his murid (disciple) this is impossible. This can never be."

Mahan Singh then said with stirring firmness, "It is my duty to obey the Emperor so far as my professional duties are concerned. It is my duty as a Munsif (judge) to safeguard equity and justice (*adal aur insaf*). But for the sake of services of the government I will never tell a lie about religion and faith. I will not stab my own conscience and do anything to harm it (*mulazmat ki khatr jhuth nahi bolun ga aur apne zamir ka khun nahi karun ga*). I will under no circumstances deny my love and devotion to Guru Gobind Singh and I will never deprive myself of true friendship with this enlightened Apostle of God and a true Friend of God and the people, even if I have to sacrifice my head for it. My wealth, my ancestral property, my body, I am prepared to offer for the Emperor and the country. All this you can take away, spend all this for improving the lot of my country. I shall not mind. But I will not stand for injustice where to be just is my duty. I will never be shaken by lies and falsehood".

And then in a deeply moving tone Mahan Singh said, "Guru Gobind Singh is my life and soul (*Gobind Singh mere pran hai*). Gobind Singh is my Faith and Religion. Gobind Singh is the

life of my life. Gobind Singh is my pir and refuge, I have taken asylum at his feet. I shall never deny him. Never, never. Never expect this from me Nawab Sahib".

The Nawab was moved. The spiritually inspired words of Mahan Singh shook this God-fearing Nawab from the depths. Then he added, "Muslims are disturbed because Guru Gobind Singh is fighting for protecting the downtrodden and oppressed. The Hindus have turned against him because he is against all types of idolatory and worship of gods and goddesses. He preaches the worship of One God alone. He saw many evil practices in Hindu religion and society. Hindu religion was like a counterfeit coin. In order to get rid of the dross and make it pure (*khalis*) he created the Khalsa. He also gave the Khalsa the visage which inspires him to lead a morally and spiritually pure life".

The Nawab remained silent for sometime. He was a very wise, noble and decent man, and a good scholar of Islam. He said, half in secret joy and half with explicit sadness, "Islam also has got involved in un-Islamic and useless practices like worship of the grave, worship of the khanqahs. I wish someone could also remove the dross from Islam and make it *khalis*".

Mahan Singh was impressed by the Nawab's generous and wise response, who assured him that no harm would come to him simply because he was disciple of Guru Gobind Singh. He was glad to understand as who Guru Gobind Singh really was. He said with profound courtesy. "If I knew your Pir is such a great and noble spiritual leader and you are so changed morally and spiritually, I would have myself come to you." Mahan Singh gave the Nawab greetings with warmth and respect, one *ashrafi* (gold coin) to the Nawab's servant as a parting gift, and felt greatly blessed by the Guru and immensely happy at the turn of the events.

Dr. Trilochan Singh

Commemorating Guru Tegh Bahadur This Centenary

The state of Panjab commemorated the 400th birth anniversary of the 9th Sikh Guru, Guru Tegh Bahadur from 18 April 2020, with year-long celebrations commencing at the historic town of Baba Bakala and the concluding function at Sri Anandpur Sahib on 18 April 2021.



Early Years

The year 2021 marks the passing of 400 years since the birth of Guru Tegh Bahadur, our ninth Guru, in April 1621. Sikhs at that time were just 15 years past the martyrdom of the fifth Guru and nascent Sikhi was passing

through a difficult period. Since the difficulties persevered through a century under ministries of the later Gurus and following several decades of struggle under evolving Sikh leadership before the community could look to some relief, it may help develop a clearer perspective of the role of Guru Tegh Bahadur, if we took an overview of the lead events since Guru Arjan's martyrdom.

Historians mostly agree that robust growth of Sikhi made segments among Hindus and Muslims turn increasingly inimical towards the Sikh Gurus. Additionally dissonance in the Guru families provided sharper focus to those hostile towards Gurughar. One effect of Jahangir's decision to impose death penalty on Guru Arjan at the behest of orthodox coterie amongst his courtiers was that it demonstrated the reversal of Akbar's 'policy of religious neutrality and eclecticism' under the new Emperor. The internment of Guru Hargobind, the successor of Guru Arjan, would have confirmed the change in policy. Post that Jahangir tried to moderate his relations with the Guru.

Guru Hargobind, while he maintained friendly relations with Jahangir, did not forget to explore other means to strengthen and consolidate the Sikh community. The Guru had accompanied Jahangir to Kashmir and Rajputana and subdued rebellion by Tara Chand of Nalagarh. He however discretely continued to organise and train his band of armed Sikhs and tried to bring the community together by attempting to heal the divide with the Minas. He did not succeed to turn Mina divide around but another opening came up.

In 1624, a few days after his eldest son Gurditta was married, Guru Hargobind with his four sons went to meet Sri Chand at Baarath. Baba Tegh Bahadur was three and was not with them. During their stay at Baarath, Sri Chand asked Guru Hargobind to give a son to him. He replied, 'If you desire, they all are available'. Sri Chand gave Udasi *bekh* to Gurditta. After the Guru left, Gurditta stayed back. Sri Chand explained Udasi *Mat* and bestowed the *Gadi* of *Pramukh Guru* of *Udasi Sampardai* on him before Gurditta left. It helped heal a divide in the Sikh community going back to the passing of Guru Nanak and Udis soon became an active component of the Sikh *parchar* missionary.

In 1627, Jahangir fell ill in Kashmir and decided to go back to Lahore but died on the way. Shahjahan, known to be close to orthodox groups, succeeded in the struggle for succession to the throne and the Sikh-Mughal relations again turned inimical. Sikhs too were no longer hesitant to cross swords with adversaries. Guru Hargobind fought four battles with Mughal forces after which to avoid recurring conflicts, c. 1634

he moved to the hilly area of the Shiwaliks and set up base at Kiratpur, outside the territory under direct Mughal control in 1634. But Amritsar slipped into the hands of the Minas.

Guru Hargobind, before he passed away in 1644, anointed Har Rai, the younger son of Gurditta, as the successor Guru. Gurditta had predeceased his father in 1638 and none of the other children of the Guru 'seemed suitable for the position'.

Guru Har Rai had a peaceable disposition and he moved further into Sirmor and stayed there most of the time. During his ministry, three new branches of Udis known as Bakshishes were added to the already large Udasi order. Guru Har Rai had blessed the Bakshishes known as Suthrashahis, Bhagat Bhagwanias and Sangat Sahibis.

Guru Har Rai's relations with Shahjahan had improved after he helped treat his favorite son, Dara Shikoh. But Aurangzeb's ascension to the throne 'in 1658 marked the beginning of a long, consistent and active policy to gain a control over the Sikh religious affairs', foreboding the testing times in the half century ahead.

Aurangzeb sent a message to Guru Har Rai 'to deliver his son Ram Rai as a hostage for the Guru's reputed support of Dara Shikoh'. Aurangzeb asked Ram Rai after his arrival in Delhi, to explain a verse from Asa ki Var in Adi Granth. Ram Rai replied that the text had been miscopied and should have been



Guru Tegh Bahadur Memorial, Delhi

mitti beiman ki, the dust left after cremating the bodies of faithless people. Guru Har Rai, on hearing of this, decided not to see Ram Rai again for changing the word of Guru Nanak. Before his passing in October 1661, Guru Har Rai installed his younger son, age five, Har Krishan as Guru.

Ram Rai was rewarded by Aurangzeb with land grants in Dehra Dun region. After a few years, in January 1664, Aurangzeb summoned Guru Har Krishan, through Raja Jai Singh, to appear at his court. The Guru came to Delhi and was lodged at the house of Jai Singh.

When Guru Har Krishan was summoned, Kunwar Ram Singh was present with the Guru on the first day. In the meeting, Ram Rai was emphatic that the decision of his father to install his brother was based on cogent reasons. It went well but the next session planned for the following day could not be held because Guru Har Krishan passed away that night.

When Guru Har Krishan was sick with small pox, Baba Tegh Bahadur arrived in Delhi on 21 March from his visit, at the urging of Guru Har Rai, to sangats in Patna and the East from 1656 to 1664. He was on way back to Bakala and with his mother visited Guru Har Krishan to offer condolences on passing of Guru Har Rai.

Guru Har Krishan passed away on 30 March 1664 and his dying words were, “Baba Bakala”, indicating that his successor Guru was in Bakala. This was considered by many as a cryptic utterance but those in the know had no doubt who was the person in view of Guru Har Krishan.

The journey to Gurudom

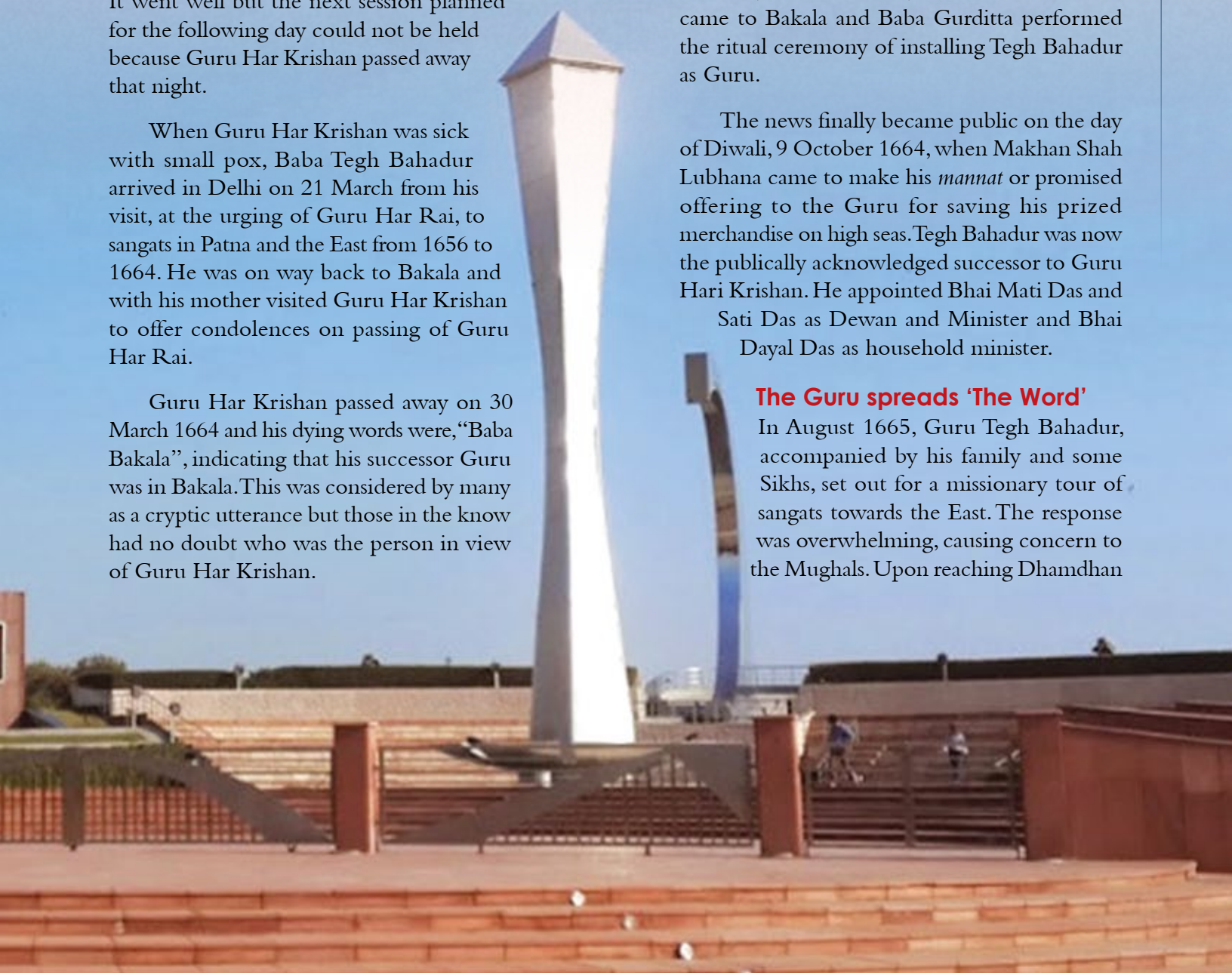
Baba Tegh Bahadur had stayed in touch with Guru Har Rai and had undertaken *parchar* to Patna at the Guru's suggestion. His brother in law, Kirpal, a soldier in Guru Har Rai's armed guard is also said to have kept Tegh Bahadur informed of the Sikh developments periodically.

As soon as news got out that the dying words of Guru Har Krishan were Baba Bakala, there was a flurry of activity in Bakala as local, as well as outside aspirants to the Gur Gadi came to stake their claim. After over four months, a Delhi Sangat led by Diwan Durga Mal and others including Mata Sulakhni, mother of Guru Har Krishan, Baba Gurditta, son of Baba Budhha came to Bakala and Baba Gurditta performed the ritual ceremony of installing Tegh Bahadur as Guru.

The news finally became public on the day of Diwali, 9 October 1664, when Makhan Shah Lubhana came to make his *mannat* or promised offering to the Guru for saving his prized merchandise on high seas. Tegh Bahadur was now the publically acknowledged successor to Guru Hari Krishan. He appointed Bhai Mati Das and Sati Das as Dewan and Minister and Bhai Dayal Das as household minister.

The Guru spreads 'The Word'

In August 1665, Guru Tegh Bahadur, accompanied by his family and some Sikhs, set out for a missionary tour of sangats towards the East. The response was overwhelming, causing concern to the Mughals. Upon reaching Dhamdhan



in Banger area in December 1665, a Mughal enforcement officer Alam Khan arrested the Guru and some of his associates and produced them before Emperor Aurangzeb, who ordered to hand them over to Kanwar Ram Singh, son of Raja Jai Singh. Released after about two months, he resumed his mission and reached Patna via Agra, Allahabad, Benaras and Sasaram in May 1666. They halted at Patna as arrangements for the stay of the Guru's family were made. Guru Tegh Bahadur proceeded to Dacca in October 1666. Mata Gujri was expecting at that time and a son was born on 22 December 1666.

At Dacca, the Guru established a Hazuri Sangat with the help of Bhai Almas. Gurdwara Sangat Tola now marks the place where Guru Sahib used to deliver his sermons. It was here that the Guru heard of the birth of his son. From Dacca, Guru ji proceeded to Chittagong via Jaintia Hills, Sylhet and Agartala and returned to Dacca in 1668.

Raja Ram Singh, deputed by Aurangzeb, was then in Dacca for his expedition to Assam. He met the Guru and requested him to accompany on the expedition. Guru agreed and the Guru's presence is credited to have made possible the historic avoidance of a bloody confrontation between the ruler of Kamrup and Raja Ram Singh.

Guru Tegh Bahadur was the first Guru to visit Sikh sangats in eastern India set up 150 years earlier at the instance of Guru Nanak. These sangats prospered in the times of the succeeding Gurus, who placed them under Masands to collect offerings and minister to the spiritual needs of devotees. In the time of the sixth Guru, Sikh sangats were firmly established at several places including Agra, Bina, Burhanpur, Mongher, Prayag, Ujjain, Gujarat, Lucknow, Patna, Dacca and Raj Mahal.

The Guru returned to Anandpur around 1671. Around 1672, the Guru set out on a tour to the Malwa region of Punjab. The mission assisted

in planting trees, digging community wells and distributing cattle to encourage dairy farming. Several Muslim followers of Sakhi Sarvar adopted Sikhi. These developments did not sit well with fundamentalist Muslims and the ruling elite.

Concurrently, Brahmins at major pilgrimage centers and Kashmir had been told to convert to Islam or face death. At this juncture, a group of Kashmiri Pandits led by Kirpa Ram came and met Guru Tegh Bahadur at Anandpur in May 1675 to seek his protection. The Guru, 'after long discussions with prominent Sikhs and Kashmiri Pandits' made up his mind to sacrifice himself for the cause of 'righteousness' and for the freedom of 'dharma.'

The Guru's offer was conveyed to Aurangzeb who was said to be pleased to accept it. The Guru with his three companions, Sati Das, Mati Das and Dayal Das, set out from Anandpur. All of them were arrested and brought to Delhi. In time, the authorities offered three alternatives to the Guru: show miracles, or embrace Islam, or face death. The Guru accepted the last and did not budge from his resolve even after his three companions were tortured to death. He was publically put to death by severing the head from his body in Delhi's Chandni Chowk on 11 November 1675. Gurdwara Sis Ganj marks the place where the execution took place.



Gurdwara Sis Ganj Sahib in Chandni Chowk, Delhi

Compositions of the Guru

Guru Tegh Bahadur's compositions in Sri Guru Granth Sahib reflect facets of his preaching and persona. He commends the fundamental teaching of Gurmata – *naam* is the real blessing; imbibing it is the way to *nirvaani* – so contemplate on *naam* and live by it. The message comes in various forms – all in simple words and familiar metaphors, going straight to one's heart!

Pray, Guide Me!

The compositions of the ninth Guru are characterized by the flow of complex emotions and thoughts using simple language and easily graspable metaphors. The way he has shared a dilemma that many of us would have experienced – “to whom should I tell the state of my mind? Engrossed in greed, running around in the ten directions, I cling to my hopes of wealth. For sake of some gain, I suffer all this and cringe before each and every person wandering from one door to another like a cur. I am wasting this precious life, unaware if others even laugh at me.” The message could not be clearer – place not your integrity, dignity or belief at stake for petty gain!

To Merge with Divine

Here is the simplest enumeration of qualities that may make a person receive the divine blessing to merge with God: the one – “who in the midst of pain, does not feel pain, who is not affected by pleasure, affection or fear, and who looks alike upon gold and dust; is not swayed by slander or praise, nor affected by greed, attachment or pride; remains unaffected by joy and sorrow, honor and dishonor; has renounced all hopes and desires and has no expectation; who is not touched by sexual desire or anger – within his heart, God dwells – such a person, O Nanak, merges as easily with the Lord of the Universe, as water merges with water!” The Guru himself was such a person and such attributes are repeatedly stressed in his Bani.

ਹਰਖੁ ਸੇਗੁ ਜਾ ਕੈ ਨਹੀ ਬੈਰੀ ਮੀਤ ਸਮਾਨਿ ॥ ਕਹੁ ਨਾਨਕ ਸੁਨਿ ਰੇ ਮਨਾ ਮੁਕਤਿ ਤਾਹਿ ਤੈ ਜਾਨਿ ॥ ੧੫ ॥

Imbibe Humility

The Guru places value on humility in relations – sense of pride out of one's mind and control the urge to be judgmental of others by expressing the praise

or blame. To savour the true essence of life, restrain yourself from sex, anger and evil company. Relate to pain and pleasure, honor and dishonor, as the same and treat joy and sorrow with detachment; and tread the complex path to Nirvaanaa that only rare Gurmukhs understand! There is simplicity of expression and a sense of indifference to worldly affairs.

Dispelling of Anxieties

When one keeps introspecting, looking within, one learns of one's own failings and prays in humility: “Now, what should I do to dispel my anxieties about how will I cross over the terrifying world-ocean? Born human and having done no good deeds; makes me full of fear! I worry that neither in thought, word or deed, have I sung the Lord's Praises. Nor by listening to Gurmata, did spiritual wisdom well up within me. I just kept filling my belly like a beast. Nanak realises that it is only through Thy Merciful disposition that a sinner like me can be saved.” Another sound advisory is that anxiety is well placed if only the happening is unexpected-

ਚਿੰਤਾ ਤਾ ਕੀ ਕੀਜੀਐ ਜੇ ਅਨਹੋਨੀ ਹੋਇ ॥ ੫੧ ॥ Slok M IX, p.

Naam & Maya

“Holy people: what way should I now adopt, to dispel all my evil propensities so that my mind may vibrate in devotional worship to the Lord? My mind entangled in Maya, knows nothing at all of spiritual wisdom. What is the Naam, contemplating which the world might attain the state of Nirvaanaa? The Saints became kind and compassionate and told me that whoever sings the Kirtan of God's Praises, has performed all religious rituals. One who enshrines the Lord's Naam in his heart even for an instant in night and day, his fear of Death is eradicated and his life approved and fulfilled. For the sake of Maya, the mortal wanders constantly, night and day. Among millions, O Nanak, there is scarcely anyone, who keeps the Lord in his consciousness” -

ਨਿਸਿ ਦਿਨੁ ਮਾਇਆ ਕਾਰਨੇ ਪ੍ਰਾਨੀ ਡੋਲਤ ਨੀਤ ॥ ਕੋਟਨ ਮੈ ਨਾਨਕ ਕੇਉ ਨਾਰਾਇਨੁ ਜਿਹ ਚੀਤਿ ॥ ੨੪ ॥ Slok M IX, p.

“Spiritual Wisdom Says Nanak, listen my mind, call spiritually wise the one who neither frightens any, nor is afraid of anyone else.”

Nirmal Singh




**GURU TEGH BAHADUR
MEMORIAL**

SUPREME SACRIFICE

Martyrdom of Guru Tegh Bahadur

PUSHPINDAR SINGH
EXECUTIVE EDITOR



**GURDWARA
SIS GANJ SAHIB**



**GURDWARA
RAKAB GANJ SAHIB**

PHOTOS FROM THE NISHAAN COLLECTION

DELHI

MAP NOT IN SCALE

H A R Y A N A

DELHI
HARYANA
BORDER

Y
A
M
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V
E
R

OLD DELHI

N E W D E L H I

PARLIAMENT HOUSE



AT 1:45 AM [PAST MIDNIGHT]
AFTER THE TAKHAT SNAN
INSIDE VIEW OF THE PLACE
WHERE GURU TEGH BAHADUR
WAS MARTYRED.

GURDWARA SIS GANJ SAHIB
[DELHI]



SUPREME SACRIFICE

Martyrdom of Guru Tegh Bahadur

GURU TEGH BAHADUR
WAS THE YOUNGEST OF THE
FIVE SONS OF
GURU HARGOBIND.
HE WAS BORN IN AMRITSAR
ON 1 APRIL 1621.
THE NAME TEGH BAHADUR
['MIGHTY OF THE SWORD']
WAS GIVEN TO HIM BY
GURU HARGOBIND AFTER
HE HAD DISPLAYED GREAT
VALOUR IN A BATTLE WITH
THE MUGHALS.

**SUPREME
SACRIFICE**

Martyrdom of
Guru Tegh Bahadur



GURDWARA
SIS GANJ SAHIB AT CHANDNI CHOWK, DELHI,
MARKS THE PLACE WHERE THE GURU WAS BEHEADED
AND HIS COMPANIONS BHAI SATI DAS, BHAI MATI DAS
AND BHAI DAYALA DAS WERE TORTURED TO DEATH.



SUPREME SACRIFICE

Martyrdom of
Guru Tegh Bahadur

GURU TEGH BAHADUR WAS A GREAT EXPONENT OF POETRY AND PEACE, MUSIC, MEDITATION, CHARITY AND HUMAN FREEDOM. HE WAS ON HIS MISSIONARY TOUR IN BENGAL AND ASSAM WHEN HE HEARD THAT AURANGZEB HAD ISSUED ORDERS TO PERSECUTE THE BRAHMINS, CUSTODIANS OF THE HINDU FAITH. IN THOSE DAYS, THE EMPEROR HAD IMPRISONED HUNDREDS OF BRAHMINS WITH THE INTENT TO FORCIBLY CONVERT THEM TO ISLAM, FOR IF THEY DID SO, MOST HINDUS WOULD FOLLOW.

AFTER SHIVAJI AND THE RAJPUTS HAD EXPRESSED THEIR HELPLESSNESS, UNDER THE LEADERSHIP OF PUNDIT KIRPA RAM OF KASHMIR, FIVE HUNDRED BRAHMINS WENT TO GURU TEGH BAHADUR AT ANANDPUR TO SEEK HIS PROTECTION AND HELP. IMMENSELY MOVED BY THEIR WOEFUL PLIGHT, THE COMPASSIONATE GURU SAID, "GO AND TELL AURANGZEB THAT IF HE SUCCEEDED IN CONVERTING GURU TEGH BAHADUR, ALL BRAHMINS AND THEIR HINDU FOLLOWERS WOULD ACCEPT ISLAM AS THEIR RELIGION. BUT IF HE FAILED TO DO SO, HE MUST STOP THE PERSECUTION OF BRAHMINS."



WALL PAINTING

DEPICTING GURU TEGH BAHADUR'S SEVERED HEAD [SIS] BEING BROUGHT TO ANANDPUR IN A PALANQUIN.

ANANDPUR SAHIB [PUNJAB]



AT 9:19 PM DURING THE EVENING CEREMONY
['SUKHASAN'] A SEWADAR CARRIES GURU GRANTH
SAHIB TO THE RESTING PLACE ['MANJI SAHIB']

GURDWARA SIS GANJ SAHIB [DELHI]



SUPREME SACRIFICE

Martyrdom of
Guru Tegh Bahadur



PAINTING OF GURU TEGH BAHADUR

AS PRESERVED INSIDE THE GURDWARA
AT THE EXACT PLACE WHERE
HE WAS MARTYRED.

GURDWARA SIS GANJ SAHIB
[DELHI]

TRUNK
OF THE HISTORIC BANYAN TREE
UNDER WHICH GURU TEGH BAHADUR
WAS EXECUTED.

GURDWARA SIS GANJ SAHIB
[DELHI]

ACCORDING TO CONTEMPORARY WRITERS. GURU TEGH BAHADUR WENT TO AGRA WHERE HE COURTED ARREST AND WAS THEN BROUGHT TO DELHI. AURANGZEB FAILED TO CONVINCE GURU TEGH BAHADUR THAT IDOLATORS SHOULD BE PHYSICALLY ELIMINATED BY THE RULING POLITICAL POWER. ALTHOUGH GURU TEGH BAHADUR HIMSELF PREACHED AGAINST IDOLATRY AND BRAHMANISM, HE REFUSED TO ACCEPT THAT FORCIBLE CONVERSION IN ANY FORM WAS LEGALLY, MORALLY OR SPIRITUALLY JUSTIFIED. HE CONSIDERED FORCIBLE CONVERSION AS AGAINST BASIC MORAL VALUES WHICH SUPERIOR RELIGIONS PREACH. GURU TEGH BAHADUR ALSO REFUSED TO PERFORM ANY 'MIRACLES' TO SAVE HIS OWN LIFE BECAUSE ANY DISPLAY OF OCCULT POWERS WAS CONSIDERED UNWORTHY OF TRUE SAINTS AND THE PROPHETS OF GOD.



BAOLI SAHIB

THE HISTORIC WELL WHERE GURU TEGH BAHADUR PERFORMED HIS FINAL ABLUTIONS JUST BEFORE HIS EXECUTION. NOTE SYMBOLIC OFFERING OF AMRIT BY A MOTHER TO HER DAUGHTER

GURDWARA SIS GANJ SAHIB [DELHI]



AURANGZEB FIRST ORDERED THAT GURU TEGH BAHADUR'S CLOSE APOSTLES AND COMPANIONS IN PRISON BE TORTURED TO DEATH: BHAJI DAYAL DAS WAS THROWN INTO A BOILING CAULDRON, BHAJI MATI DAS WAS SAWN ACROSS FROM HEAD TO LOINS AND BHAJI SATI DAS WAS BURNT ALIVE AT THE STAKE. THE SCENE OF THE HEROIC MARTYRDOM OF HIS DISCIPLES DID NOT DISRUPT GURU TEGH BAHADUR'S TRANQUILITY. FINALLY, THE GURU WAS BEHEADED UNDER A TREE IN THE PRESENCE OF A HUGE CROWD OF HIS FOLLOWERS ON THE FATEFUL THURSDAY OF 11 NOVEMBER 1675 AD. THE TREE TRUNK IS STILL PRESERVED IN SIS GANJ SAHIB GURDWARA SINCE THEN AND AROUND THE PLACE OF THE GURU'S MARTYRDOM, EMERGED THE GURDWARA, KNOWN AS GURDWARA SIS GANJ SAHIB. A SUITABLE MEMORIAL COMMEMORATING THE MARTYRDOM OF BHAJI MATI DAS AND HIS COMPANIONS HAS ALSO BEEN BUILT IN CHANDNI CHOWK.

SUPREME SACRIFICE

Martyrdom of
Guru Tegh Bahadur



BHAI MATI DAS CHOWK,

IN CHANDNI CHOWK TODAY, IS WHERE BHAI MATI DAS, BHAI SATI DAS AND BHAI DAYAL DAS WERE BRUTALLY EXECUTED ALONG WITH THEIR COMPANIONS. THIS IS ALSO WHERE BANDA BAHADUR'S FOLLOWERS WERE MARTYRED FOUR DECADES LATER. FATEFULLY, THE MUGHAL EMPIRE WOULD DISINTEGRATE SOON THEREAFTER

CHANDNI CHOWK WITH THE RED FORT IN THE BACKGROUND [DELHI]



SUPREME

SACRIFICE

Martyrdom of
Guru Tegh Bahadur



GURDWARA

RAKAB GANJ SAHIB WAS CONSTRUCTED BY SARDAR BAGHEL SINGH

AT THE PLACE WHERE BHAI LAKHI SHAH VANJARA CREMATED GURU TEGH BAHADUR'S MORTAL REMAINS IN NOVEMBER 1675. TWO HUNDRED AND FORTY YEARS LATER, THE CAPITAL OF BRITISH INDIA WAS CONSTRUCTED ON RAISINA HILL, AROUND RAKAB GANJ SAHIB. [SEE NORTH AND SOUTH BLOCKS IN THE BACKGROUND].



SUPREME SACRIFICE

Martyrdom of
Guru Tegh Bahadur



**PAINTING OF
GURU TEGH BAHADUR**
NEAR THE PLACE WHERE
HE WAS CREMATED AFTER
EXECUTION.



WHEN GURU TEGH BAHADUR WAS BEHEADED IN CHANDNI CHOWK, THE LAMENTING AND WAILING CROWD SURGED FORWARD TO HAVE A CLOSER LOOK AT THE MARTYRED PROPHET. BHAI JAITA RUSHED OUT OF THE CROWD LIKE A FLASH OF LIGHTNING AND WITH A CLEAN SWEEP PICKED UP GURU JI'S SEVERED HEAD AND IMMEDIATELY DISAPPEARED INTO THE GRIEF STRICKEN CROWD. THE CLOUDS DARKENED AND A STORM BEGAN TO RAGE. LAKHI SHAH, A SIKH DEVOTEE AND GOVERNMENT CONTRACTOR ARRIVED WITH A CONVOY OF HORSES AND BULLOCKS DRIVEN BY HIS EIGHT SONS THROUGH THE HEART OF CHANDNI CHOWK IN DARKNESS. THEY CARRIED GURU TEGH BAHADUR'S BODY TO THEIR RESIDENCE, WHICH WAS A HUT WHERE GURDWARA RAKAB GANJ SAHIB NOW EXISTS. THEY REVERENTLY PLACED THE GURU'S BODY ON A PILE OF SANDALWOOD AND SET FIRE TO THEIR HUT. AFTER CREMATION, THEY COLLECTED THE ASHES IN AN URN AND BURIED IT AT THE EXACT SPOT WHERE THE BODY WAS CREMATED. GURU TEGH BAHADUR'S HEAD WAS CARRIED BY BHAI JAITA TO ANANDPUR, WHERE GURU GOBIND SINGH CREMATED IT NEAR THE PLACE WHERE GURU JI USED TO MEDITATE. THIS PLACE IS KNOWN AS SIS GANJ OF ANANDPUR.

TAKHT SNAN
AT 2.45AM [PAST MIDNIGHT].
THE PLACE WHERE GURU TEGH BAHADUR'S
BODY WAS CREMATED.

GURDWARA RAKAB GANJ SAHIB [NEW DELHI]



SUPREME

SACRIFICE

Martyrdom of
Guru Tegh Bahadur

SUKHASAN AT 9:30 PM
SEWADAR CARRYING GURU
GRANTH SAHIB TO MANJI SAHIB
[RESTING PLACE]

GURDWARA
RAKAB GANJ SAHIB
[NEW DELHI]





SUPREME

SACRIFICE

Martyrdom of
Guru Tegh Bahadur

GURU TEGH BAHADUR MEMORIAL, DEDICATED IN 2011

GURU TEGH BAHADUR IS ALSO KNOWN AS 'HIND KI CHADAR' MEANING PROTECTOR OF HINDUSTAN AND THIS IS MOST SYMBOLIC OF THE TIMES, THEN AND NOW.

AN INITIATIVE OF THE DELHI GOVERNMENT, THIS MEMORIAL IS A TRIBUTE TO THE NINTH SIKH GURU, TEGH BAHADUR, AND IS SPREAD OVER 10 ACRES ALONGSIDE THE GRAND TRUNK ROAD AS IT ENTERS DELHI AT THE HARYANA BORDER. THE GURU'S HOLY TEACHINGS HAVE BEEN INSCRIBED ON TEN ROCK STANDS WITH BEAUTIFUL LIGHTING WHOSE COLOURS CHANGE EVERY MINUTE. THE CENTRE OF ATTRACTION IS THE TALLEST PYLON OF STEEL IN THE MIDDLE AND VISIBLE FROM A DISTANCE OWING TO ITS EXCELLENT ILLUMINATION. THE BASE OF THE MONUMENT IS SHAPED LIKE THE PETALS OF A FLOWER WITH THREE C-ARCHES REPRESENTING THE THREE FOLLOWERS OF GURU TEGH BAHADUR, WHO WERE MARTYRED WITH HIM, EMBEDDED IN THE SURROUNDING LANDSCAPED GARDEN AND ALSO INSCRIBED WITH THE GURU'S TEACHINGS.



GURU TEGH BAHADUR MEMORIAL
GT ROAD, DELHI HARYANA BORDER.

[DELHI]



An Ode to The Tenth Master

Sache Padshah, Kalgidaar Dashmesh Pitah Guru Gobind Singh Ji Maharaj: True Emperor, the Plumed, Tenth Guru, the Great Guru, Guru Gobind Singh Ji Maharaj



The Tenth Guru of the Sikhs: Guru Gobind Singh ji

Historically referred to as the ‘Dasveh Patshah Da Granth’ the Dasam Granth holds the writings and works of the Tenth Guru of the Sikhs, Guru Gobind Singh. The Dasam Granth is also known as the *Bachitar Natak Granth*. It contains the *Jaap Sahib*, *Akal Ustat*, *Bachitar Natak*, *Chandi Charitar Ukati Bilas*, *Chandi Charitar II*, *Chandi di Var*, *Gyan Prabodh*, *Chaubis Avtar*, *Rudra Avtar*, *Tev Prasad Sawaiye*, *Khalsa Mahima*, *Shashtar Nam Mala Purana*, *Ath Pakh-yaan Charitar Likh-yatay* and the *Zafarnama*.

The *Dasam Granth* documents and records the oral and written words of Guru Gobind Singh. The words and writings, from various periods of Guru Gobind’s life were scattered in different books and *Pothis*. In 1708, they were compiled into a single repository, its present form, The *Dasam Granth* by Bhai Mani Singh Khalsa and a few others at the instructions of Mata Sundri, Guru Gobind’s wife.

The daily prayers of the Sikhs, the *Nitnem*, consisting of the five *baanis* that have to be recited every day, start with the *Japji Sahib* by Guru Nanak, progress to *Jaap Sahib*, *Tat Prasad Sawaiye*, *Chaupai Sahib* (Guru Gobind’s) and conclude with Guru Arjan’s *Anand Sahib da path*. A significant part of the daily *Ardas*, the supplication to the divine, also come from the words of Guru Gobind Singh.

Born on 22 December 1666, Guru Gobind, the Tenth Guru of the Sikhs inspires awe, gratitude, love, affection and deep respect. He was a scholar, a poet, a writer, a respectful son, a loving father, a man of spiritual leanings and a warrior of immense courage and bravery and, above all, a visionary. He was well versed in many languages, including Sanskrit, Persian, Gurmukhi, and *Braj Bhasha*. His foresight in anointing the *Adi Granth* as the living Guru of the Sikhs ensured the new religion from becoming a fiefdom and property of the privileged. He placed the intertemporal power of the Sikhs in the book of divinity and knowledge whose compilation was started in 1603 by Guru Arjan, the Fifth Guru of the Sikhs and finished in 1604.

In 1708, knowing that his end was near, Guru Gobind sanctified the spiritual power of the *Akal Purkh*, in the *Adi Granth* by placing a five paisa coin on it, reciting ‘*Waheguru Ji Ka Khalsa, Waheguru Ji Ki Fateh*’ and bowing his head before it, a custom of the times. Thus, the *Adi Granth* became *Guru Granth Sahib* and took the place of the Gurus.



Guru Gobind Singh ji anointing Guru Granth Sahib ji as the Guru

Agya bhai Akal ki/tabhi chalayo Panth/Sabh Sikhan ko hukam hai/Guru manyo Granth/Guru Granth Ji manyo/pargat Guran ki deh/Jo Prabhu ko milbo chahe khoj shabad mein le/Raj karega Khalsa/aqi rahei na koe/Khuwar hoe sabh milange/bache sharan jo hoe.

“Under orders of the divinity, the immortal (*Akal*), the Sikh Panth was created. All the Sikhs are enjoined to accept the *Granth* as their Guru (*Sab Sikhan ko hukum hai, Guru Manayo Granth*). The *Granth* is the embodiment (*Deh*) of the Guru. Those who want to meet the creator (*prabh ko milbo chahe*), should look for in the hymns (*khoj shabad mein le*). The *Khalsa*, the Pure, will take power, and the evil that stands in the path of righteousness will be destroyed. Those separated (*khwar howe*) from the pure, will unite (*sab milange bache sharan jo hoe*) and the world will be free of the sinful.”

As Nanak knew that he had to feed the hungry rather than start a trading business as requested by his father, so did Gobind know that he was destined to fight injustice and the forces of evil.

*Chirion se main baaz turaun,
Gidderon se main sher banaun,
Nichon se main ucch banaun,
Sawa lakh se ek laraun,
Thab Gobind Singh naam kahaun.*

“I will make the doves fight with eagles, will make the cowardly hyenas take on the mighty lions, I will make the downtrodden square off with the powerful, I will make one of my soldiers fight the might of an

army of a lakh and a quarter, and only then I will call myself Guru Gobind.”

This composition, when he was barely a young lad of eight became a battle cry years later when he and his band of 42 brave and fearless soldiers fought Aurangzeb’s mighty army at the second battle of Chamkaur Sahib in December 1705. Separated from their larger army upon crossing the river Sutlej, the group took refuge in a small mud fort (*Kachchi Garhi*). Though a truce had been signed and Guru Gobind was promised a safe passage, he was betrayed by Wazir Khan, the Nawab of Sirhind, and the small group was soon surrounded by the mighty Mughal Army. From their position inside the mud fort, 42 Sikh soldiers led by Guru Gobind fought till their ammunition ran out and then came out in batches of five and fought the army that outnumbered them exponentially. These 42 brave men of Gobind’s army also find a mention in the daily *Ardas* as *Chali Mukte* (40 liberated men), who fought valiantly and bravely and gave up their lives for a just cause.

The guru also made his childhood prophecy come true.

*Sawa lakh se ek laraun,
Thab Gobind Singh naam kahaun.*

The Sikh panth saw two Gurus, Guru Arjan (Fifth Guru) and Guru Tegh Bahadur (Ninth Guru) embrace martyrdom, fighting the tyranny of the ruling powers before Guru Gobind’s ascension as the Tenth Guru. With Guru Gobind rests the glory of changing the course of Sikhism from a *Sufi* faith to a Martial power, while maintaining the tenets of both. His reasons, however, remained just; the sword was to be picked up only if all else failed. A deeply spiritual leader, he wrote a letter now known as the *Zafarnama* (written in Persian) in which he called out Aurangzeb’s lack of morality in governance and war and laid out his beliefs about the dispensation of justice and dignity without fear. It came to be called the ‘Epistle of Victory’. Severely rebuking and indicting Aurangzeb, the Guru pointed out his weaknesses as a human being and admonished him for excesses as a leader and for being a cruel and distorted human being. Guru Gobind reminded Aurangzeb how he had broken an oath taken on the holy *Quran* and therefore, he could not be trusted.



Nine-year-old Guru Gobind ji is seen saying, “Father, who is greater than thee in these gloomy times, who can be equal to this great and stupendous task? Who else but my beloved Father can face the Emperor and try to show him the right path to peace, unity and harmony? Who else besides thee, O Gurudeva, can sacrifice his life, if such a crisis arises?”

One of the most quoted verses from the *Zafarnama* is verse 22:

*Chun kar az hameh heelate dar guzasht,
Halal ast burdan bi-shamsher dast*

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

Guru Gobind Singh shall forever remain the man who guided his father to the righteous path, and sacrificed his sons on the same path too. A delegation of 500 Brahmins had decided to meet Guru Tegh Bahadur ji and asked the Kashmiri scholar, Kripa Ram to lead them. Kripa Ram ji told Guru Tegh Bahadur ji about the suffering and torture inflicted on Hindus for not accepting Islam. Seeing his father, Guru Tegh Bahadur, the Ninth Guru of the Sikhs, deep in thought regarding the threat faced by the Kashmiri Pandits to convert to Islam by the General of the Mughal Army or face certain death, the young Gobind asked what could be done to help them. Upon being informed by his father that, “Grave are the burdens the earth bears. She will be redeemed only if a truly worthy person comes forward to lay down his head. Distress will then be expunged and

happiness ushered in”, Gobind Rai, turned to his father and with utmost innocence replied, “Father, none could be worthier than you to make such a sacrifice.”

The outcome of this conversation saw Guru Tegh Bahadur declare to Emperor Aurangzeb that if he, Tegh Bahadur, could be persuaded to convert to Islam, the Pandits of Kashmir would follow suit. This led to the Ninth Guru’s capture during which



A fresco of Guru Gobind Singh and The Panj Piare in Gurdwara Bhai Than Singh built during the reign of Maharaja Ranjit Singh

he was tortured mercilessly yet refused to convert to Islam. He was martyred on 11 November 1675, following the orders of Emperor Aurangzeb. Upon hearing of his father's fate, young Gobind Rai recited this *chaupai*, signifying his understanding of the life that lay in front of him now.

*Thheekar forh dilees sir, prabh pur keea payaan,
Teg Bahadur see kirya, karee na kinahoo aan.
Teg Bahaadur ke chalat, bhayo jagat ko sok,
Hai hai hai sabh jag bhayo, jai jai sur lok.*

“Casting off his bodily vesture on the head of the feudal lord of Delhi, Guru Tegh Bahadur departed to the Empire of God. None who came into the world performed such splendid deeds as him. On his departure, there was dismay in the world. This world cried in sorrow and the heavens rang with greetings of victory to welcome him.”

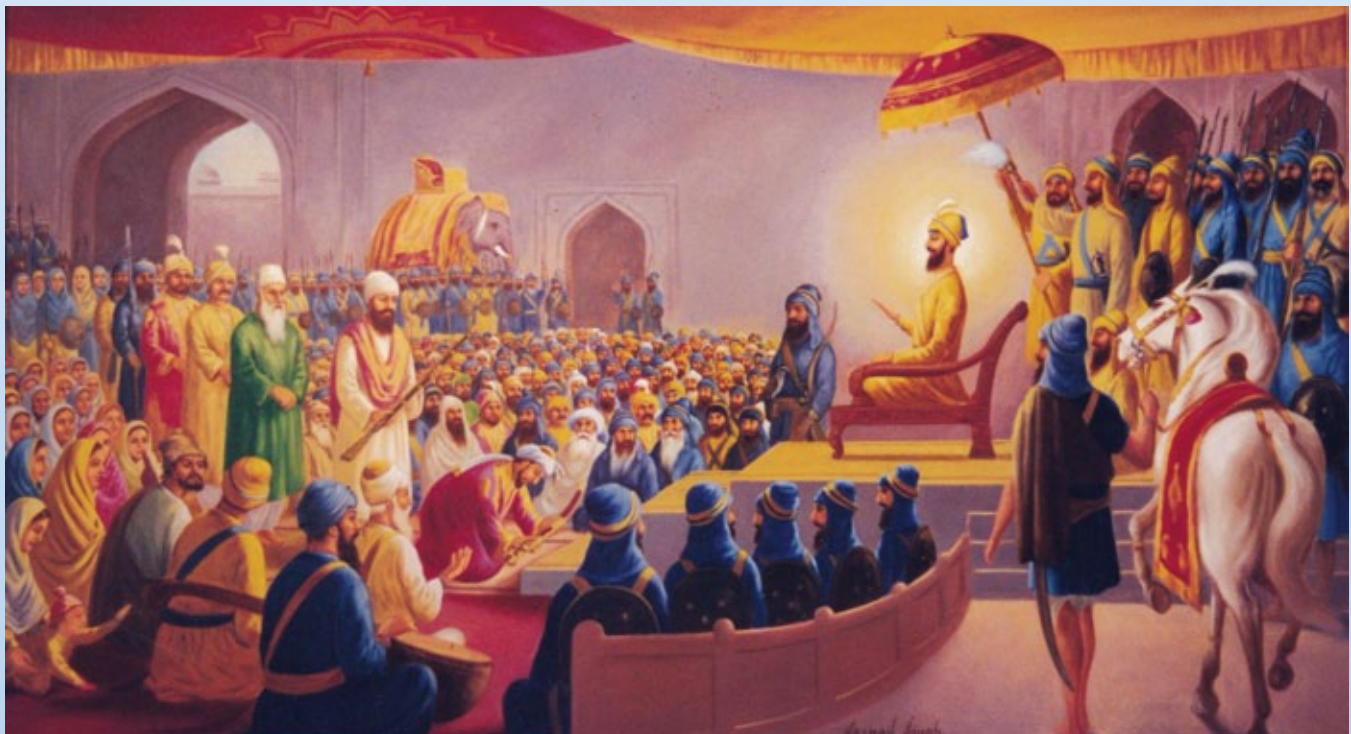
However, when Aurangzeb's men challenged the followers of Guru Tegh Bahadur to claim his tortured and decapitated body, nobody came forward. The fear of retribution and reprisal prevented those present at the public beheading from revealing themselves as Sikhs. To a young Gobind, this was indeed a moment

of epiphany. In 1699, Guru Gobind created a Sikh community, which was identifiable by their *roop* or looks.

In 1699, on the holy day of Vaisakhi at Fort Keshgarh Sahib, Anandpur Sahib, Guru Gobind initiated the Khalsa Panth. On that day, Guru Gobind transformed the *Sufi* Panth established by Guru Nanak in the 1500s to a martial Khalsa Panth.

Guru Gobind had started to work towards the creation of the Khalsa Panth much earlier than 1699, as his writings indicate. Besides taking forward the greeting of *Fateh* from Guru Hargobind (Eighth Guru of the Sikhs) and Guru Tegh Bahadur (Ninth Guru), he knew that he was going to name the path as the *Khalsa*. *Khalsa* in Persia means pure and to Guru Gobind, it signified the righteous and just community that he wanted to create.

For this passage of initiation, Guru Gobind needed five men. To find the five people who would stand brave and fearless with him, he asked the congregation to come forward with neither fear of death nor worry of what others would say. He asked for five volunteers. “Those who want to submerge their being, those who



Jarnail Singh's painting of Guru Gobind Singh ji holding court was unveiled to commemorate his 350th birthday

want to play the game of life, those who will put their heads on the palm of their hand should come to the trail on which I await. And walk with me.”

*Jao tao parem khelan kã chão.
Sir dhar tali galĩ merĩ ão.*

“If you desire to play this game of love with Me, then step onto My Path with your head in hand.”

He continued thus,

*It mārāg pair dharĩjai.
Sir dījai kãñ na kījai.*

“When you place your feet on this Path, Give me your head and don’t pay any attention to public opinion.”

To extoll the listens gathered there Gobind further recited,

*Gagan Damama Bajeo, Bhariyo Nishaney Ghao
Khet Jo Maange Soorma, Ab jhujhan ko dao.*

“The war horn has been sounded, aims have been taken,

When the battlefield asks for a warrior, it’s time to fight.”

He borrowed the next two lines from Sant Kabir and brought spirituality into his martial prayer.

*Sura So Pahchanye, Jo Lare din key haet,
Purza Purza Kat Mare, Kabhun Na Chade Khet.*

“Know that man to be a true warrior, who fights in defence of the defenceless; He may be hacked limb by limb, but he never flees the battlefield.”

Five people from different walks of life volunteered to give their life to the Guru and were, one by one, led to a tent situated at a short distance. Each time the Guru emerged from the tent, his sword was bloodied, yet the next volunteer was ready. After five men had followed the Guru to the tent, they all emerged (a little later) and were led back to the congregation by Guru Gobind, “hand in hand with the five”.

They were all similarly dressed in saffron tunics and turbans. Guru Gobind made *Amrit* (nectar) from water, sugar crystals and mixed and *cut the liquid* with

his *Khanda* (small-dagger) and used the holy-water to baptise them.

Bhai Daya Ram became Bhai Daya Singh, Bhai Dharam Ram became Bhai Dharam Singh, Bhai Himmat Rai became Bhai Himmat Singh, Bhai Mohkam Chand became Bhai Mohkam Singh, and Bhai Sahib Chand became Bhai Sahib Singh.

After the ceremony, the Guru called these men his *Panj Pyaras*, five beloveds. He then turned to them and bowing in front of them, asked them to baptize him into their fold. And, at that surreal moment, Gobind Rai became Guru Gobind Singh.

This was enshrined in the following lines, showcasing the Guru’s humility in becoming the disciple of his disciples and taking forward the basic tenet of Sikhism, as the name suggests, to be a student for life.

*Waho waho Gobind Singh,
Aapey Gur Chela,
Waho waho Gobind Singh,
Hai Sache Takth Rachiye, Sath Sangath Mela,
Waho Waho Gobind Singh
Apey Gur Chela.*

“Praise be on Gobind Singh, for he is the Guru and he is the disciple too. He has raised a true court from a congregation of mortals, thus raising the bar of truth and courage.”

Thus, Gobind Rai became *Sache Padshah*, Guru Gobind Singh Ji Maharaj. Guru Gobind Singh later revealed that he had killed five goats inside the tent, with a single sharp cut of the sword, and called it *Jhatka*, a hard cut.

The Khalsa religion created five symbols for the newly baptized Sikhs to adorn. After this day, Sikhs could be identified by their unshorn hair (*kesh*), the comb to keep it neat and in place (*kanga*), the steel bangle on their right wrist (*kada*), a sword on their person (*kirpan*), and their drawstring underpants (*kachha*). This was done to send a message to Aurangzeb, who had called the Guru’s Sikhs cowards and who were not willing to reveal themselves for fear of religious persecution. Hereafter, Sikhs were identified by their *roop* and were battle ready in every sense of the word.

The women of the fold were given the suffix of Kaur to identify them as *Guru di Sikhni*. They too had to grow their hair long and adorn the markers of Sikh identity as outlined by Guru Gobind.

The *Khalsa Panth* thus created replaced Guru Nanak's salutation from *Sat Kartar*, 'Hail the Eternal Creator with Guru Gobind's *Waheguru Ji Da Khalsa*, *Waheguru Ji Di Fateh*, 'the Khalsa belongs to the Divine and through the Divine will be victorious.'

Though Guru Gobind enshrined the requirements of those who want to follow the *Khalsa Panth*, as 'to live with courage and bravery and with the most exalted levels of righteousness', he did not take away the principle of *Sewa* from Sikhism. He added to it. Whereas Guru Nanak likened earth to *deg* (kettle, cooking pot), the ever-bountiful provider, Guru Gobind Singh acknowledged the *tegh* or sword with the Creator. The iron from the inner depths of earth, that creates the *deg*, is also used to coax the *tegh*. He referred to it as *Bhagauti* (goddess), *Sri Kharag* (Lord Sword), *Jag Karan* (Creator of the World) and *Sristi Ubaran* (Saviour of the Creation), besides reiterating its role as protector of the good (*Sukh Santan Karnan*) and destroyer of the evil (*Dumiatl Daman*). In a passage in his *Krishnavtar*, Guru Gobind Singh says: *Deg teg jag mai dou chalai* – "I have used both the kettle and the sword." It signified the twin responsibility of the Khalsa: to provide food and protection for those in need.

Guru Gobind combined compassion with protection of the marginalised by the social structures and religions by upholding *Loh Langar Tapde Rahen* and *Deg Tegh Fateh*. It translates to: "the fires of the kitchen be always warm and the kettle be ready to cook and the sword be ready to strike at evil."

Guru Ji also showcased his support of feminine energy early on in his writings. In his work titled *Chandi Charitar Ukati Bilas*, written at Anandpur Sahib in 1698 in *Brij Bhasha*, Guru Gobind invokes the feminine power of *Shakti*. *Chandi* stands for the incarnation of fierce *shakti*, the female form of cosmic energy, *Bilas* refers to the chronicles of heroics, *Ukati* means in relation to, and *Charitar* specifies characteristics and function. So, *Chandi Charitar Ukati Bilas* stands for

"Discussion on characteristics and functions of *Chandi*". It is contained in the 4th chapter of the Dasam Granth.

In *Chandi Ki Waar Baani*, one also finds the battle cry of his *Khalsa* warriors, *Deh Shiva Bar Mohe Eha*, one of the most celebrated *Shabads* of Guru Gobind. It connects with the listener in the manner in which it is written and the imagery of the Guru invoking Shiva. The Shiva in this *Shabad* is often mistaken to refer to the cosmic power of Shiv-Shakti. However, in his *Baani Benti Chaupai Sahib*, Guru Gobind clarifies that he does not believe in Mahadev to be Shiva, the third part of the triumvirate of Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva. *Mahadev ko Keht Sada-Shiv, Nirankar ka Chinat Nai-Bhiv*. He says you refer to Mahadev as Sada-Shiv, yet you do not recognise the formless source of power, the Nir-ankar. To him Shiva is the divine energy, whom he invokes to grant him the boon of strength of the body and the mind.

This rousing *Shabad* lays out the determination required to be a warrior of the Guru's army. It merges the physical with the sublime and the spiritual and energizes the listener with inner strength and instills a desire to do right.

In the quatrain, *Chaupai's* first line, (*Deh Shiva bar mohe-i-hai, shubh karman tey kabhu na taroo*) Guru Gobind extolls the divine to grant him the body and soul that would not refrain from moving on the path of right, however fearful that path maybe and however huge the sacrifice it may ask for. *Na daroo ar siyoo jab jah laroon, Nischai kar apni jeet karoon*. He then appeals to the *Akal*, the divine to remove fear and self-doubt from his mind and fill it with resolve and fortitude, so as to enable him to 'fight all the battles of his life without distress and win them with determination and confidence in his abilities'. *Ar Sikh hao apne hi man ko, Eh lalch hou goon tau uchroo* – He requests the benevolent to grant him the ability to attain an exalted position to focus only on the wondrous creator and its creation and honoring its dignity by speaking of its worth and singing its praises (*goon tau uchroo*). *Jab aav ki audh nidhann banay, Aut he rann me tab joojh maroo* – he ends his prayer by invoking his right on his faith and extolls the celestial powers to ensure that when his

Deh Shiva bar mohe-i-hai,
shubh karman tey kabhu na taroo
Na daroo ar siyoo jab jah laroona,
Nischai kar apni jeet koroo
Ar Sikh hao apne hi man ko,
Eh lalch hou goon tau uchroo
Jab aav ki audh nidhann banay,
Aut he rann me tab joojh maroo

Chitrak

Painting by Chitrak

end is nigh and it is time for his mortal life to end, the *Akal* will entrust him to the battlefield fighting for truth, righteousness, and justice, his dignity and courage intact.

In 1705, his two elder sons, Ajit Singh (18) and Jujhar Singh (14) were martyred in the Battle of Chamkaur. The Guru's steadfast support for a righteous cause was also challenged when Wazir Khan had his two young sons, Zorawar (9) and Fateh (7) pillared alive. They too refused to convert to Islam in return for a safe passage out of captivity. Yet, Guru Gobind Singh refused to give up his fight against injustice.

Heartbroken at the loss of his young sons, and separated from his larger army, Guru Gobind wrote this Shabad while in the Machhivara forest. He beseeched the Lord to understand the anguish of separation. Full of sorrow and grief, he recited these words,

*Mittar Pyare Nu, Haal Mureedan Da Kehna
Tudh Bin Rog Rajaian Da Odhan, Nag Nivasan
De Rehna
Sul Surahi Khanjar Pyala, Bing Kasaian Da Sehna
Yaarare Da Sanu Sathar Changa, Bhath Kherean
Da Rehna*

The first word *Mitr* or friend has a special meaning; it refers to the divine; deep and evocative, it treats the spiritual being as a friend, as not as somebody one has to please or be fearful of. It places the responsibility of friendship on the benevolent one. And it supplicates the invincible one to recognise that. It compares the indifference of the friend to that of a venomous snake; the friend's unresponsiveness akin to drinking poison, his abandonment as painful as being butchered like an animal at the hands of an unfeeling one. It talks of separation at two levels, physical-the loss of his four sons and metaphorical-even more grievous, the separation from the great divine itself.

"Please tell the dear friend - *mitr pyare nu*, my beloved Lord and friend - the plight of his disciples, *haal murida da kehna*. Without You, rich blankets

wrap me like disease (*rog rajiyan*) and the comfort of the house is like living in a snake pit (*naag nivasa deh rehna*). I can't even partake water, the elixir of life, the water pitchers (*sul surahi*) are like stakes of torture and our cups have edges like daggers (*khanjar pyala*). In addition to my loss, your neglect is like the suffering of animals at the hands of butchers (*bind kasaiyan da sehna*). Please envelop me in your care, your straw bed (*sathar changa*) is more pleasing to me than living in costly mansions, their furnace like heat eviscerates me (*bhath kheraia da rehna*)."

Guru Gobind lived, preached and died for the words that he believed in, that all men are equal and there is no one bigger or smaller than the other, *Manas ki jaat saabeo, eko pehchan hai*. In the daily prayer *Tav Prasad Swaihye*, his words eschew hatred, differences and idolatry. It talks of how to worship and realise God. This Bani appears in the Sri Dasam Granth Sahib Ji on pages 13 to 15:

*Kaha bhayo jo dou lochan mund kai baith rahio
bak dhian lagaeo.
Nhat phirio leei sat samundran lok gayo parlok
gavaio.
Bas kio bikhian so baith kai aise hi aise su bais bitaio.
Sach kahon sun leho sabai jin prem kio tin hee prabh
paio.*

"You sit and meditate with your eyes shut (*dou lochan mund kai*), what do you achieve by looking for the divine in the seven seas (*nath phirio leei sat samundran*), you lose this world and the nether one too (*lok gayo, parlok gavaio*). You give orations, you talk down, you spend all your life in giving sermons (*Bas kio bikhian*), and you achieve nothing (*aise su bais bitaio*). Listen to the truth, the only way to reach the divine is to radiate, give, and receive love (*jin prem kiyo, tin hi prabh payo*)."

There will never be a Gobind again, a man so revered that he is called *Sache Padshah, Kalgidaar Dashmesh Pitah Guru Gobind Singh Ji Maharaj*.

Dr. Sarabjeet Dhody Natesan

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ROYALS AND REBELS

THE RISE AND FALL OF THE SIKH EMPIRE

Ik si rajah, ik si rani, dono margeh, khatham kahaani!

...but not for Priya Atwal, the author of *Royals and Rebels*, who, through her debut book, explores the intricate world of the Sikh Empire, long after it ended

**The summer of 2009;
Oxford, in all its glory;
A talk organised by the Oxford
University Sikh Society on Empire of the
Sikhs;
And eleven years later, *Royals and Rebels*.**

“It was in the first year at university, when my friends at the Sikh Society organised a talk on the Sikh Empire, dragging me to it, saying that I was going to be the only History student at that talk. Everyone else, mostly Asians, was from the other fields, like law and medicine. They wanted me to ask questions too, to avoid any awkwardness”, says Priya Atwal, going back to how it all started. “It was a lecture on Patwant Singh’s book, *Empire of the Sikhs*, and I remember, that at the end of the talk, when the speaker spoke about Rani Jindan, and how she stood up against the British, about the Anglo-Sikh wars, and about how it all went wrong for her, I was blown away. I found myself wondering as to why I hadn’t heard about her. I wanted to know more, I was at the edge of my seat. The speaker, even though Punjabi, had spoken about her in slightly negative tones, but I somehow knew there was more to this Maharani. At the end of the session, I went over and asked if I could volunteer with them for research. The same summer they signed me up to work on some research at the British Library.”

A whole new world opened up for Priya, a world she had not known had existed.



“I was exposed to Sikh History, growing up in a British Sikh family, but I wasn’t really exposed to the history of the Sikh Empire”, she elaborates. “I grew up going to the gurdwara, knowing about

the gurus, seeing posters and learning about the shaheeds, the freedom struggle, Bhagat Singh, the Partition, but it seems that somehow I had missed the middle section, about Maharaja Ranjit Singh, the Sikh Empire, and that Maharani Jindan ever lived. My mother was born and brought up in the UK, so I let her off easily, but I did ask my father as to why he didn't talk about the stories of the Sikh Empire. As mentioned in the conclusion, he just said that he was never really enjoyed History at school and somehow he never thought of talking about it. His favourite phrase is, "Ik si rajah, ik si rani, dono margeh, khatham kahaani". We have had lots of interesting conversations about this and it's ironic that when the book came out he devoured my book the moment it came out. He finished it in two days and absolutely loved it. The feedback that I have received from people has been encouraging. Many people have mentioned that they had no idea about the history of the Punjabi royals."

The seeds for this vivid narrative were planted in her undergraduate years. As Priya started her research, one thing lead to another. She was asked to look into Gobindgarh Fort, and as she turned the pages of the archives, she discovered how Maharani Jindan had tried to protect the treasury, which was housed in this famous fort. Inspired by Jindan's story and her grit, intrigued by the stubbornness of this young queen, she delved deeper into the gendered politics of that era. Her research made her realise that there was more to Sikh History than what was portrayed. Eleven years of exploring and evaluating the primary sources that were available, first for her undergraduate thesis and then for her PhD., enabled her to weave eloquent prose of the role played by the forgotten and often misinterpreted ranis and princes of the Sukherchakia clan and their dynamic politics.

Royals and Rebels brings out the different facets of Maharani Jindan, who as per colonial imperialists, was one of the people responsible for the downfall of the Sikh Empire. The Messalina of Punjab, as she was called by the Sahibs of the

East India Company, was the Maharaja's kennel keeper's daughter.

"Her story journey was a fascinating one", says Priya. "I wanted to write a biography of Rani Jind Kaur. But as I scratched the surface more, all the other Maharanis came forward and that completely changed the fabric of the book. I realised that you can't just exceptionalise one queen anymore. She is an incredible figure but she follows in the footsteps of so many other women and so many other characters, and they are all integral to each other's story. This lead me to reimagine the whole dynastic setup and understand how they related to Sikhi and how they rose."

For centuries, what was known about the Sikh Empire was what the colonial writers had written, grand and dramatic, stereotyping the men who ruled, and relegating the women into the background. While Maharaja Ranjit Singh, Sher-e-Khalsa, was given his place in the limelight, the queens, the princes, and the playmakers hardly found any mention, except in a few letters exchanged or the official records for stipends and pensions paid. There were portraits, that adorned the walls of museums, but very little was known about those royals. How they shaped their destinies and what influenced them, was ignored.

Priya Atwal's debut publication is a brilliant addition to the plethora of literature that is available on the Sikh Empire.

The uniqueness of this narrative is that it focuses on the players who have so far been overlooked and brings forth their intricate histories. Some of them were rebellious, questioning the standards they were measured against, wanting to leave their mark in the pages of their dynastic chronicles. From the pages of Royals and Rebels emerge the vivid characters of Sada Kaur, Mai Nakain, Prince Kharak Singh, Prince Nau Nihal Singh, and Rani Chand Kaur. One of the primary sources used is the writings of the Maharaja's court historian, Sohan Lal Suri.

Priya's insightful articulation gives due respect and credit to the views of those who have written before her. She carefully dissects the events that



Ranjit Singh, Maharaja of the Punjab, with his wife and child accompanied by his secondary wives. Gouache painting

unfolded, keeping in mind the dynamic socio-economic fabric of 18th and 19th century India, and brings forth her views on the rise and fall of the Sikh Empire.

Her modernistic approach to analysing History is inclusive, piquing the interest of the reader, and encouraging them to make their own observations. Priya's prose is evocative, bringing to life not just the durbar of Ranjit Singh, which was known for balancing the Sikh ethos with a political power play, but the centuries old story of the birth of Sikhism and how it shaped the history of the region.

The charm of her writing is complimented with the rich images from the Samrai Collection, the British Library, the British Museum, the Kapany Collection, the Victoria and Albert Museum and the photography of Aown Ali.

The cover image by the Singh Twins is a visual delight.

The book ends with the annexation of Punjab by the British, but the story will continue with her next project on the life and image of Maharaja Duleep Singh, also known as the Black Prince of Perthshire.

"Kanwar Kharak Singh ... wants energy and his manners are not in his favor nor is his mind brightened by those beams of intelligence which appear both in the conduct and the observations of his young and active son, but I am not inclined to consider him so utterly destitute of intellect as is generally supposed. The studious manner in which he has avoided for many years taking any prominent part in the affairs of his father's Government beyond what he may be charged to do is the result of reflection and does not arise from indifference to his situation. He has a just perception of Ranjit Singh's distrustful character and considers it good policy to follow the course which he has adopted [staying out of things] ... He had at one time a large force under his command and paid by himself of which he has been dispossessed more perhaps from the Maharaja's distrust than the Kanwar's alleged incapacity to manage his affairs. At present he has only a small establishment but still retains about ten Lakhs of Rupees of territory while his son is charged with the government of the recent conquests of the Sikhs in the direction of Dera Ismail Khan. Kanwar Kharak Singh is of a mild and humane disposition and though not much feared he is loved by his dependants while no one in the country bears ill-will to him for he has injured no one."

Wade to Macnaghten, 1 January 1838, in Fauja Singh (ed.), *Maharajah Kharak Singh: select records preserved in the National Archives of India* (Patiala: Dept of Punjab Historical Studies, Punjabi University, 1977), pp. 12-13.

**Excerpt from *Royals and Rebels*
by Priya Atwal**

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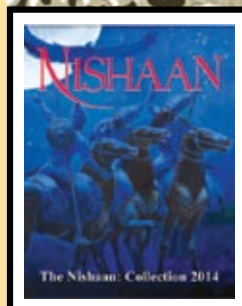
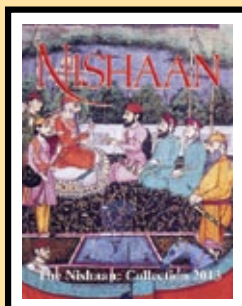
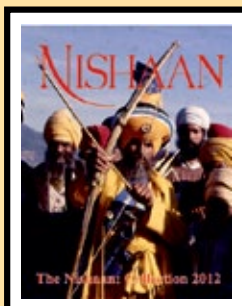
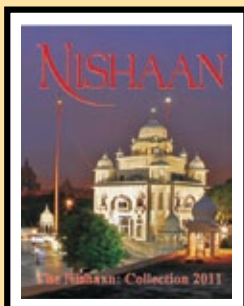
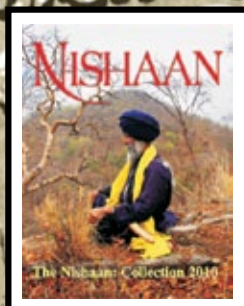
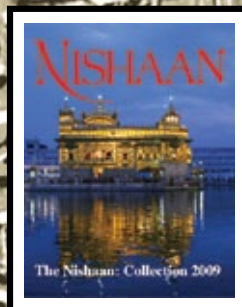
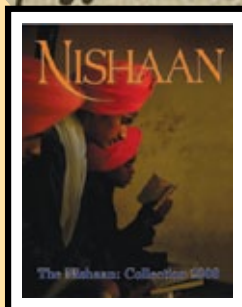
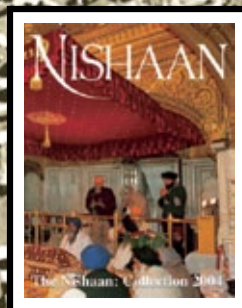
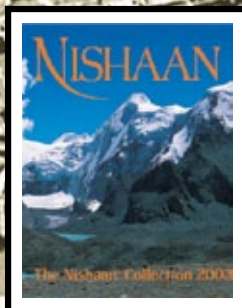
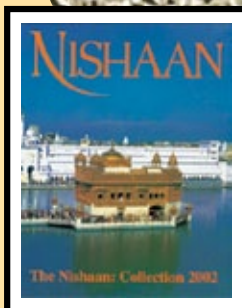
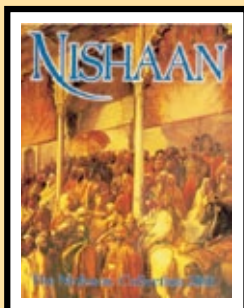
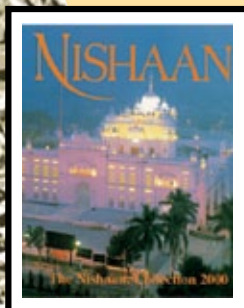


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