

II/2021

# NISHAAN

NAGAARA



REMEMBERING PUSHPINDAR SINGH





*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





# Contents

## Issue II/2021

- 02 Editorial**  
**SIKHI: Think Globally Act Locally**  
 By: IJ Singh



- 04 Remembering Pushpinder Singh**  
 By: Roopinder Singh



- 26 A Faith for Thinkers: Sikhi**  
 By: H.S. Ahluwalia



- 34 Sulej to Brahmaputra**  
 By: Bhupinder 'Bo' Singh



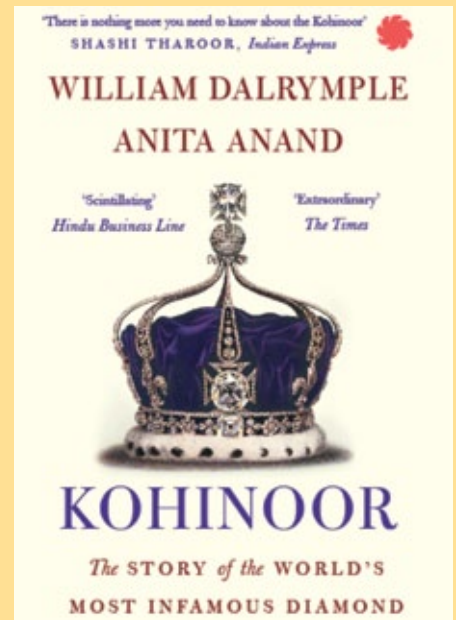
- 39 Farmers Protest: Fault Lines to Fort Lines**  
 By: Amandeep Sandhu



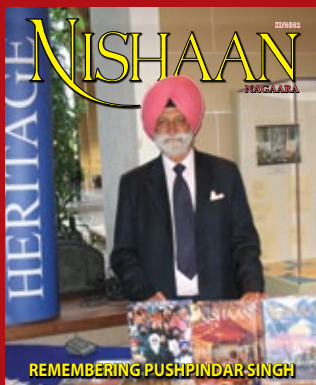
- 45 Closed Minds Open Hearts: A True Story**  
 By: I.J. Singh



- 47 The Chillianwala Battle**  
 By: Lt. Gen. Kirpal Singh Randhawa



- 59 Getting to know Anita Anand**  
 By: Artika Aurora Bakshi



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# SIKHI: Think Globally Act Locally

This Editorial owes its birth to some of the last brief conversations and contacts with the late Pushpinder Singh, the illustrious Founder of *Nishaan Nagaara*. Even though he lived in India and I was on the other end of the globe, I always thought that his base was not India but the greater globe itself. We enjoyed our many exchanges, though sometimes quite brief.

But I learned rapidly that for a good imaginative writer the location is not important, ideas and events are the core of interest and the whole wide world is the territory.

I come from a lifetime in academia. Note that academics habitually need 50 minutes to make a point. I hope, pray and try to be otherwise. Hence global Sikhi is the theme and “Sikhi Anew” comes as a reminder.

Pushpinder Singh, the Founder giant of *Nishaan*. We had known each other for a long time, though our contacts were sporadic during the past few years. I have been late in taking stock of matters and thinking of steps to initiate corrective action. Pushpinder was a memorable partner. Over the years I have worked with many movers and shakers in our community with often mixed results; yet, I am grateful for the opportunities; the journey continues to teach me.

Many of us who came as young and ambitious recognized early that the message of Sikhism is inclusive and egalitarian. It recognizes that

*“Stone walls do not prison make nor iron bars a cage, minds innocent and quite take that for a hermitage. If I have freedom in my love and in my soul am free, Angels alone that soar above enjoy such liberty.”* Sikhi indeed comes to us with a message that uniquely recognizes its promises, and unfailingly points to our place and duty.

Of course, we now accommodate at least two realities in us - Sikhs, young and old, who live in sometimes contradictory worlds of culture, cuisine, language, ideas, art, philosophy, morals, edicts and ethics. In our frustrated contradictory reactions sometimes, we think of *“East is East and West is West; Never the twain shall meet.”* But the twain does meet and gifts us a life that is richer than either alone.

If, as we do, we want an equal place at the table of this or any society, we have to create that space and earn and it. *Failing that, look carefully, and we will likely be found listed on the menu - a place that our dignity will and should reject as soon as we see it.*

In a successful genetic mix of different cultures, the successful admirable model values the host culture as well as the new arrivals. *The two cultures can and will learn from each other enriching both.* Luckily, this kind of thinking has shaped us.

As far as I know your readers, my understanding of our life and theirs resonate to similar values.



This might seem like a longish ‘*Introduction*. We need to enhance communication such that we find friends and create relationships amongst strangers in the world. In some communities we will enter as stranger to soon become treasured and welcomed friends. In other places the newness might last a lifetime.

I hope that *Nishaan Nagaara* comes to a more direct purpose and process.

We have in mind interesting exchanges on new immigrants and how new immigrants see themselves less immigrants and more natives. How long does the process take - less than a generation? Do race, religion, the color of your skin and accent of speech matter? I will deliberately not explore this further today. But believe me these matters are important. Unfortunately, such discussions have been few and far between. *Nishaan Nagarra* comes to accelerate the process.

Sikhs have been in North America since the First World War and construction of the Panama Canal. These were some of the early settlers from India.

We need to parse the relationships of the many kinds of Americans that make up the rich mix that constitutes our neighbours in America.

The first Sikhs came to America as laborers on the Panama Canal in 1901–1904. Now in the evening of my life I often think: My candle burns at both ends; it will not last the night. But oh, my foes and ah my friends, it casts a lovely light.” We have had a colorful and eventful past here.

The persistent issue has been that our neighbors know so little of us. But I ask how well do we know them. Good neighbours need to know each other even though “Good fences make good neighbours”. When we interact with others, both learn, the world becomes smaller. History speaks of peoples sharing music, culture, language,

cuisine - things that make them what they are. Just look at Sikh tradition in such matters. When we share these traits with neighbours, both cultures expand their horizons in the new fusion reality.

Yet, we deserve and need an equal place at the table of this society, so we have to explore the common ground between us. If we do not define that equal place, mind you then we are at best listed on the menu, never mind how big the market place – in fact, not a place you ever want to be.

Be not afraid of sharing the ground with others. Look at language, music and cuisine. The richness in it is a contribution from others from other cultures over time - non-Punjabis and non-Indians. Look at the spirit of Sikhi that speaks of the worldly life *Meeri* and the spiritual – *Peeri*. Diminish neither. Remember that the whole is always greater than the sum of the parts, for good and equally as well as for evil, sometimes.

As long as we live, we should never stop tinkering with our ideas and how they define their place in our lives. The institutions that we design are not necessarily to battle or challenge the existing ones but to provide new ways to look at these matters and create ways to expand our horizon in the new world. But when the moment calls for action on such matter it often asks us to make the best workable choices. But keep in mind that much depends on opportunity and what possibility of choices are available since they are often limited. And yet, we will continue to slip and make mistakes, as also we will enjoy triumphant moments.

I would ask that in the process we always continue to “**Think globally but act locally. Thus, we will keep in our mind the larger picture of what we do and how we impact our existence.**”

IJ Singh  
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# PUSHPINDAR SINGH

## 1943–2021

# REMEMBERING PUSHPINDAR SINGH

Managing editor **NISHAAN NAGAARA**

**Z**est for life is what stands out when one thinks of Pushpindar Singh, the founder of the Nishaan 'Illustrated Journal of the Sikhs' and an elder of the Sikh Forum.

Born in Murree in undivided the Punjab on 30 September 1943, Pushpindar Singh comes from a distinguished army family—his father being one of the first King's Commissioned Indian Officers from Sandhurst and his father-in-law, perhaps the senior most Gunner Officer of the Indian Army.

His father was the legendary Major General Mohindar Singh Chopra, one of the earliest King's Commissioned Indian Officers from Sandhurst who was also responsible for establishing the Wagah Border in October 1947 between India and the new nation of Pakistan. After three decades in the Indian Army, General Mohindar Singh was appointed as India's first

Ambassador to the Philippines and later was Director-General of the National Institute of Sports at Patiala.

Coming from a Gursikh family of Amritsar-Lahore, Pushpindar Singh studied at The Doon School at Dehra Dun where he was appointed School Captain. After Doon School, he joined the Punjab University, Chandigarh. After completing his studies, he joined Gillanders Arbuthnot & Co. Ltd., one of the foremost producers of quality tea at that time. Four years or so later, Pushpindar Singh joined Rallies India to become its youngest General Manager. It was around that time that he met his life partner, Deepak Singh, the granddaughter of Sardar Bahadur Sir Sobha Singh OBE, one of the most prominent builders of New Delhi, and the daughter of Brigadier Gurbux Singh and Promila 'Kuku' Singh. The two were married in October 1966, at Delhi.





(Pushpinder Singh along with his colleagues, pose in front of a Rallies Wolf showroom)

## Roar of the Jets

While still at Rallies and recently married, the roar of the jets got the better of Pushpinder Singh and he left his prestigious job at Rallies India to devote himself to his passion – aviation. He wrote articles and had them published in aviation journals, until he decided to become a publisher himself! He would take *Vayu*, a little-known aviation journal to the top of its niche. So interested was he in the aviation industry that on a wet monsoon afternoon in June 1972, he witnessed the first landing of the Concorde in India, at Mumbai.

His knowledge and passion of the aviation industry impressed many and a few years later, in



(On a wet monsoon afternoon in June 1972, Pushpinder Singh along with senior dignitaries witnessed the first landing of the Concorde at Bombay Airport, India.)

1978, he became the Chief Executive of a leading German aerospace company, which he headed for 24 years, with several international accomplishments in the industry. As Chief Executive, Pushpinder Singh successfully brought the Dornier 228 light transport aircraft into India, involving comprehensive transfer of technology in licence manufacture of the Dornier 228 light transport aircraft in five variants.

Pushpinder rarely missed any Air-Show or Defence show. During one conversation, he mentioned that he had not missed a single air show at Farnborough in Britain since the early 1970s. His reputation as an expert in aviation preceded him and at these events, he met and freely interacted with pilots, managing directors of large aerospace companies, media channels, colleagues as well as his friends. He was also happy to ‘educate’ those who he felt had limited knowledge of their product, even if that person was the executive vice-president of a large billion dollar company.

## Indian Air Force's Chronicler

Pushpinder loved recording history and by combining his passion for aviation and history and he ended up publishing 21 books on the subject over the years. He was working on three more. Most of these books were on the Indian Air Force (IAF). One of his early books, ‘Aircraft of the Indian Air Force 1933-73’ is considered the reference book on the Indian Air Force. Naturally, he would go on to write books on the Golden and Diamond Jubilees of the Service.

His magnum opus was IAF's official history ‘Himalayan Eagles: History of the Indian Air Force’, which was released at the IAF's Platinum Jubilee by Marshal of the Air Force Arjan Singh DFC in 2007.

His other books include ‘The Battle Axes’, ‘History of Aviation in India: Spanning the Century of Flight’, ‘Fly Navy’, ‘Diamonds in the Sky’, ‘Tigers in the Sky’, ‘Valiant to the Last’, ‘The Black Archers’, ‘The Fighting Fourteen’, ‘On the Wings of Gold’, ‘Dragon Fire’, ‘First to the Last’, ‘The First Supersonics’, ‘Tusker Charge’, ‘Fly Navy’ plus two dozen more on military aviation history subjects. Pushpinder also published ‘Fiz'aya': Psyche of the Pakistan Air Force’, now considered a ‘must read’ for all Pakistani air force pilots.







that formed the World War I Jullundur Brigade in Flanders and Mesopotamia. These regiments include: the old 47th Sikh Regiment, now the 5th battalion of the Sikh Regiment of the Indian Army; the old Manchester Regiment, succeeded by the King's Regiment (Liverpool and Manchester), now The Duke of Lancaster's Regiment of the British Army; and the old 59th Scinde Rifles (Frontier Force), now 1st Battalion Frontier Force Regiment of the Pakistan Army.

The association was formed with the official approval of the three constituent countries and it exists to this day to maintain these historical affiliations by mutual liaison.

A major book that was the one off his regular flight path was also connected with family history. In 1997, he published '*1947: A Soldier's Story*'. Herein he chronicles the diary notes of his father, then Brigadier Mohindar Singh Chopra, who had taken over the 123 Brigade in 1947. The Brigadier was charged with

establishing and securing the Punjab border. The book recorded history from his perspective and what he witnessed and lived through. As the Brigadier's diary entry recorded: "There is little need to describe the events of that period, September-December 1947, for they are indelibly engraved in the memories of those who experienced them."

### Environmental Consciousness

Pushpindar was the Chairman of World Animal Protection. He was also a founding member of the Society for Protection of Kasauli and its Environment (SPOKE), a society focused on preserving the environment of Kasauli from greedy builders. He was on the board of a number of educational institutions and trusts.

### A Loving Son, Husband, Father and Grandfather

What can one say to describe a man who was a loving Son, Husband, Father, Grandfather. He loved his family and the greatest joy he got was to see his



(Standing height-wise, Dadaji and Dadiji along with their grandchildren)





(Standing L to R : Bhayee Sikandar Singh, Dr. Jaswant Singh Neki, Dr. IJ Singh, S. Anup Singh and S. Pushpindar Singh)



(Pushpindar Singh along-with his wife Deepak Chopra posing in front of Tata House, Doon School)



(Pushpindar Singh with the Fauja Singh, the oldest Marathon runner, now 110 years young)

family together, be it at weddings, family dinners, holidays or just a casual drop in to meet his family.

New Towers, Kasauli, his home in the mountains, played a major part in his growing up years. The bonds created in Kasauli have kept the family bond strong. It was at Kasauli where he invented the phrase ‘champagne weather’, to describe the crisp, clear blue skies of Kasauli. The smell of pine carried by the wind brought out this joy in his face, which he only got when he was there. He often discussed with the family how he would spend his retirement in Kasauli. His retirement plan always started with ‘Four months in Kasauli...’

Above everything else, Pushpindar Singh was a family man. He loved his grandchildren and the grandchildren looked forward to meeting with their *Dadaji*. Friday evenings were often spent in his house where the grandparents and grandchildren played ludo and jugs of *nimbu pani* were drunk. The highlight was *Dadaji*’s Mowgli stories. The grand kids favourite Mowgli story was about ‘Mowgli in space’. Typically, story time was followed by Pushpindar teaching the grandchildren *Sara Malan*, a card game he had learnt when he was a child. The children in turn taught their *Dadaji* the game of bluff.



(Pushpindar Singh (L) along with Gp. Capt. JC Mallik (R) pose outside the Leh airport, located at 3,256 meters above sea-level)



Then there are his expressions that have now become a part of Pushpindar Singh's family vocabulary. Phrases like '*kapra dhoyga*' – his way of thanking someone for doing something, a term he learnt from his eldest son, Vikramjit Singh when they were in

“ There was no denying that Pushy was a veritable walking encyclopedia on aviation matters in general and military aviation in particular. He always regaled one with nuggets of new information as also some of his stories about the various important personalities he knew, nationally and internationally, or what he had picked up from his visits to various shows abroad ”  
- Air Marshal Harish Masand (Retd.)



Calcutta...or '*Thand paigaye*', when he hugged his children and didn't want to let go. There was '*Chaddo Ji*', when he felt something was going to be an uphill task and he did not want anyone to sweat it. Then there was '*good man di laantain*' a simple thank you... The list carries on.

Pushpindar was at heart a simple man. He didn't care for flashy cars, pens or watches. He liked simple things. Aloo gobi for dinner, plain salted chips in the evening. He always carried a pad and pen in his pocket, so that he would never forget anything. Some of these small note pads, found in his cupboard go back to 1982.

When he lived in E-2 Defence Colony or when he stayed at his farmhouse, he would wake up early and walk on the grass barefoot. He often described the feeling of the dewdrops and the stiffness of the grass under his feet as ethereal.

Overall, Pushpindar lived his life in '*Chardi kala*'. He was a kind and caring man and for him family always came first.

Now, that's a good way to remember a person whose multifaceted personality and many accomplishments were not allowed to overshadow the basics that we all want in our elders, even as finding one who has them is exceedingly rare.

Roopinder Singh



# Pushpindar Singh Chopra



Pushpindar Singh is internationally well-known for his research and writing on Indian aviation matters for over five decades, being regarded as the virtual chronicler of India's aviation history and present times.

His 'Aircraft of the Indian Air Force 1933-73' the became standard reference book on the IAF and was followed by an account of the Service on its Golden and then Diamond Jubilees. The definitive three-volume History of the Indian Air Force 'Himalayan Eagles' was officially released at the IAF's Platinum Jubilee in 2007.

His various publications include 'The Battle Axes', 'Fiz'aya', 'History of Aviation in India: Spanning the Century of Flight', 'Fly Navy', 'Diamonds in the Sky', 'Tigers in the Sky', 'Valiant to the Last', 'The Black Archers', 'The Fighting Fourteen', 'On the Wings of Gold', 'Dragon Fire', 'First to the Last', 'The First Supersonics', 'Tusker Charge', 'Fly Navy' plus two dozen more on military aviation history subjects. He also wrote many books on other matters including a biography of his late father Major General Mohindar Singh Chopra (1947: A Soldier's Story), a book on 'Neuve Chapelle' & The Jullundur Brigade, 'Portrait

of Courage: Century of the 5<sup>th</sup> Battalion, The Sikh Regiment' amongst many others on varied topics.

He was the Founder-Editor of the Vayu Aerospace and Defence Review, now in its 47<sup>th</sup> year of publication and was Indian editor for the Air International, World Air Power Journal, Asian Defence Journal, Jane's Defence Weekly and Aviation Week & Space Technology. During an earlier Farnborough Air Show, he was given a special award for his breaking news story on the Indian LCA programme from the Royal Aeronautical Society of the UK. In 2015, at the Aerospace Media Awards held at the Paris Air Show, he was awarded the 'Lifetime Achievement Award' for Outstanding Contribution to Aviation Journalism'.

In the year 2000, he also started another magazine, The Nishaan, a non-political journal on Sikh culture, history and heritage.

Indeed, Pushpindar Singh's writings on the Indian aviation and defence matters, impacting too on the international stage for over five decades, have inspired and encouraged generations of those who later joined the industry and are continuing to serve the profession with honour.





## Encyclopedia of Indian aviation

**P**ushpinder ‘Pushy’ Singh Chopra. The name brings to mind a range of reference books scripting the aviation history of the subcontinent, capturing generations of aircraft flown, recording treasured history for posterity. It would not be an understatement to say that the work of Pushpinder Singh has been regularly used as official reference material by officers and airmen of all generations, looking to learn about the IAF’s past and its journey. A renowned aviation historian, Pushpinder Singh’s association with the IAF dates back to the period soon after the Indo-Pak war of 1965, when he interviewed aviators and IAF personnel in an effort to record the air operations as they happened, and also to refute enemy propaganda.

His write-ups and records of the air battles of 1965 are a valuable source of information for various authors who have written about the war. One recalls his article, ‘Laying the Sargodha ghost to rest’, in Vayu Aerospace Review in November 1985 as being a trailblazer amongst others, which led to debunking the myth of PAF’s claim of shooting down five IAF Hunters on 7 September 1965. In the numerous books he wrote on the IAF, starting from ‘Aircraft of the Indian Air Force: 1933-1973’, and the coffee table books of squadrons, one finds diligent professional research on facts, anecdotes, pictures from archives, summing up history in a nutshell, which is something every official historian would aspire to deliver.

To converse with him was akin to engaging with a human encyclopedia of Indian aviation. It was perhaps for this reason that one mistook him for an Air Force veteran at many of the demi-official and social gatherings of the IAF that he was

invited to. To his distinction, he published books on the occasions of IAF’s Golden Jubilee, Diamond Jubilee and Platinum Jubilee. The definitive three-volume magnum opus titled ‘Himalayan Eagles: History of the Indian Air Force’, written for the Platinum Jubilee in 2007, occupies pride of place in every Air Force library and squadron crew room. His pioneering work, Vayu Aerospace Review, was one-of-its-kind aerospace journals when launched in 1974 and it continues to dominate readership amongst air warriors of today. The contribution of Pushpinder Singh towards recording the history and air wars of the IAF cannot be contained in a single article. He belonged to a rare category of passionate aviation enthusiasts, who of their own reckoning decided to become a part of the men and women in blue. We shall fondly remember him and treasure his works for future generations.

**Air Marshal Anil Chopra (Retd)**



*Air Marshal Anil Chopra (Retd) and Pushpinder Singh along with DRDO scientists at Dexexpo 2020*



# Farewell Pushpindar 'Pushy' Singh Chopra

The sudden passing away of Pushpindar, better known as 'Pushy' to all his friends, on 3 May, 2021 was most unexpected and shocking, to say the least. He was so full of life and energy despite his age; running up the steps instead of taking the elevator, that I personally never expected him to succumb to corona virus. Pushy always lived up to his shortened name and pet name; gently pushing everyone around to get things done in a hurry, particularly in aviation and military matters, all with the good intent of getting the right message to all concerned quickly for the benefit of the armed forces with special reference to the IAF. His bi-monthly magazine, Vayu Aerospace and Defence Review, was the vehicle he largely used to convey all the news and views for which he was always in a hurry to get folks to write, debate and discuss but contribute. That is how he got professionals like Air Marshal Brijesh Jayal, Admiral Arun Prakash and Air Vice Marshal Cecil Parker and many others to regularly contribute to the magazine to make it that much richer. In the early days before the internet, this was one indigenous homegrown magazine that we all looked forward to for catching up with the latest in aviation. The other magazines like Aviation Week & Space Technology, Jane's Defence and Air Clues et cetera were difficult to come by in Air Force libraries or prohibitively expensive to afford for individuals and, in any case, had a different and more western perspective.

I met Pushy a little late perhaps in 1988 when I was commanding 28 Squadron on the new MiG-29s in Poona. Pushy was obviously visiting and I got a call one afternoon from then Group Captain 'Mike' McMahon, commanding 6 Squadron on the base, that Pushy wanted to see me. Quite obviously, having heard of him and all that he had done for the Golden Jubilee of the IAF a few years before, I invited him home. He was with me in a jiffy and after gulping down the cup of tea that Malini made in a hurry, he said he wanted me to take him to the squadron and show him around. Once in the squadron, out came his camera and he clicked the MiG-29 from every possible outside angle including one with me in front of the aircraft. Cockpit photography then was a big NO-NO. We came back home to spend a little more time together and he borrowed a number of slides from me that I had personally clicked of the MiG-29 in various formations. Those days, all my squadron pilots got lots of formation flying practice in every ferry flight instead of just doing boring straight and level navigation while I carried my Cannon with a zoom lens clicking pictures for the squadron. With his affable personality, our friendship thereafter just grew and every time I dropped in on him in Delhi or we met somewhere, he behaved as if he was meeting a long lost friend and was quickly into a conversation about aircraft and aviation. On a personal level, his wife, Deepak, and Pushy were great hosts whenever I visited their home and both just bowled you over with their warmth and hospitality. The added advantage of visiting him was also that often you met one of his international friends and aviation enthusiasts with something new to hear and learn from them.

On a professional level, there was no denying that Pushy was a veritable walking encyclopedia on aviation matters in general



and military aviation in particular. He always regaled one with nuggets of new information as also some of his stories about the various important personalities he knew, nationally and internationally or what he had picked up from his visits to various shows abroad. From his father, who was a senior army man, he obviously inherited a lot of knowledge about various arms and services of the Army including many individual regiments and their history. His first publication as a young aviation buff in the 1970s, 'Aircraft of the Indian Air Force', is still something worth referring to even today for information on the early days of the IAF. I still have personal copies of many of his publications including the 'Himalayan Eagles: History of the Indian Air Force', a trilogy that was published on the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the IAF in 2007, 'First and the last: 50 Years of the MiG-21 in the IAF' co-authored with Air Marshal Phillip Rajkumar, the squadron histories of the First Supersonics, 28 Squadron and the one on 47 Squadron The Black Archers amongst some others. His collection of books, photographs and other memorabilia was like a treasure trove that I tried digging into every time I could while in Delhi.

With Pushy's untimely passing away, the aviation community in India has lost one of its most vocal stalwarts and he will be sorely missed by all of us even remotely connected with aviation in India. Om shanti, our friend.

**Air Marshal Harish Masand (Retd)**





My day started with a very sad note when I learnt that my very close and dear friend, my senior from Punjab Engineering College, and my perhaps the biggest well-wisher has been snatched away from all of us. What a man, full of boundless energy, who breathed only aerospace. He brought his star publication Vayu to commanding heights and all of us looked forward to receive our copy. He would never miss a chance to meet me whenever he was visiting Bangalore and I would always see him in his office during my visits to Delhi and have delicious home-made lunch. He published my first book which created a record of sorts in response.



My heart-felt condolences to the bereaved family.  
Let his legacy move on with much more vigour.

**Yogesh Kumar**

Pushpindar Sir,

Thank you for the books, the stories, and for telling the Indian side of the story when so many others weren't - and above all, for making it clear that there is a body of such stories out of India, which can be told as well as any others. Blue skies always,

**K S Nair**

I am Philip Rajkumar, an old friend and admirer of Pushpindar's. My wife and I were very upset when we heard of his demise. Pushpindar and I go about 35 years to the early 1990s. I always considered him an authority on aviation history worldwide. He was a prolific writer and will be sorely missed by the aeronautical community in the world. I am happy he handed over Vayu to his son well in time and I am confident the magazine will improve on the high standards set by him.

Losing a father is always a wrenching event. Pushy was a proud father and loving husband and we understand what a bitter blow it must have been to the close knit family. Just a couple of months ago he called me from Kasauli where he and Deepak used to go to often for a break. We also enjoyed their parent's hospitality in 2013 when we stayed with them during the launch of the book Pushy and I compiled together on the history of the Mig-21 in the IAF. May Pushpindar's soul rest in everlasting peace.

**Philip and Sheila Rajkumar**



In 2015, at the Aerospace Media Awards held at the Paris Air Show, Pushpindar Singh was awarded 'Lifetime Achievement Award' for Outstanding Contribution to Aviation Journalism'.





I cannot tell you how terribly saddened and shocked I was to hear that my dear friend, Pushpinder, had passed away. The international aviation and defence community, especially all his journalist and PR friends, will share my grief and greatly miss the warmth, humour and sheer depth of his knowledge on all things relating to Indian aviation. Pushpinder was a real joy to know, and made the global air and defence show circuit that much more endurable as he always had

something new to discuss and his interests covered every possible aspect of aviation history. I was pleased to have had the honour to show him our museum at Farnborough and to welcome him to the Guild of Aviation Artists Annual exhibitions in London.

It was a privilege to have enjoyed his company and wisdom over the years, and I will always remember and retain the fondest memories of this truly great journalist, amusing companion and creator of so many wonderful books on India's aviation history. His lasting legacy lives on, of course, in Vayu, which is in a class of its own.

My most sincere condolences to you and all the family and in the meantime keep safe during this challenging period.

**Richard Gardner**



## Eulogy for Pushy

### AN OLD SCHOOL GENTLEMAN

Pushy Chopra is no more. He had struggled with Covid. I anchored many of Pushy's seminars on defence.

He was not only a valued colleague but one my closest childhood buddies since our schooldays.

He was ebullient, bubbly, outspoken, rambunctious, with a Falstaffian Hail of a voice. He suffered no fool gladly even while he remained ever the compassionate gentleman...and chivalrous to a fault.

He felt passionately for his family and was the eternal mother-hen. He adored his childhood home in the misty effervescence in Kasauli to which he summoned me for a first visit many moons ago, where we consumed gallons of good Scotch and barbecued pork chops with his beautiful wife Deepak and sister the vivacious Gugu and her gentle giant of a husband, the expansive Anup (now also gone) son of the legendary Sardar Karnail Singh, former chairman of the Railway Board who had the most amazing wooden bar laden with foreign wines tucked away in his luxurious railways saloon.

Pushy was a diehard liberal who detested political tyrants, bigotry, intolerance.

Do you know that he loved Shakespeare and could quote from John Donne?

In the Doon School Pushy (74-T), Askari Imam (68-T), and I (155-T) were known as the "Tata House Trio", all of us unregenerate rebels. 74 and 68 now both gone.

My youngest daughter Samira was married at Piffer Post, Pushy's get-away spot from Delhi's madness, small farmhouse in the capital's outskirts where generals, air marshals and admirals rubbed shoulders with ruffian writers like me and Ajay Shukla and Hari Dang and Dilip Bobb.

Just as Pushy and I grew up together and reunited after my 20-year sojourn in the US, so did my children Arjun, Ayesha and Samira grow up with Pushy's kids, the "Choppy" boys, Vikram, Karan and Prem.

Cheers, Pushy! May you ever keep raging against the dying of the light.

**Inderjit Badhwar**





**W**e heard with deep sorrow the grave death of Pushpinder Singh. He was a wonderful and most appreciated person with whom we had the honour working closely for decades. He will be remembered as a great friend of Israel. Please pass our condolences to the dear family. Let us all cherish to what we have.

**Dubbie & Ilan Shifrin, Israel**



**I** just learned of Pushpinder's passing from Covid. I am truly sorry and my thoughts are with the family. I admired him very much, and recall being hosted in your family home in Delhi once along with Chris Chadwick. That was one of many fond memories I have which I treasure.

I pray that you can overcome the loss of this great man, and that you and your family stay safe during this terrible ordeal.

**Brian Nelson**



**B**rian made me aware of your Father's passing as well. He was a marvelous friend, always generous with his words and his smile. A very kind soul indeed. I hope this note finds you well. You and your family are in my thoughts.

**Chris Chadwick**



Journalist colleagues,

I have only just heard the sad news of Pushpinder's death and wish to convey to you my immense regrets at the passing of a fine gentleman and a thoroughly professional colleague.

Pushpinder was also a dear friend who, when we met at air shows around the world, was always full of enthusiasm for discussions on our favourite subject of aircraft. Never once did he give the impression that he was anything but overjoyed to see me again. Always a twinkle in his eye; always a happy or humorous remark to be made.

Our paths first crossed in the early 1980s when I was working for John Fricker—the author of a book on the 1965 air war with Pakistan. Pushpinder's view of events differed somewhat, but in public and private debates over the details, he argued his case with impeccable politeness and civility. In those pre-Twitter days, that is the way great men behaved.

So, farewell 'Pushy'. You elevated Indian aerospace journalism to world standards and lived a meritorious life which will be remembered by your many friends at home and abroad.

**Paul Jackson (United Kingdom)**





I no longer remember when I first met Pushpindar Singh Chopra, who for me was always Pushy. But he figures in the “Favourites” category of my mobile indicating our frequent interaction. He was a friend, though he was some years senior to me. But in terms of his enthusiasm for doing any anything and everything, he was decades younger.

Our connect came through the ruling passion in his life—aviation. In the 1980s, two of my journalistic beats—defence and civil aviation—benefited immensely from Pushy’s knowledge. And yes, there were occasions where he tipped me off on good stories. At some point, I can’t recall when, I was drafted into the editorial panel of the *Vayu* magazine that he had founded half a century ago. Over the years, the magazine, now edited by Vikramjit Singh, has improved in quality and style and is the premier publication of its kind in the region if not the country.

Pushy was the ultimate gentleman—kind, never intrusive and ever-helpful and an impeccable host. He never showed off his enormous knowledge of matters aviation and was not the one who would bore you with stories about it. In fact, his style was often to get you talking about an issue which he was quietly absorbing.

He was what in UK would be called the grand amateur—someone who had no direct training or connection to an issue but yet had, through his passion, developed an expertise way beyond what trained experts often had. The books Pushy has edited or



Manoj Joshi, Capt. Shakti Lumba and Pushpindar Singh

written, if placed end to end would probably exceed a foot. He was currently working on a book on naval aviation which will now be completed by his son and nephew. Such people went out of style a long time ago. But India was fortunate to have Pushy till his tragic and sudden demise.

**Manoj Joshi**

Pushpindar Singh Chopra shaped my life long before anyone might realise. Growing up, “Pushi mamaji” was the fun uncle for all us cousins, but my fascination for aircraft and aviation meant we shared a special bond. He would always remember to come back from air shows around the world with gifts of posters, magnets and models. In hindsight, my choice of the aviation and defence world for a profession was inevitable. But again, it was he who gave me my break, bringing me into the *Vayu* fold, where around the office we always referred to him by his initials – ‘PSC’. Working with him on *Vayu* and the various aviation histories we published, from squadron books to the Battle of Laungewala, to the definitive history of the MiG-21 in IAF service, was the privilege of a lifetime.

His singular defining trait was a boundless reserve of energy and enthusiasm. One of my fondest memories was when just the two of us traipsed up and down the west coast of India covering Indian naval aviation in 2018. Those were long, humid, exhausting days, but he was a dynamo through them all, from sunup to late night shoots under stormy moonlit skies, and always, *always* closing the day out with a drink.

He nurtured my interests and skills, but also constantly pushed me to be better. The best of what I am is due in no small part to him.

Godspeed, and *ad astra*.

**Angad Singh**





**P**ushpinder Sir “Uncle Pushy” was a trailblazer and a guru. I cannot forget the warmth and love he showed to us amateur historians or the encouragement he gave over the years. He was a doyen of Indian Aviation History and will be sorely missed.

Growing up in the 80s, with no internet and no good libraries to speak of in Hyderabad, it is easy to be ignorant of the body of work that Pushpinder Sir had generated over the 70s and 80s writing for noted publications for years. I came across my first reference to him in Air Chief Marshal P C Lal’s book in the mid-80s which mentioned his first book “Aircraft of the Indian Air Force 1933-1973”. Finding a reference to a “Civilian” who wrote a book about the Indian Air Force in itself was a fascinating fact. I subsequently found a copy of this book and it is not an exaggeration to say that I still keep referring to this book even to this day.

Ultimately, in the late 80s and early 90s, some stray copies of Vayu magazine made their way to local shops near me. Only then



did I realise the groundwork Pushy Sir had laid in writing about Aviation in India and Aviation history. I was still unaware of his previous publications in Air Enthusiast, Air International, Air Forces Monthly etc - my respect for him increased exponentially when I ran into his articles later on.

My first contact with him started only sometime in 2000 or so, I mailed a printed draft of my first book dealing with the 1965 Air War to the Vayu address. Imagine my happiness when I got a glowing letter from him - he was thrilled that someone took an effort to put something about the war and though it needed more work, he encouraged me to continue working on it. For good measure, he added that he passed on the draft to Air Cmde Jasjit Singh and received positive comments about it. Needless to say, the boost that an amateur historian like me got out of that letter cannot be undervalued.

I met him in person for the first time at Aero India 2005, which is when I took this photograph. It was a moment that I cannot forget, framing two legends in the same photo. I have had the opportunity to interact subsequently multiple times. Once during a Delhi trip, while working on my second book, I gatecrashed the Vayu Office and I can never forget the warmth with which I was received. Of course, I have had the pleasure of meeting him quite a few times after that and we always kept in touch.

It is easy to overlook Pushy Sir’s work. But put it all in one place, and it is astounding in the amount of work that went into it, and the size of shelf space it occupies. Apart from the numerous Squadron histories, the type histories on the Marut and Gnat, Who else can claim to have written a History of the Indian Air Force that spans nearly 700 pages? This is exactly what his 2007 magnum opus “Himalayan Eagles - History of the Indian Air Force Volumes 1-3” was about.

With his passing, We, the aviation historians, lost not only lost his vast knowledge but also his generosity and kindness. Rest in Peace - Pushpinder Sir.



Pushpinder Singh with Marshal of the Air Force Arjan Singh

PVS Jagan Mohan



# Remembering PSC

I met Pushpinder Singh Chopra for the first time in 2017 for work related to the Partition Museum. I don't have a clear memory of that meeting, but I remember he cut through all formality, and invited me to drop by for coffee whenever I was free. And so I started coming by the Nishaan office, and we would discuss Panjab politics, Sikh history, and family updates. I never understood why he 'adopted' me, but reading the many, many obituaries for him and the fond memories shared by a very disparate group of people, I realise that that is just who he was - always welcoming new people and willing to learn and share knowledge. He treated everyone with an *apnapan* that came from the heart.

He was one of the warmest persons I have ever met. He was larger than life with boundless energy and an unmatched zest for life! He worked on a dozen projects at a time and had the incredible knack of getting others involved and passionate about them. Incredibly generous with sharing his knowledge as well as opening opportunities for others, he loved connecting with people, and also connecting people he knew to others he thought they might get along with. He was a strong proponent of good relations with Pakistan and had friends on both sides of the border. At the same time, he had no compunctions about calling a spade a spade, no matter who he was challenging. He did not brag about his accomplishments - he may have been the foremost expert on aviation matters in India and respected around the world, but as that was not my subject of interest, he never brought it up, except perhaps as a side-mention in a story he might be sharing (I never did realise the extent of the respect he commanded in the aviation world until after his death).

PSC (as he was often called), was also one of the most interesting people you could ever meet - he had so many stories and first hand experiences and he loved sharing them! And what a raconteur he was - quite like the 1001 nights, each story nestled another which led to another, until the original was almost lost many hours behind, and almost every conversation ended with "remind me to tell you about that next time!"

Unlike many good talkers, he was also a great listener. And he remembered. He would ask after family and friends that you had once mentioned in a conversation six months ago.

He told me to think of him and Deepak Ma'am as my family in Delhi. Last year when I had Covid & quarantined alone, they sent across food and checked in every day.

Last April, he was extremely disturbed by the rising hatred in India vis-à-vis Pakistan; his response was to dedicate a special Nishaan issue to Panjabiyat - to celebrating cross-border connections and friendships and the oneness of our people and culture. Would I help him put it together?

I consider it my good fortune that through 2020, I had the opportunity to be in regular and close contact with him. We would meet whenever circumstances allowed at the Nishaan office. He was most particular of going home on time for lunch with his wife - meetings cut short, work kept aside for that one hour.



PSC had clarity of thought and the gift of words. I watched him dictate the editorial in a smooth flow to Jaya, his personal secretary, and complete it within half an hour. He had a close relationship with everyone in office - Nanak ji, Ganga, Inderjit, Nitin - he would pull everyone's leg.

It was a very delayed issue because of many reasons from both our ends, but we finally had it out in March 2021 (Photo from that day)! I met him last in early April 2021 - we celebrated the issue and the feedback we'd received and made plans for the future. - Shall we cycle across Wagah? He asked - Knowing him, he would have made it happen.

PSC was always willing to learn. As I slowly got more involved with Nishaan, he asked me my thoughts about the magazine. I candidly told him that (amongst other things) I thought the magazine needed more younger voices and more women writers, so that it involved the youth and was representative of the Sikh community. He was quiet for a minute, and then he said, "I'm sorry, I didn't realise we hadn't had enough women writers." That response encapsulated who he was. For a man who was, almost single-handedly, responsible for keeping the Nishaan going for 20 years, for an Indian man of that generation, to be open to hearing criticism of his personal project, was a most pleasant surprise for me. Or perhaps, I already knew he would receive it well and that's why I was comfortable enough to speak my mind. I never felt the age-difference with him - he was a young man at heart.

In a recent article, I read, "...any death leaves you burdened with the responsibility of holding onto the parts of a person that only you knew." In the last few months, I have shared the PSC I knew with everyone around me, his life celebrated in retelling the crazy anecdotes he shared.

While I mourn him and keep Deepak Ma'am and the family in my thoughts, remembering him and sharing a sliver of the incredible man he was is my tribute to him. Sir, you will be missed.

**Ganeev Kaur**





Pushpinder Singh Chopra, 'Pushy' for most - the legend for others!

The funny, most jovial, energetic and enthusiastic man! At 78 he was nothing short of the life of the party.

His love for taking pictures was one that none of us will forget. Only he knows what would catch his eye and would proceed to quickly make us huddle together to show our teeth for his camera! To the very end he was behind that camera, sending us photos of Mamiji. Boundless energy always.

Pulling up his pants and standing confidently with a grin on his face is my memory of him. A man with so much passion on his subjects, be it Aviation or Sikhism. He always had these ideas brewing in his mind and would catch us off guard and say - "I want you to help with this. Come to my office." How I wish I would have gone to his office....

Special to my father and brother. It's hard to understand what they might be going through at this moment. He was the man who gave both of them the wings to soar. With perhaps a gap of 25 years, both of them got their very first taste of working life with him. Their fire for aviation and defence was lit under his watchful eye. From Dornier to Vayu to Nishaan, to name a few, the lives he has had an impact on, is countless!

The legacy he leaves behind is in the hands of his most capable family and wife.

My prayer to God is that Deepak Mamiji, the graceful, loving and strong person that she is, comes out of this trying time with strength and a spirit of Charhdi Kala. It would be the only thing Mamaji would want.

As Tahira put it so simply - He was "one in a billion".

May Waheguruji always be with his family and give them all the blessings they need right now.

**Harleen Kaur**



## A MONUMENTAL LOSS

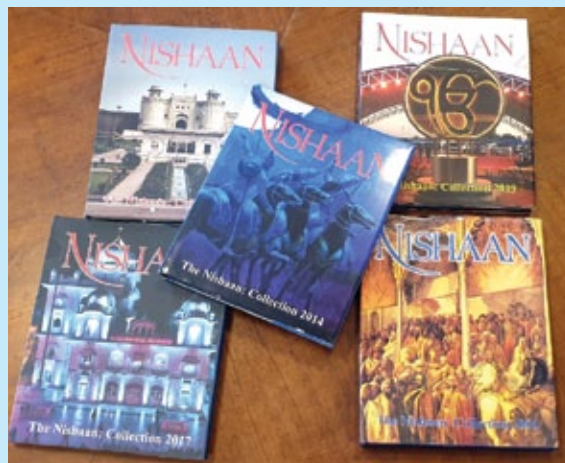
Pushpinder Singh Chopra is no more. The few years we knew each other were spent working and defining the role of the Nishaan magazine in the corporate life of Sikhs across the world -- irrespective of country, culture, language, and other differences, even political that often define our communities. These different visions provide and enhance our strength, they are the base of Sikhi and its rich vision.



Pushpinder Singh with his better half  
Mrs. Deepak Chopra

The loss of Pushpinder Singh is critical and a painful one. But such is life. He is like a permanent and unforgettable stone in the worldwide modern reality of Sikhi. I was lucky to have been granted a niche in the works. And I will treasure my association with Pushpinder Singh Chopra.

Pushpinder began the magic of Nishaan. We need to continue and further develop the institution around the project.



**I.J. Singh (New York)**



# Tributes from the Jullundur Brigade Association



Words by email cannot adequately cover the loss we all feel.

I must inform you that this loss is also most keenly felt by Members of The Jullundur Brigade Association worldwide and I am receiving their condolences at the loss of their dedicated Vice President hourly. Once I have collated these expressions of affection and respect I will forward them to you for the family to retain. But it will be some time before I can do this in order to allow the sad news to reach all corners of the JBA. I have, of course, published a simple immediate statement on the JBA website. Finally for now, our deep sadness at the loss of one of the finest of men who was also one of my dearest friends,

**Peter Davies**

**President, The Jullundur Brigade Association**



**The Inaugural Jullundur Brigade Association Dinner November 1989**

Seated: Brig Fazle Qadir, Lt Col Roger Hislop, Lt Gen Ahmad Kamal, Maj Gen Peter Davies, Maj Gen Mohindar Singh Chopra, Brig Saeed Ismet, Lt Col Sadaqat Ali Shah  
Standing: Maj L Taylor-Duff, Maj R Tranter-Owen, Gobindar Singh Chopra, Maj R Young, Capt Khalid Kamal, Maj BWR Baker, Capt D Chatterton, Capt Nadir Khan, Maj K Hastie, Maj FR Baker, Pushpindar Singh Chopra, Capt RA Bonner (photo: JBA)

Pushy's sad demise was unbearable. Not only was he a dear friend and highly respected professional colleague but the country has lost a worthy son. Pushy was undoubtedly one of India's best known authorities on aerospace, past and present, but also the Indian Air Force's trusted chronicler. Pushy's warm and humorous demeanor, on and off the field, won many hearts. I recall once, at Washington DC's new Air & Space Museum, how he regaled a whole bunch of American students on the history of aerospace - their minds boggled at this suave, turbaned gentleman displaying such a wealth of extempore knowledge.

Besides, Pushy and I shared a passion for military history, particularly the Indian Army. It was he who encouraged me, besides Peter Davies of course, to join the Jullundur Bde Assn. Here I am, a Hodsons Horse officer, with only a small link to the JBA (Hodsons were part of the Lahore and Ambala Bdes in France and Flanders) but it was Pushy's persuasive charm that won me over! He was so passionate in encouraging me to join this year's visit to the Battlefields. Alas!

Wonderful times!

Rest in peace good friend

**Karun Khanna (Kinny)**



Words cannot describe what I and Pushie's friends went through and are going through right now after hearing of what happened. No words can describe our feelings at his loss and even more that of you and your brothers. I can only recall the words of Elizabeth Frye, that so aptly mirror Pushie and our loss of him -

I am a thousand winds that blow.  
I am the diamond glints on snow.

I am the sunlight on ripened grain.  
I am the Gentle autumn rain.

When you awaken in the mornings hush,  
I am the swift uplifting rush  
of quiet birds in circled flight,  
I am the soft stars that shine at night.

Do not stand at my grave and cry,  
I am not there, I did not die.

I pray, and we, all his friends pray that your mother comes out of it and home to you all.

In sadness

**Paddy Singh**

Jacquie and I were so sad to receive your devastating news and have been in a state of shock really ever since. Please accept our most sincere condolences. I first met 'Pushy' many years ago at a JBA gathering in the North West when I commanded the Kings Ist Battalion and although I met him only on a few occasions since, he was the formidable link the Association needed to ensure it became such a successful and enduring organisation. Pushy epitomised all the best qualities we have come to admire and like so much in our Indian JBA friends. We will all miss his gentle charm and innate courtesy. He was a wonderful and fun companion.

**Jeremy and Jacquie Gaskell**

I do not think we ever met when I was in India, but I just want to tell you how sad I am to hear of the untimely death of your father. Have met your father on many occasions in London, Ypres and then in India when he arranges a JBA tour, it is hard to envisage that he has left us. I was always remember him as an individual with energy, respected by all and a real gentlemen. He will be sorely missed by all who knew him.

**Brigadier Tim Waugh**

## HRH the Prince of Wales - Sikh Reception 2008



*HRH the Prince of Wales speaking to Pushpinder Singh Chopra and Major General Peter Davies, both wearing the association tie, at a reception for members of the British Sikh community. Clarence House, London. (photo: JBA)*



## What does one write about a person who loved the world?

That his innings was not over when he was suddenly snatched away from all of us. That he had so much more to do; so many more journeys to complete; so much more to tell.

PSC was willing to walk the distance; was willing to help and to get involved; was very sporty, was willing to take on anything anyone threw at him.

And now there are mere cherished memories and stories to be told of the days gone by.

PSC was the eldest of all cousins of our generation: the Kapur clan.

Story has it that Mom and Auntie Bucher, who were all set to go elsewhere to further their studies and had started their journey, only to return to Murree a day later – to celebrate the arrival of Baby PSC, the first-born male child of the family. Their studies went for a toss thereafter!

Mom and Pushi had their own journey of a closeness and love that was so special. For her, he was Pushi or Pushiji; for him, she was Fee or Feetee.

As cousins, we met infrequently. Families were spread all over and only special occasions – holidays and weddings got much of the family to meet.

My earliest recollection of PSC was when most cousins met up in Calcutta for Deepi Bhanji's wedding. Families came in from the North and West; we travelled from Bangalore – a longish train journey.

We were staying in Fort William. Joyful times.

One day, PSC led us cousins into a room, Nupi, Pama and others too. He then played out a vaudeville act with a walking stick. But halfway through the brilliant act, his stick hit an overhead bulb which broke up, sending a shard of glass to cut the vein on his hand. A fountain of sprouting blood; a hysterical bunch of girls and nervous us – an urgent visit to the MI Room and stitches/bandaging laid to rest further theatre. But we gathered our wits and went on romping through the Fort.

And on Deepi Bhanji's birthday, bands came and played the birthday tune for her!

On an aside, Dad would be out playing golf with his group; I'd tag along, away from the girls – at that age, you wanted to be away from them. So, I walked while the elders played all the courses, the Maidan one, Royal and Tolly. One day I was given a club to see whether I could hit a golf ball; I sent it into the air – thus started my golf journey. An excited father took me to the New Market and bought me my first set of clubs – 1 wood, 2 irons and a putter, in a rexene bag, all for a huge amount of Rs 24!!

The wedding went well and we returned to Bangalore.

My next recollection of PSC was when I joined Doon. For years earlier and between Bangalore and Poona, we had rarely met. But Doon was different.

I joined in the Autumn Term – The Silver Jubilee Year. Tata House.

PSC was our House Captain. His team of prefects included Askari, Manu and Ravi.

My first day was eventful when Gobi, Chuck and I got nabbed plucking and trying to eat raw guavas outside the Hospi. Sister Gibby fed Gobi and Chuck with a generous portion of Castor Oil; I escaped, new boy! But House Cap was informed and we got a severe dressing down.



PSC on extreme left and Serge in the middle  
(yellow shirt and yellow turban)

PSC ran a tight ship. Didn't know where he found time and energy for sports, but he did. Did well in Athletics and brilliantly well in the Cross-Country.

The Silver Jubilee celebrations and term ending was wonderful. The Chopra parents and Mom had come.

And we travelled back to Delhi, only to stop for lunch with Jassi Bhapa at Roorkee.

Untangling of knotty hair at E2 the next morning, juniors took in a junky movie and dinner at Rat Road thereafter. PSC and his friends saw a much better movie-“Around the World in 80 days”.

As School Cap, PSC was less to be seen as he was busy helping in school work. And he had his Inter exams to take care of too.

The next time we met was during a midterm break – a journey that took our group of juniors to Bhakra, Kasauli and Chandigarh. PSC was studying in Chandigarh and he organised our stay at the Aroma.

And we met again briefly when Gobi and I visited Delhi ostensibly to meet our dentist – during Bunoo's wedding.

The next one saw him when he joined Rallis in Mumbai. Those Rallis years were a time when we met often.

As a bachelor and whilst staying in Alaknanda, he had an interesting fellow as his Man Friday – Apparao, who bred fighting cocks! One fighter at a time; tall guys, two and half feet tall; they'd strut



Serge in full yellow and PSC in pink turban

around the apartment – cocky buggers. One was named Red Rufus!

On a weekend, Apparao would take along his charge – for cock-fights somewhere in the deep suburbs. It was a bloody fight and illegal for sure. Knife blades were tied to the fighter's feet – so imagine what must have ensued. If his ward lost, Apparao would come back empty handed and with pockets cleaned out too; if his ward won, he'd bring back the vanquished – dead and tough meat to eat! But all this ended after PSC got married.

In October of '66, Deepak and PSC got married. It was a fairy tale wedding; we all had the time of our lives.

For the baratis, the wedding functions kicked off at NIS, Patiala where bingeing and planning their wedding trip to Delhi was on.

Dad and MS landed in Delhi; got received at the airport by Joginder. They then had a rollicking time at a club in Delhi, convinced Joginder to drive up to Patiala with them. They reached NIS in time for cocktails. Someone got high with Loona thereafter.

PSC and Nupi (who was to marry in the following December) went through the 'Amrit Chakna' ritual; wonder if they wore 'breakars' thereafter! Elevenses, cricket matches, bridge, golf – everything went on and on. Sangeets in the evening had senior bartenders – Channi Bhapa and Anup Jijaji. College specials – whisky with Coke were dished out for the college goers, Gobi, Jaswinder and me– keeping us safe from the prying eyes of our elders.

But on PSC's bachelor night, he was sporty. He was taken down to a room; all of us drank a bit; and then, he got 'mehnified' – all over!

The wedding in Delhi went off brilliantly well and after the Doli lunch it was back to Patiala.

Almost 55 years of wedding bliss.....

In Bombay, Deepak and PSC flitted in and out of apartments- Alaknanda, Cuffe Castle, Cumballa Crest, Breach Candy Apartments with brief snatches of time spent in Ramalayam.

I was flitting in and out of Baroda too – doing my engineering degree course. In the five years of



Baroda studies, my longest stint there was 21 days. Couldn't keep away from Bombay. And with Dad away in Udhampur and Mom covering up for me, I was able to enjoy my Bombay stints.

It was during such visits that one enjoyed meeting Deepak and PSC. Later, and after graduation (I got a first class; Dad got a 'heart attack' hearing the news; expected a lower class, no doubt), we all had fun together.

From spending the night with PSC in Cumballa Crest to hear the moon landing commentary on the radio – Deepak was in Delhi at the time; to celebrating Air Force Days with gusto – dinners and a fashion show; to tension filled hockey matches at the BHA stadium where everyone cussed the referees (Messrs Sujana – 'bistar bund Singh' and Saroj Nagarwala) but still had a jolly good time; to driving his green coloured company car and hitting a fire hydrant at Worli, life went on and on with the exciting couple.

Hockey needs a special mention. The BHA stadium was the first floodlit stadium in India. In the 50's when we had moved to Bombay as Dad was building Dugal House – our apartment was in the Churchgate area, so BHA was a stone's throw away. We would go to all the matches, watch all India's greats – Laxman, Claudius, Balbir Singh, Gentle, Babu, Dharam Singh, Amir Kumar, Udham and so many other stalwarts.

Sadly, politics entered our premier sport and for the '68 Mexico Olympics we were shocked to see a team with two joint captains, Gurbux and Prithpal – disheartening to see all this. They came home with a bronze!

But hockey carried on and the new age lot were now on display. Charles, Surjit Singh, Ajit Pal, Inam, Ashok Kumar and good old fossil Udham with so many others, were all playing too. But they lived in deplorable conditions – sleeping under the stands in hot, humid conditions and with mosquitos buzzing them. PSC was able to get them fans from the service centre make their stay comfortable.

PSC was born to become an authority on aviation matters and on military history. It was his passion and even during his company days I dare say he spent a bit

of his off-office time to pursue his interests. He met and became a great friend with William Green and then with Gordon Swanborough.

He even got invited for the Concorde's test flight when it first arrived in Bombay for a demonstration.

The last time we met was when PSC, Gobi and JP came to Mumbai for MSD's funeral – December 2019. JP was going back on an early flight; PSC and Gobi were on a later one. Instead of returning to Worli after the funeral, I took them and Chotu for lunch to Willingdon. PSC insisted on meeting Mom thereafter. So, we all trooped off to Ramalayam.

Mom was on her sickbed but when she heard PSC's voice, she perked up. Then she insisted that we all have a drink (late, late afternoon). And so it was, our last drink together. Mom and PSC savouring their moments together. Who knew that it was to be the last time that we would be meeting PSC.

PSC's story will never end. There are stories to be told about him and there are very many who will continue to talk and write about him.

Like a bright star, he flashed the skies and for those moments that some of us who were lucky to share parts of his journey, it was a dream.

Now there are memories to cherish.



**Serge  
(Surjit Singh Dugal)**

It is very unfortunate that Shri Pushpindar Singh Chopra, founding trustee and chairman of World Animal Protection-India is no longer with us but his vision to protect animals will continue to inspire us to keep on the work to help and protect animals.

Under the able chairmanship of Shri Chopra, World Animal Protection in India has achieved many notable successes. Under his guidance and direction, World Animal Protection was able to extend its reach to many institutions and schools to spread the message of animal welfare. These programmes were undertaken to sensitize youth to animal welfare and to make them more empathetic and considerate toward animal welfare. Many NGOs collaborated in this programme too and benefited from the help given to them by World Animal Protection in raising a generation more attuned to compassion and animal welfare. He also led the efforts of World Animal Protection in India to institute efforts to improve the standards of rearing of dairy and farm animals in India. Under this effort, standards and guidelines were set for the husbandry and maintenance of dairy animals that are so often abused for the benefit of humans. A lot of work of World Animal Protection was also undertaken with his vision for helping the lot of animals in distress during disasters. World Animal Protection in India pioneered the inclusion of animals in disasters in the National Disaster Management Plan unveiled by the Prime Minister in 2016.

World Animal Protection in India has worked diligently to raise awareness on the plight of wild animals in entertainment, primarily the plight of elephants used for riding in Amer fort in Jaipur in Rajasthan. It was the tutelage of Shri Chopra, that was the impetus for World Animal Protection to highlight the plight of captive tigers in Thailand that are abused for clicking photographs with tourists, including Indian tourists. With the help and steering impetus of Shri Chopra, World Animal Protection has achieved more than 100,000 signatures sent



to the Prime Minister of India to stop the destructive and counterproductive wildlife trade. He encouraged us to engage volunteers and other organizations to provide food to numerous dogs and other stray animals during the Covid-19 lockdown. He also spearheaded the rescue and rehabilitation of hundreds of bears used in dancing performances in North India on the Delhi Agra highway. These bears were rehabilitated, and their owners provided alternative livelihoods.

It has been the involvement of Shri Chopra that World Animal Protection in India has been able to improve the lives of millions of animals throughout India and beyond.

His support and thoughts to build a better future by raising awareness on the plight of animals and many other significant campaigns for ending the exploitation of animals farmed for food and wild animals in captivity will be always remembered.

Our new name is World Animal Protection. We were known as WSPA (World Society for the Protection of Animals). World Animal Protection registered in India as World Society for the Protection of Animals-India (WSPA-INDIA)

**Gajender K. Sharma**



Pushy Mamaji - the man behind the camera. Every memory I have of him is with him taking a picture of the "beautiful girls". In that single moment, he would make us feel so special. His own unique way of showing his love.

My latest memory is having a conversation with him at Keerat's wedding - he was telling us a story. I do not remember what he was saying, but I cannot forget the enthusiasm with which he would narrate something.

And of course, I am going to miss the pulled up pants - his signature look!

Cheers to a great man - one who will be missed and remembered by all.

Love you Pushy Mamaji,



**Harsimran Kaur**



# A Faith for Thinkers: Sikhi



Guru Nanak with Bhai Mardana. (Victoria Memorial Museum Kolkata)

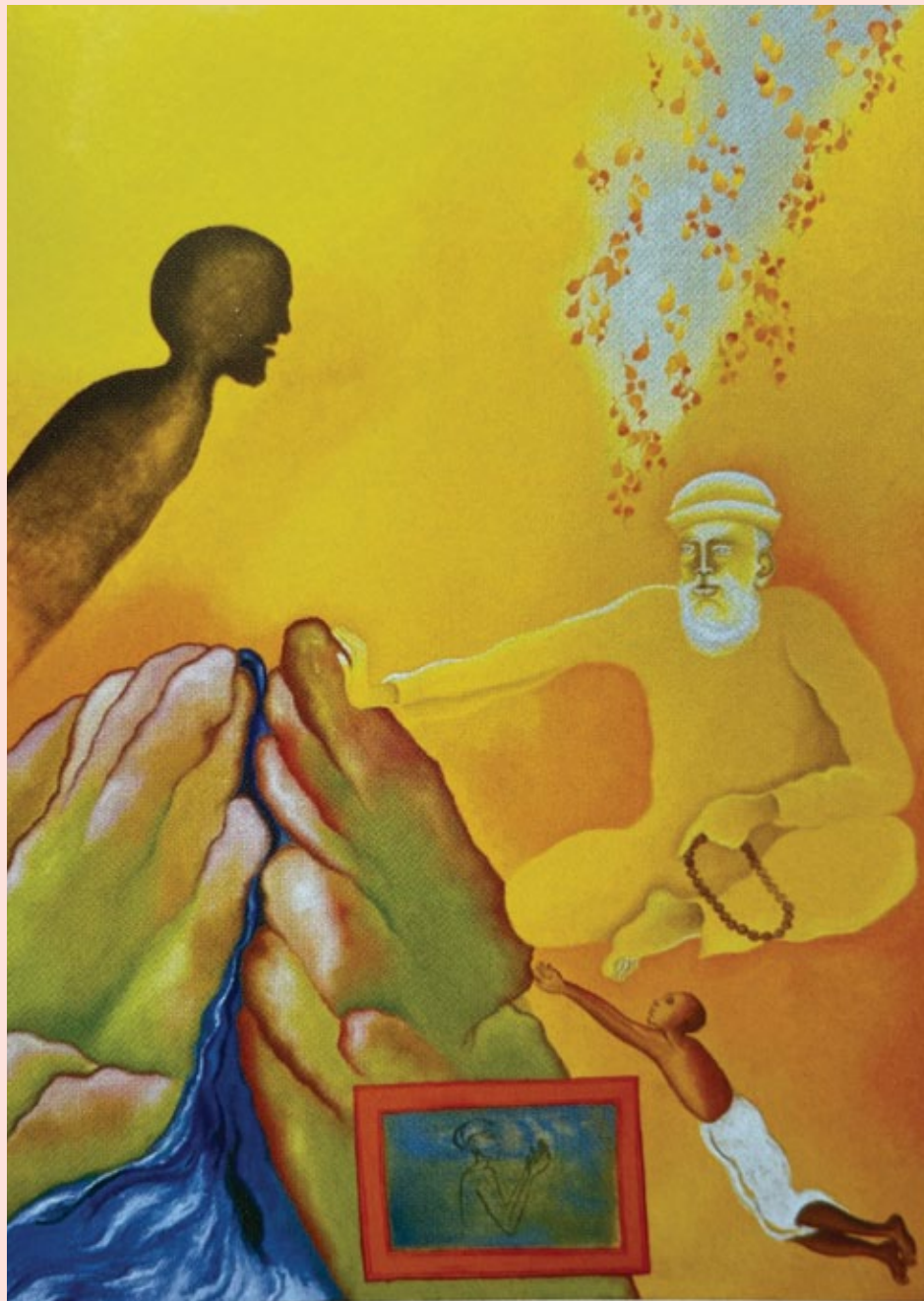
The compelling feature of faith is to grant the practitioner a peace of mind. A believer's faith should lead to a life full of joy, contentment and peaceful interactions with humankind at large. The articles of faith should have a clarity and simplicity about them, enabling believers to put their

faith into practice in everyday living experience and derive ensuing joy and peace of mind. These expectations are amply met by the Sikh faith founded by Nanak Dev (1469-1539). His approach was empirical. He rejected all religious rites and notions that failed the test of common sense. He

enjoyed discussions with religious leaders but he could also communicate with masses. He confronted people with the absurdity of their wrong beliefs and advised them as to how they could lead happier lives. Nanak found the existing religions to be marred by practice of complicated rites led by unscrupulous priests, preaching in languages (Sanskrit and Arabic) not understood by common folks. The practice of religion led to divisiveness amongst the populace, oppression of women, and a shameful exploitation of the masses at the lower end of the economic strata, leading to extreme unrest among them. Nanak dispensed wisdom in the language of the masses (Hindu and Muslim). They flocked to him in record numbers and called him their Guru (Mentor). His followers came to be known as Sikhs (Students).

At a very young age, Guru Nanak started questioning the relevance of religious rites and oppressive interventions in personal lives (what people could or could not eat, how they should dress and behave, etc.) as practiced then by Hindus and Muslims in India. Nanak traveled all over the Indian sub-continent (including Tibet, Burma and Ceylon) and the Middle East, discussing the religious precepts held by eminent Hindu and Muslim philosophers; he does not seem to have encountered Jews and Christians. After deep thought, he renounced the teachings in the sacred texts of both Hindus and Muslims and annunciated easily understood guiding

principles for everyday living; namely, earn living by honest means, share earnings with less fortunate ones, and always remember the Creator. Guru Nanak stressed that if one professes love for God, one must love His creation also. In particular, he emphasized the concepts of equal rights for all, including women. I quote from his hymn (an Ode to Women) highlighting the important contributions made to family and society by women:



*The Golden Saint by Arpana Caur. (Image from the Kapany Collection)*



“Of women we are born, of women conceived, to  
women engaged, to women married.  
Women we befriend, by women the civilization is  
sustained.

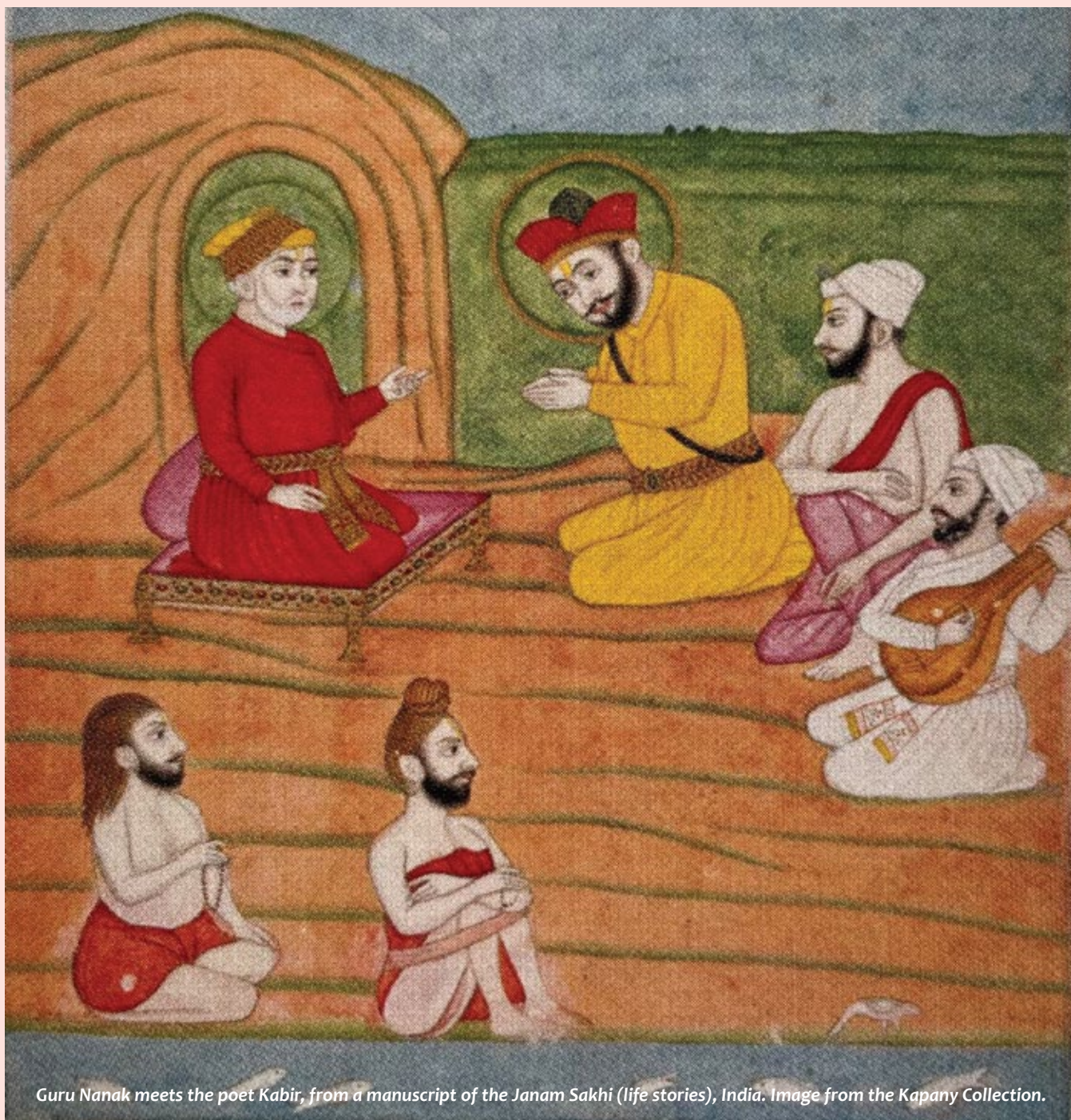
When a woman dies, another woman is sought.

It is by women that order is maintained.

Then, why call women evil from whom great men  
are born?

From one woman another woman is born,  
without women none would exist.  
Nanak says, only the Immortal One does not  
depend on Women.”

Guru Nanak advised Sikhs to always seek the  
TRUTH because, “TRUTH is above everything  
but TRUTHFUL living is higher still.” Science is an



Guru Nanak meets the poet Kabir, from a manuscript of the Janam Sakhi (life stories), India. Image from the Kapany Collection.



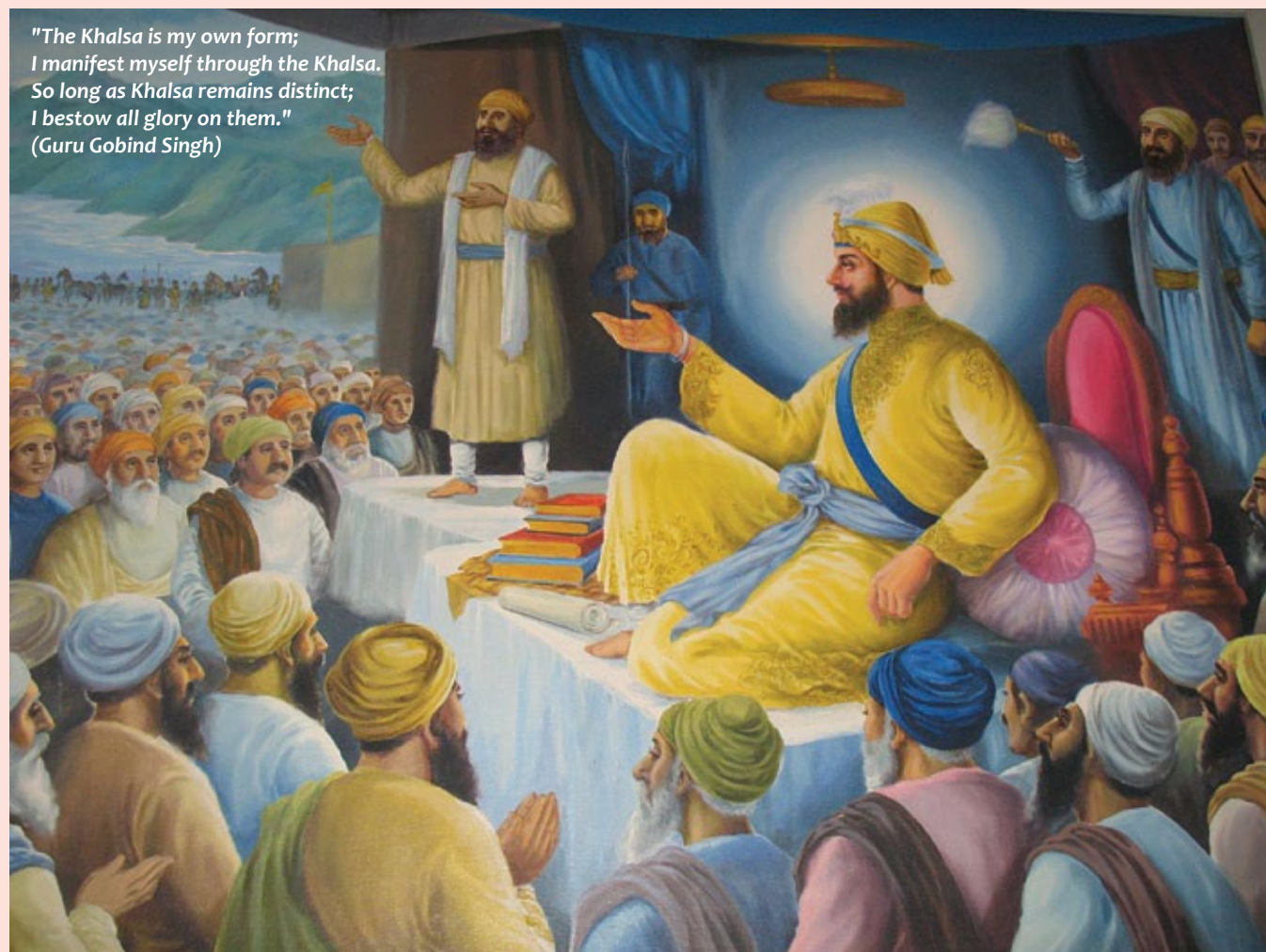
inherently careful and skeptical pursuit that leads to a verifiable TRUTH. As an article of faith this makes Sikhi a living faith because the search for TRUTH is unending.

To appreciate the monumental contributions made by Guru Nanak's teachings to alter the cultural set up of India, one should understand the historical background of the subcontinent. A large number of South Asians are descended from Aryan tribes that invaded the subcontinent and settled in the Indus basin around the second millennium BC.

When Guru Nanak started his ministry in the fifteenth century, he realized the herculean nature of the task ahead of him. Nevertheless, he set about trying to find an answer to the problems of the society. He set in motion a process that ultimately led to the establishment of the Khalsa Panth by Guru Gobind

Singh (the last Sikh Guru). In due course of time, Khalsa rule extended from Punjab to the Khyber-pass in Northwest India and Eastward to include Jammu & Kashmir.

I am a citizen of the United States, a great country whose Constitution states, "We hold these truths to be self evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness." The Constitution of USA was written in 1776, nearly 300 years after Nanak was born, yet it resonates the message that Guru Nanak preached to masses on the other side of the globe. The two messages, one spiritual and another secular, are complementary. Not surprisingly, the Constitution also grants its citizen freedom to worship as they please. Sikhs conclude their daily prayers as follows: **"We pray to God Almighty... Give us happiness and**



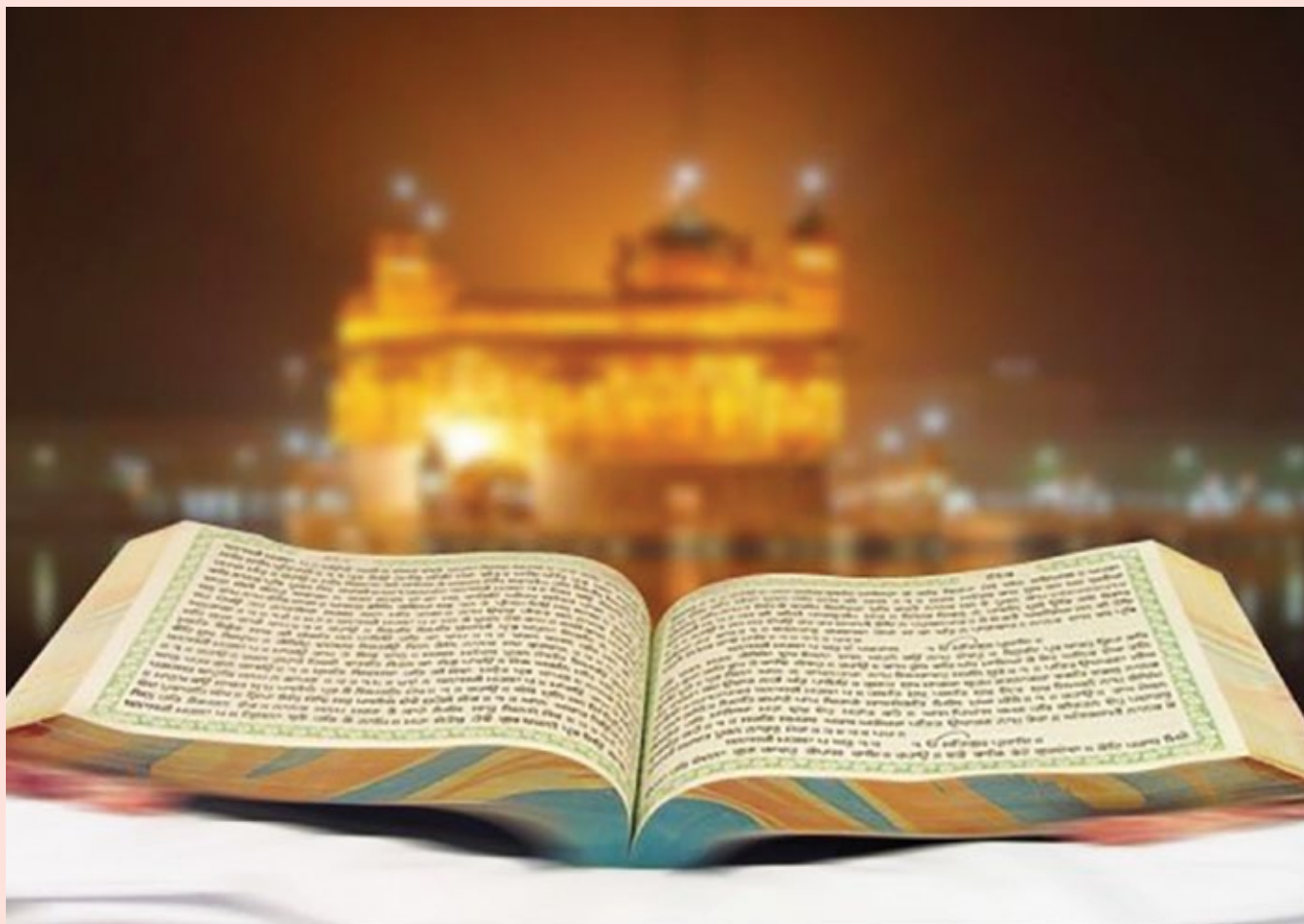


**peace of mind. Help us to be humble and wise. Forgive us our excesses. Grant us the company of those who are Believers. May we be charitable and help the needy. Keep us in good health. Bless us to retain our faith strong. Help us in restraining our limitations (lust, anger, greed, ego, and pride). Fulfill desires of all those who pray. Nanak says God's name be ascendant and by the grace of God may everyone prosper."**

Guru Nanak was followed by nine successor Gurus; a succeeding Guru may or may not have been related to the previous Guru; there were no female Sikh Gurus. The first five and the last two Sikh Gurus were prolific writers of Sikh sacred compositions in poetic style (*ragas*). These hymns (5894) are to be found in the Sikh Holy book called the Shri Guru Granth Sahib.

The Granth Sahib has 1429 pages, 19 lines to a page. Before passing on, the tenth Sikh Guru, Guru

Gobind Singh decreed an end of the line of living Gurus and stipulated that all Sikhs must consider the Granth to be their eternal Guru. This mandate cannot be changed. It should be stressed that Sikhs show reverence to the WORD in the Guru Granth Sahib, not the book itself; idolatry is forbidden for Sikhs. The fifth Sikh Guru, Arjan Dev compiled the Adi (first) Granth. His task was made easier by the fact that the third Guru, Amar Das had collected the works of his two predecessors (Guru Nanak and Guru Angad) and had compiled them into two volumes by his grandson (Shasar Ram), adding popular hymns of some Hindu Bhagats (Saints) as well as Muslim Sufi mystics; he added his own comments whenever his views differed from theirs. These came to be known as the 'Goindwal Pothees.' Guru Arjan borrowed them from Mohan Das, son of Guru Amar Das and added the writings of the Gurus from other authentic sources as well as his own compositions. This whole collection was put together by Bhai Gurdas (who was himself a



great poet) under the supervision of Guru Arjan and was called the Adi (first) Granth. Guru Arjan installed it in Harimandir (the Golden Temple) in 1604; Baba Buddha was the first *Granthi* at Harimandir. Guru Gobind Singh added verses composed by his father (Guru Tegh Bahadur) to it. A great effort has been made to preserve the thoughts expressed by the Sikh Gurus, unlike other holy books written decades after the deaths of the authors of the compositions. This makes the Granth Sahib a unique Holy Book in terms of authenticity of the original message. The Guru Granth Sahib contains 5894 hymns, out of which the largest number (2216) belong to Guru Arjan, 976 to Guru Nanak, 61 to Guru Angad, 907 to Guru Amar Das, 679 to Guru Ram Das, 118 to Guru Tegh Bahadur, and 937 to Bhagats and Bards. The hymns are sung by the congregation in Gurudwaras daily. They are set in 31 *ragas*. Guru Nanak and the other Gurus were great vocalists and musicians in the classical style; Guru Arjan was a great instrumentalist also. Both music and poetry form an integral part of Sikh culture. Bhagats whose compositions are included in the Granth Sahib belonged to different regions of India. They covered a wide range in terms of religions, professions, and castes. Many belonged to the lower castes. Kabir, Ramanand, Ravidas, Surdas, Sain and Bhikan came from Utter Pradesh; Jaidev from Bengal, Namdev, Trilochan, and Parmanand from Maharashtra, Pipa and Dhanna from Rajasthan. Five of them: Farid, Bhikan, Satta, Balwand, and Mardana were Muslims. Kabir was a weaver; Namdev a tailor; Dhanna a farmer; Sadhana a butcher; Ravidas a shoemaker; Sain a barber; Ramanand, Trilochan and Surdas were brahmins; Pipa a ruler. Farid who lived in the thirteenth century did much to spread Sufi Islam in Northern India. Kabir accepted the incarnation of God as Rama; 292 of his hymns (the most by any Bhagat) are included in the Guru Granth Sahib. Some of these Bhagats worshipped Rama and Krishna.

Considering the religious affiliations of Bhagats whose compositions are included in the Granth, it is not surprising that the largest portions of the Granth Sahib is composed in a mixed language which may be called 'Hindwi', a mixture of Hindi, Prakrit, Braj, Punjabi, as well as Persian and Arabic vocabulary current then. The metaphor of the Granth is homely

and direct, much like one would encounter in everyday life. The word, sound, and idea in the poetry of the Granth create a perfect harmony between the subject matter being discussed. As one would expect, it begins with Guru Nanak's composition 'Jap ji', the morning prayer of Sikhs. Guru Nanak's teachings form the Gold standard for Sikhs to follow. He stressed truthful living (honest living, compassionate heart, and a fearless passion for TRUTH) as the goal for humans. I recommend all Sikhs to recite Jap ji with alert minds every morning and dwell on Guru Nanak's wisdom dispensed therein. Gurus did not criticize Muslim or Hindu way of worship. However, all Sikh Gurus preached against the incarnation of God and idol worship. Beginning with Guru Nanak, they all rejected the authority of the Vedas, Puranas, Shastras, as well as Koran.

The basic Sikh belief is that life is not sinful in its origin; having emanated from the Pure One it remains Pure in its essence. There is no place for a Satan in the Sikh belief system. One's vision may be clouded by delusions and distractions leading to suffering. We are subject to five limitations: Lust, Anger, Greed, Infatuation, and Pride, but temptations may be overcome by following Gurus' teaching. Asceticism or the notion of Castes is forbidden for Sikhs. No food is forbidden to a Sikh but that which creates in one Evil or Pain. Similarly, no dress is taboo but that which leads to Sin and Sorrow. Women rights are on par with men rights; men as well as women may serve as priests. Thereby, women are saved from tyrannical rulings of priesthood. One may contrast this situation with the formal status accorded women in Hinduism, Islam, Christianity, Judaism, as well as Buddhism. Unlike Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, Sikhs do not claim any exclusive status with God by just being Sikhs. The spiritual merit is earned by submission of one's ego to God's Will (Hukam) and living in a state of equipoise (Sahaj). This view may be contrasted with the Christian and Islamic fervor for converting so-called 'infidels', often at the point of a sword, in the name of the Benevolent, Merciful God, averring that salvation is not possible outside them.

Many scholars are often confused by the Sikh view of life. Some see in it a strong strain of the





Bhakti cult inspired by the tenets of Kabir. Others see it as an attempt to reconcile the monotheism of Islam with Hindu metaphysics. Again, Sikh emphasis on moderating of desires (Trishna) seems an echo of Buddhism, as do terms like Nirban (Nirvana) and Sangat (Sangha). The Nirmalas, well versed in Hindu scriptures (their elders were educated at Benares), have interpreted Sikhism as a Vedantic creed, an exposition of the Bhagwat Gita. The Qadianis (a Muslim sect) quote chapter and verse to prove that Guru Nanak was a devout Muslim. Here one may note that the first four Gurus were Hindu men well-grounded in Hindu Philosophy. However, in their enlightened phase, they only accepted some of the basic doctrines of Hinduism, enlarging and deepening their meaning, and rejected those considered out of harmony with an integrated view of life. Again, Muslims see Islamic views reflected in Sikh beliefs. Clearly, a need exists to expound on Sikh credo in considerable detail to remove superficial impressions of those professing other faith.

Sikhi is monotheistic. Sikhs believe in One All-pervading Creator, who is without fear, without hate, beyond time, not incarnated, self-existent, self-enlightener God. One Personal Absolute God of Sikhs is all embracing. He is transcendent and yet immanent. He is the God of whole Universe. He is the source of good as well as evil. But He expects us to choose good and avoid evil. In the Granth Sahib, God is remembered by all His names known to Hindu mythology as well as in Islamic scriptures: Ram, Bhagwan, Damodar, Murari, Gopal, Gobind, Girdhari, Gopinath, Shyam, Vasdev, Narayan, Hari, Madho, Kesav, Brahm, Parbrahm, Mukand, Vishnu, Raghurai, Prabhu, Ishwar, Gosain, Kahn, Krishan, Govardhan, Bithal, Mohan, Murli, Manohar, Jagannath, etc; as well as Allah, Rabb, Khuda, Maula, etc. The common name of God for Sikhs is 'Wahe Guru,' the Wonderful Lord. Towards the end of services in a Gurudwara, congregants sing a part of a composition by the third Sikh Guru, Amar Das called the 'Anand Sahib'. It outlines a

path to happiness. The main points stressed in this composition are: “I am full of joy, my mother, I am in the company of God. Holy music resounds in my mind. By aligning my mind, body and soul with God, all my sufferings have vanished. God is omnipresent, the Creator of everything. With God alongside me I am blessed with peace and happiness and all my desires are fulfilled. Only the fortunate ones attain this state of bliss. Air is Guru, water is Father, Earth good Mother. Day and night are Nurses male and female, they nurse the world. In God’s court one’s merit and failings shall be read. According to their deeds some will remain with God, others separated. Those who contemplated God’s WORD completed their journey successfully. Nanak says their faces glow and they are emancipated.”

Guru Nanak defined the Immortal One as, “One, absolute, unchanging, formless, omnipresent God, the lord of hundreds of known gods and goddesses, the Creator of all, devoid of fear, without enemies, timeless, unborn, Himself His Own Being.” Guru Nanak emphatically stated that no one (himself included) has the ability to conjure up miracles. In the opening chapter of the Guru Granth Sahib (Jap Ji) Guru Nanak emphasizes that everyone and all happenings in this universe are subject to the laws (Hukam) formulated by the Creator. This train of thought gives us a hint about the whereabouts of God. In the world of Science, one is reminded about the paradox of ‘action at a distance’ that haunted Isaac Newton after he discovered the ‘Law of Universal Gravitation’ in the seventeenth century; he died without resolving it. The same puzzle confronted Charles Coulomb and his contemporaries in the nineteenth century, in their study of electromagnetic interactions. Michael Faraday’s notion of a field consisting of ‘lines of force’ around a magnet pointed to a resolution of the paradox; it inspired James Clerk Maxwell to formulate the four equations of electromagnetic field theory. In the twentieth century, they inspired Albert Einstein to formulate the Theory of Special Relativity, the notion of the Space-Time Continuum and later the General Theory of Relativity. There are many types of fields known today for different kinds of interactions in nature. All of them have energy

stored in them; short- and long-range interactions occur via exchange of ‘quanta’. These scientific facts and Nanak’s definition of God’s whereabouts suggest that there may exist a ‘Field’ in the universe (even outside the Space-Time Continuum) emanating from God. Humans, in particular, sense this ‘God Field’ at a higher spiritual level attained by thinkers such as Guru Nanak and others. A challenge lies before us to devise an experiment to detect the ‘God Field.’ Such detection would be the Mother of all discoveries for humans settling acrimonious debate between two constructs of great minds to understand the reality, namely God and Modern Science. It would improve the quality of dialog between religions by sorting out what is TRUE and what are non-essential details to be discarded. This will bring joy and happiness to humankind.

Guru Nanak’s subjective style of reasoning in search for TRUTH was limited by an absence of instruments for establishing verifiable TRUTH (Science). A simple idea underpins Science: “trust but verify.” This powerful criterion has generated a vast body of knowledge to change the world overwhelmingly for better. Even so, as an article of faith Guru Nanak’s statement requires a Sikh to continue the search for TRUTH which is unending. In the modern age, it is imperative for Sikhi that future generations master various aspects of Science and its language, Math. It is obligatory for a Sikh to acquire higher education to the best of his/her ability to measure up to the standard espoused by Guru Nanak. In this era when impressive advances are being made in Artificial Intelligence, Sikhs have to acquire higher education in Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics (STEM) simply to get good jobs to live longer, healthier, happier, easier lives; service type jobs would be increasingly taken over by the Robots. We must pay heed to a wise man’s counsel, “There is a tide in the affairs of men, which taken at the flood leads on to fortune; omitted, all the voyage of their life is bound in shallows and in miseries.”

***H.S.Ahluwalia, PhD, FAPS; Emeritus Professor of Physics & Astronomy, University of New Mexico, Albuquerque, NM 87131, USA, hsa@unm.edu.***



# Sutlej to Brahmaputra

## Retracing of Guru Nanak's hallowed Journey by Guru Tegh Bahadur



399th Prakash Gurparb of Sri Guru Tegh Bahadur Sahib

Guru Tegh Bahadur, after assuming the mantle of Guruship, visited Amritsar in November 1664. From there he went to Kiratpur, but did not stay there long and decided to found a new township called Chak Nanaki (later renamed Anandpur) on the banks of the Sutlej River in June 1665. Soon he started out on his missionary journey, stopping first at Patiala. From there he moved to Kaithal (now in Haryana), and moving further east followed the same route followed by Guru Nanak Dev Ji in his first Udasi. Leaving his family in Patna, Guru Tegh Bahadur moved even further east, arriving in Dacca in October 1666 (some authors put the date as mid 1667). Guru Tegh Bahadur visited the site in Rayer Bazar, Dhanmandi area where Guru Nanak Dev Ji had stayed. The place where he held his congregation

is marked by Gurudwara Sangat Tola. Guru Tegh Bahadur spent about a year in this region. Guru Ji moved further east in efforts to meet and revive sangats (congregations) at various centers established by Guru Nanak Dev Ji during his Udasi journey. Guru Ji stayed at Chittagong till the end of the year 1667.

After visiting Noakhali, Chandpur and Narayan Ganj, Guru Ji returned to Dacca in early 1668. From there Guru Ji set out on the return journey to Patna. In the neighborhood of Mongher, Bihar, Guru Ji met Amber Rajput chief, Raja Ram Singh. The emperor Aurangzeb had commissioned Raja Ram Singh, son of the famous Raja Jai Singh, to retake Guwahati. The march was directed at the Ahom ruler who had seized Guwahati from Mir Jumla, the Mughal Commander



on 19 December 1667. Ram Singh had left Delhi on 27 December 1667, halting on the way at Patna. There he met Mata Nanaki and Mata Gujri, Guru Ji's mother and wife and came to know that Guru Tegh Bahadur was in Dacca on a missionary tour. Raja Ram Singh upon meeting Guru Ji persuaded him to travel with him to the Ahom kingdom.

### Guru Ji in Ahom (now Assam)

Guru Ji agreed and they finally reached Dhubri in February 1669. Guru Tegh Bahadur decided to cross the river Brahmaputra and camped at Dhubri, the site of Guru Nanak Dev Ji's visit. Raja Ram Singh marched further and camped with his forces at Rangamati Fort. Raja Ram Singh was accompanied by Rashid Khan, ex-faujdar of Guwahati. The details of Raja Ram Singh's forces were: 4,000 troopers (from his *char-hazaari mansab*), 1,500 *ahadis* (soldiers recruited by the Emperor), 500 *barqandezes*, 30,000 infantrymen, 21 Rajput chiefs (Thakurs) with their contingents, 18,000 cavalry, 2,000 archers and shield



Dhubri Gurdwara stone



Lachit Barphukan Statue in Sivasagar Assam

men, and 40 naval ships. Armies from Cooch Behar also joined the Mughal forces since they were vassals.

The Ahoms, anticipating a Mughal strike because of their annexation of Guwahati, are said to have followed the army's movements from Delhi itself. The Ahom ruler at that time was Chakradhawaj Singh and his Commander-in-Chief was Lachit Barphukan. When Lachit surveyed the massive Mughal force later, he was moved to tears and he uttered, "It is a tragedy that my country is facing this dire catastrophe during my Phukanship. How will my king be saved? How will my people be saved? And how will my posterity be saved?"

The Imperial Army was very confident of its massive strength but was not as yet sure whether the five holy men from Malda with them would be able to destroy the evil effects of magic and witchcraft of the Ahoms. Across the river, the Ahoms were unnerved by the superior numbers of the Imperial Army, but they were confident that the supernatural powers of their magicians backed by their tactful resistance would keep the attackers at bay. The Ahoms resorted to guerilla warfare. With their knowledge of terrain they were continuously harassing the Mughal forces. A few skirmishes took place and the Ahom king ordered tactical withdrawal of his troops from the line of engagement. He asked his retreating forces to reinforce the defenses of Guwahati.

The Ahom women magicians began reciting tantric mantras to Goddess Kamakhya for destruction of Guru Ji's encampment directly across the river. But



all their magic spells failed to harm the great Guru. In desperation, from across the river they hurled a 26 foot long stone, which came arching across the sky like a missile and struck the ground, near Guru Ji's camp. It struck so hard that nearly half of its length was embedded in the ground. Next, they launched a pipal tree towards Guru Ji, and it landed close to where Guru Ji was sitting, but no damage was inflicted. Guru Ji finally shot an arrow taking aim at the altar from where the operations were being orchestrated. Suddenly, the whole operation came to a halt. Then, the women magicians realizing the folly of their efforts came to Guru Ji, asking for forgiveness. The woman leading the magic operations was Neta Dhoban. She told Guru Ji that she was only fighting the foreigner, with the only weapon at her command, of which her people were proud. During that meeting Guru Ji assured her that he would mediate between the Ahoms and Raja Ram Singh to avert the war. Raja Ram Singh insisted on the return of Guwahati from the Ahoms as a precondition.

Lachit outmaneuvered the army of Raja Ram Singh at every battle, which led to a stalemate. Aurangzeb asked his general to initiate diplomacy and sign a friendly treaty for the time being. But Lachit's trusted Lieutenant, Atan Burhagohain, who later became the Commander-in-Chief after Lachit's death, opposed such a deal stating that the treaty would be an example of typical Mughal treachery. He further argued what was the guarantee that once the Mughals took Guwahati, they would not reach further east for Garhgaon or even Namrup.

### **Guru Tegh Bahadur Ji in Cooch Behar**

Guru Tegh Bahadur Ji left Dhubri for a preaching tour of areas in Cooch Behar. The Ahoms taking advantage of the end of the monsoon rains would raid Mughal fortifications at night and harass them. Raja Ram Singh was extremely annoyed and wrote to Lachit; "Being unable to match with us you are adopting tricks employed only by thieves, just as jackals contrive the death of wild elephants. No honor accrues in fighting with such dotards. So, I am not going to fight any longer." The negotiations were prolonged from February 1669 to December 1669. The Ahom generals realized that their guerrilla



attacks could not achieve specific military results beyond harassing the enemy.

Guru Tegh Bahadur returned from his tours and negotiations restarted. A settlement was reached as per which Raja Ram Singh no longer pressed the demand for Guwahati. After the peace agreement was signed, the Ahom King invited Guru Ji to Kamakhya temple and honored him there. The happy occasion of the peace settlement brought about by the efforts of Guru Tegh Bahadur was celebrated by a joint homage to the shrine of Guru Nanak by the Mughal and Ahom armies. A mound of peace was erected with the red earth carried by the soldiers of the armies using their shields as pans. It is said that each





soldier carried 5 such loads on his shield of red earth to raise the mound. This permanent monument to Guru Tegh Bahadur's successful peace efforts stands in Dhubri to this day. The name Dhubri was given by Guru Ji as a remembrance for the remorse of the Dhoban who had hurled the rock missiles and the pipal tree. Now a Gurudwara stands on the mound and it is called Thara Sahib or Damdama Sahib. From here, before the monsoon of 1670 Guru Ji returned to Dacca and then visited Jagannath Puri before returning to Patna via Bongaigaon, in May 1671. It was only on his return that Guru Ji first saw his son Gobind Rai. Guru Tegh Bahadur and his family reached Anandpur after leaving Patna in February 1672.

### Events in Assam after Guru Tegh Bahadur Ji's departure

Although Guru Ji had left Dhubri, a reading of Assam history tells us that events took a tragic turn thereafter. Soon the ruler Chakradhawaj Singh died and was succeeded by his brother Udayaditya Singh who asked his generals to open full-fledged war. A period of battles between the Ahom and Mughal forces in the region of Guwahati followed, with varied results, with the forts changing hands many times. Lachit led the fight in 1671 at the battle of Saraighat, and inflicted a crushing defeat on the Mughals at every front. It appears that the Ahoms preferred to take on the Mughal army on water since this was a difficult and unknown terrain for the latter. Thus, water



warfare and the *buruj* (the small boat like structures on which the army was stationed) played an important role in favor of the Ahoms in the Battle of Saraighat.

### Battle of Saraighat

When the final battle of Saraighat began in early 1671, Lachit was terribly unwell. However, despite being ill, he displayed tremendous valor and exemplary leadership. Such an action by an ailing yet forceful Lachit motivated his troops. They fought the battle with a fierce zeal and intense courage. The Mughal army suffered comprehensive defeat at the hands of Lachit's army. Lachit Borphukan died a natural death at Kaliabor about a year later in April 1672. This was not the final battle between the Ahoms and the Mughals, nor did Guwahati remain with the Ahoms for long. Lachit Borphukan's own brother and successor Borphukan, Laluk Sola, deserted Guwahati for the Mughals in 1679. It remained with the Mughals until 1682, when the Ahoms under Gadadhar Singh recovered it, thus ending Mughal control in Kamrup forever. Even today Lachit is revered in Assam as a hero and a patriot.

### Conclusion

So, we see this Chapter of Guru Ji Tegh Bahadur's travel to the east was to renew the relationship of the Sikhs with the Guru, but it was a tumultuous time in Assam's history. The details of the journey in parts of Assam and adjoining areas are not yet fully explored. It is hoped that this write-up can stir some interest and a thorough research is carried out so that all the historical details are captured.

By: Bhupinder 'Bo' Singh

Guru Tegh Bahadur's Painting, prepared by Ahsan





# Farmers Protest: Fault Lines to Fort Lines

In his poem *Chamkaur Garhi De Singhan Da Jera*, Sant Ram Udasi had said:

*Jhora na karein Qila Anandpur da kulli wich Qila bna deyange*  
*Don't be sad about the fort of Anandpur we will turn every hut into a fort*



In this essay, I reflect upon my learnings from Panjab in the last few years which resulted from my travels (2015-17) and writing *PANJAB Journeys through Fault Lines* and now as a witness to the Farmers Protest for the last eight months. Panjab's story is long and arduous. The book is reportage with contextual history, mixed with my memory. The title of the book and its chapters outline the various fault lines - social, economic, cultural, linguistic, psychological or religious - along which Panjab could crack if the state and its people are not dealt with an approach to heal from their multiple, historical conflicts.

We have just finished translating the book into Panjabi. My translator, Yadwinder Singh, and I were discussing how the farmers protest are the exact opposite of the Panjab I have depicted in my book. Where I saw Panjab lacerated and broken, chose the metaphor of earthquakes and fault lines, the farmers protest has erected forts for us. That is why we have added a new chapter called *Ailaan - Announcement* to the Panjabi version of book.

## Agrarian Crises

The farmers protest against the new Farm Laws is a voice arisen from the neglect of agrarian India over the last five decades. Subsequent governments have not addressed the farm crises in the country. When the unions approached



the previous Congress government in 2004, they instituted the National Commission on Farmers. By 2007, its head Prof. M. S. Swaminathan, submitted his five-volume report, for which he met all stake-holders in multiple rounds. But the government did not implement the recommendations. When the Bhartiya Janata Party government was bidding for power in 2014, they promised the terms of reference from the Swaminathan report in their election manifesto. They came to power and said they can't implement what they had promised. The BJP even filed an affidavit in the Supreme Court giving its reasons which were basically that if farmers and labour get what is due to them, corporate India will be hit.

In fall 2015, when I was travelling Panjab to research my book, the farmers and labour burst into a protest over the White Fly infestation of cotton crops. At one of the protest sites, an old man said to me, 'This is 84 da geda - the circle of 1984'. I wondered what he meant. Upon research, I learnt of a huge farmers protest in March 1984, in Chandigarh. It too was one of the reasons – others being deteriorating law and order and the separatist call which was actually an issue of distribution of river waters - that led to Operation Blue Star. The March 1984 protest in Chandigarh was one of the early indications of the aftermath of the Green Revolution that started in the state in the late 1960s. The protest over White Fly was an episode in this series of protests. The gap of over three decades between them indicates the attitude of the government.

The Farms Laws bulldozed through the Parliament in September 2020 are a direct contravention of the Swaminathan report. The demand to implement a Minimum Support Price across the country, and to not bring in the electricity and smoke pollution Ordinances, are related to the report. The protest is thus an expression of the ongoing discontent growing in agriculture in general, and especially in north Indian agriculture, which has benefitted from better state infrastructure by ways of roads and Mandis.

The sense is so acute that even with the rising second wave of the pandemic second wave, the farmers stayed defiant in spite of well-wishers asking them to vacate the protest. The reason was that the farmers

know that returning to their homes without the repeal of the laws would mean more suicides. Around four hundred thousand farmers and labour has killed itself in the last two decades. The pandemic exerted a small toll on the farmers, certainly far lesser than anywhere in the country, perhaps because they are living in open air. Even the virus validated the protests. But this shows us how the protest is the farmer's last stand and Prime Minister Narendra Modi has harvested the anger and desperation of rural, agrarian, India.

## Model

The need for the protest to be conducted by blocking important roads of the capital arose from the fact that the government remained unconcerned when the farmers started the protests in early October in Panjab. Now, at over eight months, I believe the longest protest since India's independence has created a model for the country as well as for the world. The farmers have shown us how to conduct a non-violent protest – in terms of the organisation, the discipline, and their code of conduct. But notice, the non-violent approach works when the opposition has a conscience. Our freedom came from non-violent protests. The British were cunning and brutal but not without conscience. They had a sense of shame and they did not want to earn a bad name for themselves. Today's regime has no such softness. They are arrogant because they are in majority. Right-wing regimes all over the world are devoid of a sense of shame. Yet, it is important that even under grave provocation, and there have been many by the government, the protest stays non-violent. History shows that in the last hundred years whenever Panjab has turned violent, it has lost.

In Panjab's past struggles, a big gap has been its inability to tell its own story, not having a narrative about itself. This time, that has not been the case. Right from the beginning, the protest rejected the largely compromised Indian media. Instead, it set up its own social media pages, twitter handles, many Internet television channels, newsletters of the protest (*Trolley Times* being the first, and one devoted to women *Karti Dharti*). Alongside, in the initial months, a huge number of singers supported the protest ushering in their own brand of protest music, which played a key role in drawing in the youth. While the



protests remained largely absent from television, the mainstream print media covered them for the initial months; however, after the events of January 26<sup>th</sup>, print media too stopped covering them. But, the protest's own media and international media continue to cover them. Though the protests are on the ground, the narrative battle is in the air – the farmers discourse has managed to stave off all efforts to destabilise them.

When the oxygen crises hit in the pandemic second wave, in spite of having blocked roads, the farmers opened the roads and allowed the oxygen trucks to move. Whenever there is a call for nation-wide *rail roko* or *road roko*, the farmers serve water, food, medical aid to the people caught in the strikes. It is amply clear the protest is not against people; it is against the government. Panjab's Green Revolution has fed the country for five decades, the farmers can't be against the country. That is why charges of anti-national, separatism, *tukde-tukde* gang are so facile and wrong.

The heart of this protests is *langar* - communal food, and *sewa* - service. The langar has taken many forms: earlier it was langar for food and water, now it has become langar of tents, oxygen, and beds during COVID-19. The sense of service by protesters, volunteers, donors, institutional relief providers, doctors, Gurdwaras and other religious institutions has been unparalleled. It is because of this sense of *sewa* that in spite of repeated assaults by adverse weather conditions – winter, rains and summer storms – the tents and habitations keep falling and coming up, again and again.

## Gains

The main gain of the protests is the determination of the farmers and the solidarities that have held up the protests. When the farmers broke the barricades on November 26, 2020, to reach Delhi, there was a resolve – *aar ya paar*, this side or that. This resolve continues to sustain the protest. While Panjab mounted the protests, and has been its engine, alongside came Haryana, west Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, some parts of Madhya Pradesh. In some ways, the divisions between Panjab and Haryana dissolved, the love between people from both states strengthened, and metaphorically at

least, East Panjab has come together. Then there are gender solidarities, caste solidarities, unity between farmers and labour and traders, harmony between the young and old, rural and urban.

The main gain has been that the protests have broken though both the BJP's hard Hindutva in the last seven years and Congress' soft Hindutva for the thirty years preceding the BJP rule. With their emphasis on *kirrt* - work, the protests have challenged the framework that all political parties have imposed upon us – religion and caste. A new way of looking at people is emerging: through the work they do instead of which region and caste does the family one comes from, or what religion they follow. If the protests establish this new labour/work framework, it will be a great achievement of the protest.

Until the second wave of pandemic hit, the farmers nation-wide campaign was escalating new heights. The campaign reached Bengal, Bihar, Odisha, Andhra Pradesh, and Karnataka. Now that the wave has subsided, we do not know how those farmers feel. Are they still as vibrant as they had become or has COVID-19 devastated us so much that we are still reeling from it? The coming weeks will tell.

We need to note here how farmers in the rest of India, who have never fully experienced Minimum Support Price, are taking long to wake up to the idea of MSP and demand it as their right. About 65 per cent of the country gets monthly rations. They are still to wake up to their right to rations which will be jeopardized if the Essential Services Act is implemented.

## Engine to Glue

The shift in Panjab's role in the protests occurred after January 26<sup>th</sup>. On that day, the Samyukt Kisan Morcha (SKM) had declared a Tractor Rally in Delhi – a parallel march to showcase how agrarian sector too has contributed to the development of the nation. This announcement was received with a lot of enthusiasm and lakhs of farmers reached Delhi to participate. The government played a game of chess and SKM made tactical mistakes. The issue was not how some people from the Tractor Rally entered into Delhi, reached the Red Fort, or the later arrests. That was



part of the government's game and could have been dealt with easily if the protests were united. The issue was SKM's disowning a section of the protesters. The manner in which the SKM leadership spoke against the panthic protestors, without explaining why the SKM itself agreed for the rally route change, created the rift in the protests. A protest such as this one comprises many groups, many different ideologies, many different aspirations. Yet, to abuse and label panthic protesters was a tactical mistake because it was what the government wanted. Eventually, through a mid-race baton change between Singhu and Ghazipur border, the protest stabilized but the rift is still pending mends by the SKM.

Sadly, the panthic groups that came in solidarity earlier, who left after the events of January 26th, also do not seem to have a clear-cut agenda. If the panthic groups advocate the Sikh interests, then let them bring a Sikh agenda to the table. Even this can be an agenda: if Modi says the farmer is free to sell his produce anywhere, then why not across the border? To and through Pakistan to Central Asia, to the Balkans? It can ask to open Kartarpur Sahib corridor at least on which both nations had agreed. This thinking is missing. All that goes on is a blame-game, elaborate expressions of real or perceived hurts. The only way forward for the protest is that the different factions negotiate positions and stay united. If Panjab could bring so many states together, Panjab itself must also come together.

Another gap in the SKM fully owning the protest was visible in end-April. A woman activist arrived from Bengal. She was allegedly molested, later got COVID-19, and sadly passed away. Women are the foundation of these protests. Without women, the protest would not have lasted more than a week. In spite of the patriarchal and feudal framework prevalent in north India, these women have risen and stand shoulder to shoulder with men. On many special days - Women Farmers Day, Women's Day and others - women have themselves organised the protest and all its operational requirements, from transport to stage management. Yet, it took all these months and an unfortunate death for the SKM to create a woman's committee to look into all gender issues. This could and should have been done a long time back.

The SKM members have to realise that while earlier they led individual unions, now they lead a huge and diverse movement. In earlier weeks, the protests were fragile; they faced possible armed action. There is no need for that anxiety now. It has been more than seven months; the protests are still on. Nothing has destabilised them. The government too is clueless. The protest demands equality from the government, it is mounted to tell the government that it is not here to rule and impose laws. Staying true to its spirit, the SKM needs to push equality at all levels, including gender.

We all hope the protests will succeed, but while we have time and space now, if we can make something better for ourselves, we must undertake the process. That is why, I feel, if Panjab's role before 26th January was to be the engine of the protests, now it is to be the glue of the protests.

## Government

After the talks between protesters and government collapsed on January 22<sup>nd</sup>, through February and March there was hope they would be revived. The government seemed busy with elections in five states so the target shifted to May, after the election results. Now June is over and still there are no talks. Like oxen in Panjab villages, the protest and the government stand with horns locked. The protesters have an agenda: repeal laws, legalise MSP and we will go home. The government has no idea what to do.

There is no doubt about the price the protest has extracted in terms of peace of mind, divided attention between homes and sites of resistance, even a death toll of above 545. But the protestors have learnt how to sustain the protest. Every village, block, district is now ready. Rosters and timetables are maintained. The food supplies and human resource operate on clockwork. Back home in the villages, people are sharing work; women take over when men need to head back for harvest and sowing. After the harvest season, many contributed money and wheat and other food items to the protests. The farmers are now prepared for months, even years to come.

In the last seven years, the government has earned enough ill-will of the people through Demonetisation,



implementation of the Goods and Service Tax, abrogation of Articles 370 and 35A in Jammu and Kashmir, introducing the Citizenship Bill, the mismanagement of pandemic, the push for Kumbh Mela and the huge gatherings in the elections that led to the pandemic second wave. If the government were interested in solving the matter, or improving its image, the last few weeks provided a golden opportunity. The government could have said, considering the pandemic, considering the plight of the farmers, revoke the laws and form a committee for MSP. The farmers would have gone home and the government would have earned laurels. But the government did not do that. One could call it a missed opportunity or see this lack of initiative for what it is: the whole protest is staked on the ego of the Prime Minister.

For the last seven years, Modi has projected a strong man image. To his followers he seems like a messiah who will deliver them into the Golden Age of Hindu Rashtra. If he now steps back from the laws, this image will be shattered. His messianic status will crumble. This macho image is layered with the pressure on the government by corporates and international players. The corporates who stand to benefit from the new laws, sponsored the election campaign of the government. The laws are a payback to them. The government chooses to stay obliged to them rather than

look at the welfare of its people. The process is enabled by the backing of the World Trade Organisation, the International Monetary Funds loans and conditions, and the General Agreement on Trade and Tariff that after the Uruguay round (1986-93) is committed to placing agriculture on the neo-liberal track.

As of now, the government is engaged in a war of attrition: let the protests extend, they will weaken and crack around fault lines of gender, caste, regionalism, internal disagreements; it is yet to realise these are fort lines, they will stand strong.

From July 22, since the Indian Parliament Monsoon Session has started, the farmers have started a Kisan Sansad - Farmers' Parliament, a few hundred meters from the Parliament House. The permission has not been easy, the police presence is immense, the barricades are five-layered, the media is stopped from relaying proceedings, yet the farmers are sending 200 delegates from 20 states, represented union-wise, to debate on various issues, everyday until the Monsoon Session lasts - August 13. The Farmers Parliament is setting a tall benchmark for how parliamentary proceedings must be conducted. On Day 3, the eighth months of the farmers protest, women were in charge and conducted the proceedings of the Kisan Sansad the whole day and their discipline and dignity impressed



Trolley Times Newspaper





the whole nation and has given yet another model of resistance to reclaim democracy.

### Upcoming Elections

If we see the protests in isolation, we feel excited and charged. Yet, if we look at Panjab

heading to assembly elections in 2022, our reading would be different. In the same Panjab that mounted the protest, the political system is in complete disarray. In the 2017 elections, which my book covers, there was deep anti-incumbency against the Akali-BJP government. The Congress pledged on the Gutka Sahib to solve the big issues. A new party – the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) - was in the fray. AAP promised the skies. Finally, the Congress won. Now in 2022, the Akalis are nowhere, even though they broke their alliance with the BJP. AAP has no vibrancy on the ground. It is Congress alone. Yet, as of now, the Congress has bungled itself up through factionalism and infighting. All that Congress needed to do was fulfil its promises, go to people and tell them it stands with them against the Farm Laws and with the protest, and people would have returned it victorious in the elections.

It is clear that, on the one hand, Panjab can mount a struggle that becomes an example to the world but, on the other hand, when you place Panjab under a system, it crumbles. Whose fault is this? The state? The people? Or the electoral system that forms governments? Considering this dilemma of Panjab, we have named the Panjabi translation as: *Jinna Rahan Di Main Saar Na Jaana* which means 'I cannot summarise these paths'. This is what I have learnt: no one can conclude Panjab; Panjab cannot be tied in any label, any discourse. Panjab is a huge ocean and its face depends on how you look at it.

Along with Panjab, Uttar Pradesh is also going into elections in February 2022. Though the farmers

stand outside the political system, like in Bengal, they need to start a 'No Vote for BJP' campaign in Uttar Pradesh. If the farmers build anti-incumbency, misgovernance, pandemic catastrophe as themes, they could cause the BJP to lose in these elections. That will make the BJP's path to general elections in 2024 that much harder.

That defeat seems the only way the government will now repeal laws and legalise MSP.

### Road Ahead

Lastly, even if the laws are repealed, if MSP is legalised, the agrarian crises won't end. Remember, agriculture has been in crises in the country for half a century. MSP will solve a lot of issues but for real change, the paradigm of farming has to shift. Of course, the corporate model does not work, but the small individual land-holding model also does not work in the long term. The question we need to ask ourselves is, can a co-operative model help? Can we diversify crops in some regions? Can we move from technology-intensive to natural farming? We are seeing gender and caste solidarities in the protest, the question to be asked is: will they sustain after the protests? When people go home? Will women and so-called lower castes get the same respect after the protests?

My personal satisfaction is that during the Emergency, Panjab stiffly opposed Indira Gandhi. But after that Panjab paid the price through two decades. This time I feel that though Panjab is the glue to the protests, the real fight is going on in the Hindi heartland – the cow-belt. This is a fight between Bahujans and Brahmins. Given the hegemony of the cow-belt in India's discourse, India should be defined from the cow-belt and not from its fringes – Panjab, Kashmir, North East, Tamil Nadu. As of now, the forts lines of Panjab have overcome its fault lines. More strength to the protests!

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# Closed Minds Open Hearts: A True Story



**F**or years I played with a pencil or a pen. Now life has changed and I play with the mysterious hidden power of a computer. **The story I pick up today, I assure you, is the absolute truth.** Yet it seems to be the most imaginative product of a harebrain: I suppose I may fit that.

Some details are simple. I came to this country on a fellowship to study. There were perhaps 3 Sikhs where I lived and worked for years, and no Gurdwara in the State. Times changed, and Sikhs are now dime a dozen and perhaps more than a dozen Gurdwaras are in driving distance of where I live and worked. The different ways of different people fascinated me. This story develops over roughly 20 years.

I always felt free to visit - cavort around - other places of worship irrespective of religious identity. It was a joy to transcend differences. The timeless adage empowered me with its call: "*Know thyself and know thy neighbour.*"

My story today runs about a full decade and is largely the trek of one lady, a New Yorker whose religious affiliation I will not reveal. She became curious about Sikhs - her different looking neighbours. In time, slowly she became curious about Sikhi and became a regular at the Gurdwara. Her curiosity awakened. She even studied Punjabi language at the Gurdwara Sunday school, even though her command of conversational Punjabi remained somewhat troublesome but charming.

And then in a trice she became *amritdhari*. Just imagine that. She even changed her name for a

landmark Sikh name. Time passed. Days became weeks, months, and years. In a memorable day and in a monumental way, she had become an integral part of the Sikh community.

But habits of a lifetime are not so easily shelved, discarded and replaced or reframed, especially if the language to be newly adopted is entirely different.

Years passed though not always kindly. She married a fellow religionist but that union collapsed. Yet our personal friendship continued to flower. I suppose I could lay significant burden on the silent but prominent "*No Approval*" from the wider non-Sikh community, as well as a leery suspicious non-welcoming Sikh community, and perhaps silence from her parental community as well.

Note that I have dealt with life-changing issues in a couple of paragraphs, even though the process must have been earth shattering for those caught in the struggle.



Nothing in life is free and time demanded its price. She returned to her roots. Surely, she gained some peace of mind while conflicts likely continued to tear at her heart and sense of self. Surely now the repertoire was a mix of two different lore that she had experienced and made her own.

Could one conclude that she had now returned to the place from whence she came. Perhaps the mixture of two traditions suits her but such mixtures don't always create a workable union. Just think; major religions can work together on single issues. To create a joint presence and accommodate contradictory do's and don'ts rarely ever sit together. As life exists it is a joint step not easily taken or tolerated.

But life turns once again on a small but powerful axis. So, now just weeks ago she informed me that what she wanted most in life is to return to her life as a Sikh. That, she insists, describes her more truly than any other way of life. If so, in my view, she had the right to walk that step. I believe it. And that's what I told her.

But these matters are not so easy. Most religions seem to design powerful and significant processes and steps for both entrance into or exit from their model-discipline and life style. Most Sikhs will remind us that as a Sikh she has to go through some very formal time laden steps, such as confession of grave error and a formal public admission thereof that requires formal steps of forgiveness by the Creator. I wonder do we mean by the Creator or by the Sikh community, or is it that the Creator acts only through the Sikh community for issues dealing with Sikhs?

When I pushed her further, she felt that she needed to feel forgiven by the Creator who will forgive her trespasses only if she showed public tears, penance and humility. I do not respect such an opinion and demand when it comes from the clergy of a religion but I listen carefully and respectfully when it comes from a believer, no matter which faith.

My attitude is simpler and hopefully recognizes that we are dealing with an adult. She has not only the right but also the duty to think about her obligation and to attend thereon. Before we jump to scolding or scolding advice, we might as adults realize that we are dealing

with adults. They have not only the right to change their minds, but also the duty and obligation to do so.

People have their minds? Where being the place for their minds now that their reality may be somewhat mixed? Wherever they find their honest place is what I would say. All people have their stars, and all have their Satans. The choice is ours.

Let's welcome my unnamed friend wherever we find her - back with the Sikhs, if she so desires. Another day, she might make a different choice. Welcome that, too, if and when it comes your way.

Whichever way or ways you have lived, if you lived the other path your onus is to decide and live honestly, even a mixture, if that appeals. Even if you lived as the other, the experience will last. Make it for the better.

Now for my friend with a changing heart. I am what my past has made me. I look at the fact that I came to this country as a 16-year-old alien, and had a reasonable sense of the culture and cuisine that I brought with me. For about 70 years I have been an American. The two experiences were and remain different in culture, language, cuisine, technology and the whole world, in fact, *but within me their whole is greater than the sum of the parts*. Their union does exactly that, nothing less.

God and our inner self respond to real sentiments and reason. A formal public celebration is not necessary. Should my friend adopt a public but joyous time for this it would be her choice. There need not be a public display of sorrow either. Her feelings override necessity of any public display. It seems that as we get older our identity becomes less sharply edged. In fact, it becomes a mix of our many and different experiences of our rich lives.

I fully understand that this may be a kind, overriding event for my friend. Surely, the Creator is beyond personal stake of joy or disappointment. The Creator is Forgiveness incarnate, beyond any personal stake here.

*Think of the Creator but not as a counting business head. He created us so he values us too.*

**I.J. Singh**



# The Chillianwala Battle

## In the aftermath of Ranjit Singh and his Empire

The Battle of Chillianwala, fought by the Sikhs and the British 150 years ago in 1849, is one of those stirring events most nations would remember with pride for generations to come. But not our nation. This epic battle in which vastly outnumbered Sikh soldiers of the erstwhile Lahore Durbar almost ended British expansionism in India is forgotten, although it is solemnly remembered on the grounds of Chelsea's Royal Hospital in London before a memorial for some of the British officers and men who fell at Chillianwala in the first hour of the battle. Wreaths have been laid at this memorial for the last 149 years.

Do we similarly honour the unconquerable spirit of our heroes who faced formidable odds on that

battlefield? We do not. Most of us cannot even tell the difference between Chillianwala and Jallianwala!

The Fateh Foundation has taken a small step forward by instituting the Chillianwala Memorial Lecture to be held on January 13 every year – the date on which that epic battle was fought. This first lecture was delivered in 1998 by Lt. General Kirpal Singh Randhawa, an outstanding soldier in his own right.

Lectures in the future will range from historical to contemporary events with the aim of placing in perspective the possibilities and pitfalls which face nations, Particularly ours.



British infantry attack at the Battle of Moodkee on 18th December 1845 during the First Sikh War. (Picture by Henry Martens)



## Ranjit Singh and his Kingdom

By sheer force of his personality, Maharaja Ranjit Singh, born in 1780, became the unquestioned ruler of the Punjab from 1799 to 1839, his kingdom being the last bastion to hold out against the British—a symbol of their incomplete conquest of India.

Relying on unconventional statecraft and dazzling display of daring and courage, he wielded his warrior nation to extend the Empire from the Sutlej to Kabul in Afghanistan and from Ladakh to Iskardu and Tuklakote in Little Tibet.

Every invasion of India till then had been from west to east, across the Indus, from 2000 BC onwards, when the Aryans came in. For the first time in history, an Indian, Maharaja Ranjit Singh, went westwards, crossed the Indus River in 1826, going right onto Kabul. The British followed him, but with his assistance. In the south, he acquired the Cis-Sutlej States.

Deciding against an open confrontation with the British, Ranjit Singh chose to enter into the 1809 Treaty with them by which he forfeited his claim to the Cis-Sutlej States, but retained control over his existing territories south of the Sutlej, where he had the right to continue policing them with his troops. The British in turn agreed not to interfere north of the Sutlej. Maharaja Ranjit Singh was no fool to sign the Treaty of 1809. He was quite clear about his inability to push his empire across the Sutlej and against the British whose resources were far greater than his own. His future lay westward.

Ranjit Singh avoided going to war with the British at the cost of accepting their protectorate over the Cis-Sutlej territories. This compulsion made him all the more determined to modernize his armed forces along European lines for which he hired a number of European officers, the most notable of these being two former Colonels of Napoleon's *Grande Armee*, Jean Francois Allard and Jean Baptiste Ventura, who trained and reorganized Ranjit Singh's cavalry and infantry respectively. Ranjit Singh, impressed by the stocky Gurkhas of Hazara District, also enlisted



Original map source from the later 1800s/early 1900s, found by Navtej Heer in the book *The Martial Races of India*

them into the Sikh Army. The British inherited these from the Sikhs, including their typical rifle-green uniforms which were designed for Ranjit Singh's Army!

## The intrigues and the battles for succession

The splendour and greatness of the Sikh Durbar ended with Ranjit Singh's death on 27 June 1839. He left behind seven sons, born of different women but none capable of ruling his Kingdom. Court intrigues, betrayals and assassinations attended his succession and the Army became an uncontrollable and dissatisfied centre of power, eager for war.

The royal family, with no worthy successor to carry on Ranjit Singh's tradition of greatness, the nobles of the Sikh Durbar and the Council of Ministers sensing an opportunity for self-aggrandizement began playing Ranjit Singh's family members against one another in a bitter struggle for power.

The court intrigues were dominated by two factions, the more influential being the three Dogra brothers, Gulab Singh, Dhyan Singh and Suchet Singh. Dhyan Singh's son Hira Singh, a great favourite of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, came close to becoming a Dogra-Sikh ruler himself. Though not always in accord, one or the other of these Dogras managed to be in effective power at Lahore, allowing their kinsmen to set up an almost independent Dogra principality in Jammu and Kashmir.



The other faction comprised the Sikh aristocracy, such as the Sandhawalia brothers, who resented Dogra influence. Both these factions engaged in a not so subtle power struggle, and used the royal claimants as pawns in their fight for the Sikh Durbar. There were others, however, whose loyalties were unquestionable like Fakir Azizuddin, Ranjit Singh's able advisor on foreign affairs, and the Kashmiri Brahmin, Dina Nath, who handled revenue and finance.

The war of succession ended in 1845 after Ranjit Singh's youngest son, Dalip Singh, a mere boy, ascended the throne, under Rani Jindan's regency. Despite political instability, the Sikh Sardars and their soldiery undertook noteworthy campaigns, distinguished by their daring and courage. The first of these was into Little Tibet and the second into Afghanistan, to lend a hand to the British to overcome the rebellion of Dost Mohammad.

### Earlier Campaigns

Earlier a wedge had been driven into Tibet in 1834 with General Zorawar Singh's annexation of Ladakh. Ranjit Singh forbade a further thrust to avoid conflict with the Chinese Emperor but with no reaction from the Chinese, his son Nau Nihal Singh had permitted General Zorawar to move on and take Iskardu. Gen. Zorawar captured Garo in June 1841 with one column marching eastward along the Kumaon Hills to cut off British contact with Lhasa. Gen. Zorawar then took Tuklakote on 29 August 1841 annihilating the Tibetans. The Sikhs had pierced the heart of Tibet, going right upto Rudok.

The British protest to the Lahore Durbar was politely warded off. While these exchanges were going on, the Chinese mustered their armies to defend Lhasa and isolated Zorawar Singh and his men at 12,000 feet in bitter cold and in desperate straits. The Sikh Army, hungry and cold, tried to fight its way out but the gallant Zorawar fell on 12 December 1841 and his men were butchered in cold blood after they had laid down arms on Chinese assurances of being permitted to return unmolested. The Chinese reoccupied their Tibetan possession, however with Leh still flying the Sikh Flag.

By the spring of 1842, Sikh reinforcements reached Leh, and forced the Chinese to retreat and they reoccupied Ladakh. The column heading for Garo reached the boundary in August 1841 while another encircled a Chinese force sent from Lhasa and decimated it, taking the Chinese Commander prisoner. The Sikhs had made up for their winter defeat but learnt a lesson as well: campaigning in winter in this region was tough. On 17 October 1842, the Durbar Envoy signed a Treaty with the representative of the Chinese Emperor at Lhasa, making the boundaries of Ladakh and Tibet inviolable but open to trade.

In the meanwhile, common British-Sikh interests in Afghanistan made Sher Singh, another son of Ranjit Singh, order Gen. Avitabile to move from Peshawar to the relief of the British. The Sikh troops recaptured Ali Masjid beyond the Khyber and relieved Jalalabad.

Amir Dost Mohammad was given Kabul's throne.

### The First Sikh War

The First Sikh War between the Lahore Durbar and the British was marred by the treachery of a few influential figures of the Durbar, but the battles fought are a testimony to the bravery, fighting skills and sense of sacrifice of the Sikh soldiery. In successive battles their heroism in the field stood out, and despite the odds against them, they came close to shattering British supremacy in Northern India.

The British, wanting to fish in the troubled waters of the Punjab, had increased their force from 17,000 to 40,000 men by the autumn of 1845. A stormy meeting of the Durbar on 17 November 1845 took note of British intentions of aggression. Their army, poised on the frontier, waited for the Governor General and the Commander-in-Chief to cross the pontoon bridge on the Sutlej.

The Durbar, preparing to resist, divided the army into seven divisions of eight to twelve thousand men each. Four were ordered to proceed against the British advance positions at Ropar, Ludhiana, Harike and Ferozepur, one each to man the North Western Frontier at Peshawar and Attock and in the south along the Sindhu. One was kept in reserve at Lahore.





*Battle of Ferozeshah. Picture appears to portray the second day. The unit in the painting may be the 62nd Regiment based on their buff facings and the buff colour of the regimental flag. The British figures in the foreground appear to members of the light company*

The British asked for an explanation of these troop movements and were clearly told that they were meant to counter British preparations. Further, the Durbar sought the return of Suchet Singh Dogra's treasure, which was enormous, in fact cart-loads, which the British had appropriated. They also reiterated their right, often denied in practice, to free passage for the Punjab Armed Constabulary to the Durbar's possessions across the Sutlej.

The British rejected the Durbar's contention and severed diplomatic relations. The two States were close to war, and the call to arms was out. Chiefs and peasants left their homes to join the forces. According to the bard Shah Mohammad:

*"Sons of Sardars, handsome, dashing, debonair —  
leapt to battle as Lions leap out of their lair"*

### **Crossing the Sutlej**

The stage was set. The Sikh Army crossed the Sutlej between Harike and Kasur on 11 December 1845, its aim being to cut off Gen. Littler's force at Ferozepur from the British forces advancing from Ludhiana and Ambala under Lord Gough and Lord Hardinge. The act of crossing the Sutlej remains as debatable a point today as it was then. It centres around whether the Durbar troops had crossed over into their own territory, or was the crossing tantamount to a violation of the treaty of 1809 and consequently amounted to an act of war.





On December 13, Lord Hardinge declared war, accusing the Sikhs of invading British territories “without a shadow of provocation.”

### Treachery

The Sikh Army, consisting of five divisions numbering 50,000 men and 108 guns was assembled on the right bank of the Sutlej. They were to advance to Ferozepur, where Major Gen. Littler was caught unawares with 7500 men and 35 heavy guns. Two divisions under the command of Lal Singh, a Brahmin from the Gandhara Valley and the Sikh Army C-in-C, took position at Ferozeshahr village, ten miles above, to intercept the main British Army marching from Ambala to relieve Ferozepur. The other commander was Tej Singh,

again neither a Sikh nor a Punjabi, nor true to his adopted country which was Ranjit Singh’s Punjab. He was a Gour Brahmin from Sardhana, Meerut, and had been placed in the position in 1845 during the infant Dalip Singh’s rule.

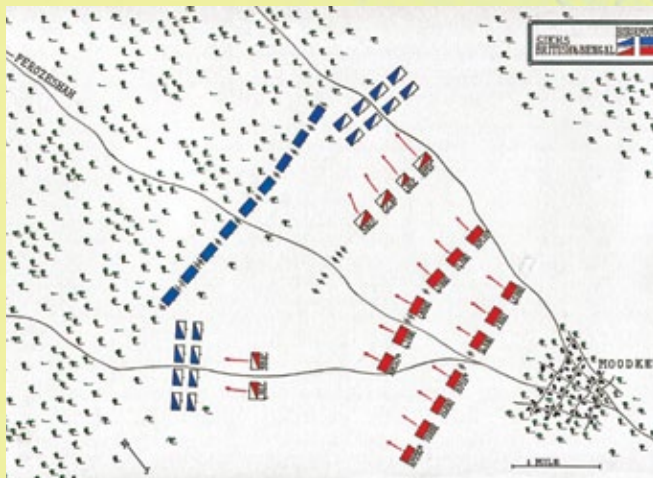
Before moving onto Ferozepur — as he should have done — Tej Singh secretly informed the British Agent at Ferozepur, John Nicholson: “I have crossed with the Sikh Army. You know my friendship with the British. Tell me what to do?” Nicholson advised him not to attack Ferozepur and “to halt as many days as you can and then march towards the Governor General”.



The other player in this sordid tale of treachery was Lal Singh. On 13 November 1845, a sketch map was sent by him to Sir Henry Hardinge, the Governor General, and Gen. Hugh Gough the C-in-C who joined him at Cantonment. It showed the entire battle plan of the Army under Gen. Lal Singh. It included the proposed deployment of forces for the attack and the cavalry charge, the position of the foot soldiers for accuracy of fire, the placement of guns, and finally the method of attack. The stratagem had a touch of the late Maharaja Ranjit Singh's French generals including shades of some of Napoleon's battle plans. There could have been no worse treachery in history.

### Battle of Mudki

True to his promise, Tej Singh encircled Ferozepur a bold sweeping move, but did not attack. His retort to the impatient Sikh soldiers was that his status and dymity demanded that he only engage with the Governor himself, implying that anybody below that



*Map of the Battle of Moodkee on 18th December 1845 during the First Sikh War: map by John Fawkes*

rank be a slight to his position. The British C-in-C and the Governor General arrived at Mudki, twenty miles from Ferozepur. There they were met by the smaller Sikh detachment under Lal Singh who commenced the attack but in accordance with his original design quickly deserted command leaving his soldiers to fight the British. Unable to stand up to the superior numbers of Gough's infantry, the Sikhs nevertheless offered stubborn resistance but lost the battle and were compelled to withdraw.

The action at Mudki, though not significant militarily, gave the British their first experience of the fighting qualities of Sikh soldiers. British casualties were heavy and they required reinforcements from Ambala, Meerut and Delhi. Lord Hardinge voluntarily joined the C-in-C as his second-in-command. Tej Singh with his now numerical superiority, was supposed to take Ferozepur after overwhelming Gen. Littler, a task not too difficult. Instead he deliberately allowed Gen. Littler to slip out and join forces with Gen. Gough and Lord Hardinge at Ferozeshahr.

### The Battle of Ferozeshahr

After the Mudki setback, the Sikhs moved to and entrenched themselves around the village of Ferozeshahr, ten miles from Mudki. Sir John Littler who had affected a junction with the main body of the British Army four miles from the Sikh entrenchments, now decided upon an immediate attack.

The British artillery mounted a steady barrage of fire followed by an infantry attack, gaining a foothold in the Sikh entrenchments. The Sikh infantry drawn up behind its artillery guns retaliated with fierce musketry fire and the British were hurled back with heavy losses. The next British charge succeeded in wresting advantage from the Sikhs, the contest continuing with greater determination throughout the night earning it the appellation "night of terror". The position of the British grew graver as the night wore on.

The British had suffered terrible casualties with every single member of the Governor General's staff either killed or wounded. That frosty night "the fate of British India trembled in the balance." Sir Hope Grant, one of the British Generals bloodied in the Anglo-Sikh Wars recorded: "Truly the night was one of gloom and foreboding and perhaps never in the annals of warfare has a British Army on so large a scale been nearer to a defeat which would have involved annihilation. The Sikhs had practically recovered the whole of their entrenched camp: our exhausted and decimated divisions bivouacked without mutual cohesion over a wide area." Lord Hardinge sent his son back to Mudki with a sword awarded to him for services during the Napoleonic campaigns with instructions that in the event of a defeat, all his private papers were to be destroyed.





*The charge of the 16th Lancers at Aliwal on 28 January 1846*

An entry in Robert Cust's diary reveals that the British generals had decided to lay down arms: "News came from the Governor General that our attack of yesterday had failed, that affairs were desperate, all state papers were to be destroyed, and that if the morning attack failed all would be over; this was kept secret by Mr. Currie and we were considering measures to make an unconditional surrender to save the wounded..."

However in the morning, the Sikh soldiers were once again betrayed by their leaders. First Lal Singh fled the battlefield. Then Tej Singh with a large force from the Sutlej did not even attempt to repulse the British. Having exhausted their men and munitions, the British had neither fight in them nor were they a match for the Sikhs. Treacherously, after firing a few rounds Tej Singh retreated. He had intentionally delayed his arrival and not appeared on the scene till he had seen Lal Singh's forces dispersed.

The battle of Aliwal, north-eastward of Ferozeshahr, on 29 January 1846 was more of an extended skirmish against mostly Dogra irregulars and a prelude to the final action at Sobraon two weeks later.

### **Battle of Sobraon**

On the left bank of the Sutlej at Sobraon, the Sikh Army had established itself in a strong position. The British decided to delay the attack until they had received reinforcements from Delhi. It was again typical that Tej Singh did not make a move to capture the stores on which the British were relying to win the war. This despite the fact that the Sikh Army was 37,000 strong, with 67 guns, compared to the British force of a mere 15,000 men.

The British massed their heavy artillery on commanding positions opposite the Sikh entrenchments which were under the command





*The Battle of Sobraon (1846) during the First Sikh War. (Anne S.K. Brown Military Collection, Brown University Library)*

of Tej Singh. The fire spread death and destruction, and though the Sikhs continued to fend the attack, the British soon began closing in on them. After a keen contest over every inch of ground, Sobraon was lost.

Once again Tej Singh deserted the army and even cut the boat bridge which linked the Sikh forces to the opposite bank of the river leaving them to perish under deadly showers of shrapnel as they tried to swim across.

Describing the battle at Sobraon as the “Waterloo of India”, Lord Gough paid great tribute to the Sikh soldier: “Policy precluded me from publicly recording my sentiments on the splendid gallantry of our fallen foe, or to record the acts of heroism displayed not only individually, but almost collectively, by the Sikh Sirdars and the Army: and I declare, were it not for a deep conviction that my country’s good required the sacrifice, I would have wept to have witnessed the

fearful slaughter of so devoted a body of men.” General Sir Joseph Thackwell who witnessed the battles wrote, “for though defeated and broken, they never ran, but fought with their talwars to the last and I witnessed several acts of great bravery in their sirdars and men”. Lord Hardinge, who saw the action, wrote “Few escaped, none it may be said, surrendered. The Sikhs met their fate with the resignation which distinguishes their race.” This was a major British victory against a people afflicted with internal treachery and treason and was the beginning of the end of the Great Sikh Durbar.

The British Governor General of India, Sir Henry Hardinge laid down stiff terms, including cession of the districts of Kashmir and Hazara. Within hours, Gulab Singh Dogra accepted the conditions and so ended, nominally, the First Anglo-Sikh War.

The traitors Lal Singh and Tej Singh were “immortalised” in doggerel verse, to quote a historian punning on their names:



*Laloo lost the blush of shame,  
Tēju lost his lustre,  
By turning their backs in the field  
They turned the tide and the battle yield*

## The Second Sikh War

As British Regiments were now garrisoned in Lahore, it was obvious the conspirators had succeeded in their aims. The Sikh Army was disbanded and a convention entered into for the administration of the Government by a Council at Lahore under a British Superintendent during the minority of Dalip Singh, the youngest of Ranjit Singh's sons. The country between the Beas and Sutlej, comprising the districts of Jullundur, Hoshiarpur and Kangra, was transferred to the British. Retaining suzerainty, they sold the valley of Kashmir to Raja Gulab Singh Dogra for a paltry five million rupees.

The disgusted Sikh soldiers whose regiments had been disbanded, realised the extent of their betrayal, and the feeling of revenge mounted. The sense of outrage of the disbanded Sikh troops and patriots was to be the root cause of the Second Anglo-Sikh War. In the forthcoming battle of Chillianwala, the Sikhs, now under able and upright commanders repaid the debts they owed and this time treachery did not quite work for the British.

In the British view there was to be no war in the next decade. Lord Hardinge, the British Governor General had ordered a reduction in the army but as subsequent events proved, this belief was ill-conceived. The first to challenge British domination was Diwan Mulraj, the Sikh Durbar's Governor of Multan and Sardar Chattar Singh Attariwala at Hazara. Chattar Singh's son, Sher Singh Attariwala, followed his father's example and also threw his forces against the British.

On hearing of Lord Gough's advance on Lahore, Sher Singh Attariwala in a tactical move, sent covering troops through the fords towards the river's left bank, for delaying the enemy's advance and sending early warning. To cover this manoeuvre, Sher Singh deployed heavy artillery on the left bank of the Chenab: a stratagem which was overlooked by Lord Gough as he led the British advance party to attack the troops of the Sikh advance guard who were now

retreating on Sher Singh's orders. The British came under fire of the Sikh guns on the right bank and it soon became evident that the British position had become untenable. Under cover of their artillery, the Sikh infantry and cavalry carried the day. The Sikhs captured British guns and the colours of a British regiment, this victory at Ramnagar giving a much needed boost to their morale.

Stunned by the defeat, Lord Dalhousie took the initiative in his own hands and directed his General Staff to prepare a blanket attack on the Sikhs before they could strengthen their positions. The main action plan of the British was to prevent a union of Chattar Singh's army from Attock and that of Sher Singh's. However, in the meantime the British had defeated Mulraj at Multan and felt adequately rejuvenated to face the now united army of Chattar Singh and Sher Singh Attariwala.

## Battle of Chillianwala

In an amazing coincidence, the battle of Chillianwala was fought in almost the same area where Porus, with his elephants, chariots, and archers, had fought Alexander's cavalry 2175 years earlier.

Sher Singh displayed exceptional skill by judiciously selecting his position which was protected on the left by a low ridge of hills intersected with ravines and the main stream of the Jhelum, the right being posted in different villages enclosed by a thick jungle.

On 13 January 1849 the British launched their attack. Their artillery advanced to an open space in front of the village of Chillianwala and opened fire on the Sikh artillery. The Sikhs replied with a vigorous cannonade. As the fire ceased the British drew up in order of battle and charged at the enemy's centre in an attempt to force the Sikhs into the river. The assault was led by Brigadier Pennycuik. For the Sikhs, the conditions were made to order. Scattering into the brushwood jungle they began their hit and run tactics, their snipers taking a heavy toll of the British cavalry and infantry. Those that got through the brushwood and the ravines were easily repulsed in the hand-to-hand fighting with the main body of the Sikh troops.





*3rd King's Own Light Dragoons at the Battle of Chillianwallah on 13th January 1849 during the Second Sikh War*

Brig. Pennycuik leading the Brigade in the front fell as did his son Ensign Pennycuik who was mortally injured while trying to protect the body of his father. Four British guns and the colours of three British Regiments fell to the Sikhs and the British registered nearly 3000 dead or wounded in the area around Chillianwala. A testimony left by a British observer says: "The Sikhs fought like devils, fierce and untamed... Such a mass of men I never

set eyes on and as plucky as lions: they ran right on the bayonets and struck their assailants when they were transfixed".

But, once again, as at Ferozeshahr, the Sikhs failed to drive home their advantage. Having suffered considerable losses themselves they were not aware of the magnitude of the punishment they had inflicted on the British. It then poured incessantly for three





days — which kept the Sikhs separated from their quarry — and on the fourth day as the sun shone again, the British had pulled out and retreated across the Chaj to the banks of the Chenab.

The Attariwalas sent George Lawrence, who was their prisoner, with terms for a truce, which included the investment of Dalip Singh as Maharaja. This, however, the British did not accept.

Once more, fate and destiny had conspired against a victory for the Sikhs, bringing to mind Shah Mohammad's words:

“We won the Battle but we lost the Fight.”

### **The Finale Battle of Gujarat, 21 February 1849**

The Attariwalas then advanced towards the Chenab and entrenched their forces between Gujarat and the river. However by now they had only 59 guns



to the 66 of the British and far less manpower. They repeated their mistake by firing too soon, betraying their positions and exhausting their ammunition. The British launched a cavalry and infantry charge which could not be contained by the Afghan cavalry which had reinforced the Sikhs. Sheer numbers finally decided the issue. The Sikhs gave way and the Attariwalas finally surrendered their army and their swords near Rawalpindi, completing the end of the Sikh Durbar.

In the maze of all the machinations that went into the terms of the surrender, Maharaja Dalip Singh was made to hand over the legendary Kohinoor and step down from his illustrious father's throne, never to sit on it again. As a veteran summed it up: "Ajj Ranjit Singh mar gaya". "Today Ranjit Singh has died."

### Spirit of the Khalsa

However, from the ashes and dust rose a proud nation whose gallantry and steadfastness against fearful odds soon filled the ranks of the new Indian Army, first pursuing British interests and then Independent India's a century later. As always, they had proved their loyalty and gallantry to the salt they swore by, being bestowed more gallantry awards than any other peoples in the region.

It is in the destiny of the Sikhs to face tribulations time and again and to rise and be resurrected even stronger. This is the spirit which gave birth to the Khalsa and made warriors out of people who never let themselves down.

They fought the British to the bitter end but having handed over their swords like the soldiers of yore, they became Britain's foremost troops winning more Victoria Crosses than any other people. They made military history when twenty-one of them, from one single unit (the 36th Sikhs), in a single day, received the highest military decoration that Britain could bestow on soldiers of the Indian Army. This was on 12 September 1897 at Saragarhi, a feat of gallantry and sacrifice unsurpassed in the annals of military history.

To this day their erstwhile foes, the Pathans faithfully maintain the Saragarhi Monument in

Pakistan's North West Frontier Province, a tribute to their then foes, the 21 Sikh heroes.

Then came the struggle for India's Independence. With less than two per cent of the population, no other people willingly gave their lives and sacrificed so much as did the Sikhs, whether at Jallianwala Bagh, the conspiracy cases, the *Koma Gata Maru* episode or banishment to the Andaman Islands. In the same vein, it was the destiny of a great unit, the 14th (Ferozepur) Sikhs to be landed straight into battle in Srinagar in October 1947, to stem the tide and uphold India's right and so save Kashmir. It must have given great pride to the spirit of Ranjit Singh that his soldiery, which ultimately formed the Sikh and Punjab Regiments, have won more laurels in battle than any other segment of the Indian Army.

Destiny continues to pursue the Sikhs even in the late twentieth century, in the same manner as it did their forefathers. They have risen from the desecrated temple of their Gods, the holiest of the holy, the Golden Temple, assaulted by a modern army with tanks and artillery. They have also risen from the ashes of their brethren whose corpses littered the streets of India's capital Delhi, all of this as recently as 1984.

A difficult people to understand—and not everyone understood them—led a seasoned British Commanding Officer of the Sikhs to write a small introduction for newly commissioned British Officers assigned to Sikh units in India, "There cannot be a more horrendous people when honour is at stake. Yet! Put your arms around the man and hug him like a brother and apologise. Before you have finished, he has melted like butter in the hot sun and is ready to take on the world for you."

Ranjit Singh is no more but the spirit of the Khalsa continues to live, not only in the battlefields of valour, but in the ability of these people to reach the highest levels of excellence in every sphere, all over the world.

**Lt. Gen. Kirpal Singh Randhawa**  
PVSM, AVSM, (Retd.)



# Getting to know Anita Anand

As the pages turn, the lost voices become loud and clear. From the confines of the past, and the yellowed pages of the archives, Anita Anand's narratives bring long-forgotten characters back to life. These are people who have influenced history, but against well-known giants like Gandhi, Churchill, Victoria and Ranjit Singh, their stories have lain buried.

**Meet SOPHIA: the princess, the suffragette, the revolutionary;**

**Delve into the minds of Udham Singh, Michael O'Dwyer and Reginald Dyer;**

**Get dazzled by the radiant Koh-i-Noor;**

**And get to know Anita Anand, the investigative journalist, the writer, the storyteller, whose words tell the stories of people long gone.**

Her characters have many shades and facets. In *The Patient Assassin*, where on one side, the reader appreciates young Reginald Dyer's love for India, his ruthlessness at Jallianwala Bagh as General Dyer, evokes an image of carnage and contempt.

"That's the whole DNA of why something happens, why it was okay and what made a person behave in a certain manner. That's what I need to understand. I think it is pointless to do comic book villains. Nobody is just bad. Nobody wakes up in the morning and decides to order a massacre. Everyone thinks of themselves and tries to be the best person they can be. You have to understand why dreadful things like the Jallianwala Bagh massacre can happen, at the hands of people who probably think themselves to be good," says author Anita Anand.

**A Question-Answer session with Anita Anand:**

**Given that there are so many subcategories of genres, what genre would you put your writing in?**

I'd say, narrative nonfiction is where I fit. I try to tell stories about big things using the lives of individual

people, whether it is through the whole episode of the fight for women's rights and colonialism; Sophia was my prism there. Udham Singh and Michael O'Dwyer became the lens to look at the whole idea of revenge and memory of what both countries did. It's through their two stories that the relationship between Britain and India is shown in *The Patient Assassin*. *The Koh-i-Noor* was an actual prism to look through. William [Dalrymple] and I looked at the great expanse of history, both Indian and British, by looking through this one talisman. I guess you can say it's like taking this talisman, a touchstone, and telling stories about the enormous canvases of history.

**How is it that you co-authored *the Koh-i-Noor* with William Dalrymple, rather than writing it yourself?**

It's a funny story. I was doing an event for the Jaipur Literature Festival, here in London itself, in the Green Room. I had been talking about *Sophia* and he had done *Return of a King*. We were just chatting about our books and what we had been up to. The Koh-i-Noor is a little bit in the background because he was writing about the Afghan kingdom, and it's very prominent in *Sophia*. So, we were telling each other these stories about it, sharing what we had both learnt during our research. We can't remember who said it, although I think it was me, that this was fabulous and we should write a book together. The information we both had was amazing and there was so much we both heard for the first time that very day. And then I completely forgot about it. Then three or four months later, someone made an official statement in India, in preparation for the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge's visit to India. As it always happens, whenever there is a British royal visit, the question about the Koh-i-Noor was brought up and this official said that the stone was a gift from Ranjit Singh. Both William and I were on Whatsapp wondering about the absurdity of the statement. A few days later, William called and said he had a publisher for the book we were going to write. This took me by surprise because I never thought we were serious about it. So we did it. We



The first comprehensive and authoritative history of the Koh-i-Noor, arguably the most celebrated and mythologised jewel in the world.

On 29 March 1849, the ten-year-old Maharajah of the Punjab was ushered into the magnificent Mirrored Hall at the centre of the great Fort in Lahore. There, in a public ceremony, the frightened but dignified child handed over to the British East India Company in a formal Act of Submission to Queen Victoria not only swathes of the richest land in India, but also arguably the single most valuable object in the subcontinent: the celebrated Koh-i-Noor diamond. The Mountain of Light.

The history of the Koh-i-Noor that was then commissioned by the British may have been one woven together from gossip of Delhi Bazaars, but it was to become the accepted version. Only now is it finally challenged, freeing the diamond from the fog of mythology which has clung to it for so long. The resulting history is one of greed, murder, torture, colonialism and appropriation through an impressive slice of south and central Asian history. It ends with the jewel in its current controversial setting: in the crown of Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother.

Masterly, powerful and erudite, this is history at its most compelling and invigorating. (Bloomsbury)

"There is nothing more you need to know about the Kohinoor"  
SHASHI THAROOR, *Indian Express*



# WILLIAM DALRYMPLE ANITA ANAND

'Scintillating'  
*Hindu Business Line*

'Extraordinary'  
*The Times*



# KOHINOOR

*The STORY of the WORLD'S*  
MOST INFAMOUS DIAMOND

did it on a very tight deadline. It was very strange, I was the Indian sitting in Britain and he was the Brit sitting in India and we split the book in half because his expertise lies in one period and mine in another. It worked brilliantly. I loved working with him.

**How does your research process work, given that there are so many modern sources now, along with the imperial sources that are available in the archives, for the central period of your books?**

I am scrupulously careful about not using the colonial sources, and if I do quote from treaties, Metcalfe and others, I do state that these sources are

not to be trusted. To balance it out, I go through all the other sources, in the case of the *Koh-i-Noor*, those of the Sikh court recorders. By doing this, even when you have a very biased source, you can show why they are saying what they are saying. With *Sophia*, I went out of the way to show that there was a secret around her, about what was being said, but I also used the family's voice. I didn't use any historians of that time because nobody cared. The thing with my characters is that nobody cares about them, until years after, the way I care about them. Nobody had even thought about Sophia. There were stacks written about Ranjit Singh, and even bigger piles here in Britain,



with the obsession with Queen Victoria and Duleep, but there was nothing about his progeny. So I would say that I was freer and completely unvetted. The voice of the family is heavily leant on for that book. The same was the case with Udham Singh. Nobody had ever seen those records. It's not the colonialist voice, it's the actuality of what was going on. It's the contemporaneous voice. I am much more interested in that than in somebody who has written an academic essay 50 or 60 years after the event, which in any case had never happened in either of those cases.

### **How many years of research has each book taken?**

I always have two or three projects up in the air at the same time because it's just the way my mind works, and the period of history that I am looking at interlaces anyway. So being a product of Britain and India, that is the territory I return to time and time again. That would explain, if you are interested in the psychology of it. I keep going back, and a lot of these sources crisscross. For the book I am writing right now, I came across the sources some ten years ago. So, it's sort of back burning. I have files, and I just keep adding to them. But my main focus is always the book or the manuscript that I am working on. I would say from beginning to end, four and a half years for each book. *Koh-i-Noor* was quicker, the imperative of all of the nonsense that was being thrown around at that time in both countries. So that was fast, but the joy of that was that doing the Sophia and Duleep Singh research had given me all that was required. I knew where everything was. I had seen everything. When I work, I put every source and every cross-index in a separate box. Everything is cross-referenced and handy for when I need it. If you have seen my work, it's meticulously presented, with footnotes and endnotes. Whatever I find interesting, I have different boxes in different places and I just keep adding. I keep it because I know that one day I will come back to it. Otherwise, I will not remember where I found it. So I guess I am thinking two books ahead, without even thinking deliberately two books ahead.

### **What next?**

You will have to wait. But I can tell you that it is my favourite territory. It's about this incredible

woman who is not white. She is entirely problematic and difficult. She has just crept up since the first book, from when I was researching *Sophia*. We have been bumping along together for a long time, but I have paid her a lot more attention over the last two years. I am head over heels in love with her.

### **How much are you influenced by your family background? Is that what led you to become who you are, writing the way you do? How do you choose your characters?**

It's such a hard question. I am not that introspective. I actually got into writing by accident. My avenue has always been journalism. I am a political journalist, and I am very proud of the path I took, when nobody who looked like me was taking it. I am the first in my family to do it. It was a huge worry for my dad. But I had that kind of mind, which is a bloody-minded way to live, to say why can't I do it. And if I come across things, I am also slightly obsessive. I won't let it go until I understand it. I need to understand everything. So I don't know whether that's what makes me, but it's what I have done in journalism. *Sophia* happened all of a sudden. I never wanted to write a book. Writing books is really hard. My husband is a writer and I saw how much he poured into it, and it just put me off. But then when I was pregnant, I came across this image which I couldn't explain. It was a picture of a woman selling a copy of *The Suffragette* outside Hampton Court Palace. It was a sepia print and it just said 'suffragette selling a newspaper'. People talk about intuition, about knowing when someone has something in common with you. Call it "*Pundar*", a radar for recognising another Punjabi, by just looking at them. There was something about her face and her features that made me think of my aunt, my *bhua*. That got me intrigued, and being who I am, even though I had a small baby, I got in touch with the people who printed the photograph. I was off work so I could become obsessive about it. They told me her name was Singh, and that she was a suffragette. This information made it worse, because my name is Singh by marriage, and I knew I needed to know more about her. I have been a feminist for as long as I can remember, and I wondered as to why I had not heard about her. So that started this obsession,



In 1876 Sophia Duleep Singh was born into Indian royalty. Her father, Maharajah Duleep Singh, was heir to the Kingdom of the Sikhs, one of the greatest empires of the Indian subcontinent, a realm that stretched from the lush Kashmir Valley to the craggy foothills of the Khyber Pass and included the mighty cities of Lahore and Peshawar. It was a territory irresistible to the British, who plundered everything, including ultimately the fabled Koh-i-Noor diamond.

Exiled to England, the dispossessed Maharajah transformed his estate at Elveden in Suffolk into a Moghul palace, its grounds stocked with leopards, monkeys and exotic birds. Sophia, god-daughter of Queen Victoria, was raised a genteel aristocratic Englishwoman: presented at court, afforded grace and favor lodgings at Hampton Court Palace and photographed wearing the latest fashions for the society pages. But when, in secret defiance of the British government, she travelled to India, she returned a revolutionary.

Sophia transcended her heritage to devote herself to battling injustice and inequality, a far cry from the life to which she was born. Her causes were the struggle for Indian Independence, the fate of the lascars, the welfare of Indian soldiers in the First World War – and, above all, the fight for female suffrage. She was bold and fearless, attacking politicians, putting herself in the front line and swapping her silks for a nurse's uniform to tend wounded soldiers evacuated from the battlefields. Meticulously researched and passionately written, this enthralling story of the rise of women and the fall of empire introduces an extraordinary individual and her part in the defining moments of recent British and Indian history. (Bloomsbury)



not for wanting to write a book, but just wanting to know. I was at it for a year, and I kept boring my poor husband, by constantly telling him about all that I was finding out. He finally told me to just write it all down. That's how that book came about. Frankly, I think my husband wanted me to tell other people and stop telling him. I became an accidental writer.

Coming to family influences, my father enjoyed History, and it was he who got me interested in it. He was a doctor, and I lost him when I was fairly young. I was raised in Essex, and there were no Asians around us. He made it his absolute mission to tell me where we came from, where our roots

were, and the things to be proud of. I grew up in this bifurcated kind of way, where I knew about the Indianness of me, but the schools that I went to, had nobody like me. The names, nobody is familiar with here, like Lajpat Rai, I knew about those names when I was a child. And when I found Lajpat Rai's name in the documents, particularly while working on Sophia, it immediately set off fireworks in my head. If I hadn't known about him, thanks to my father, I may have just skipped over it. I might not have had the knowledge to drill down. Lajpat Rai was a very important man, especially during that time. Here, we are not taught anything about India. We are taught about the Tudors, Shakespeare and



The dramatic true story of a celebrated young survivor of a 1919 British massacre in India, and his ferocious twenty-year campaign of revenge that made him a hero to hundreds of millions—and spawned a classic legend.

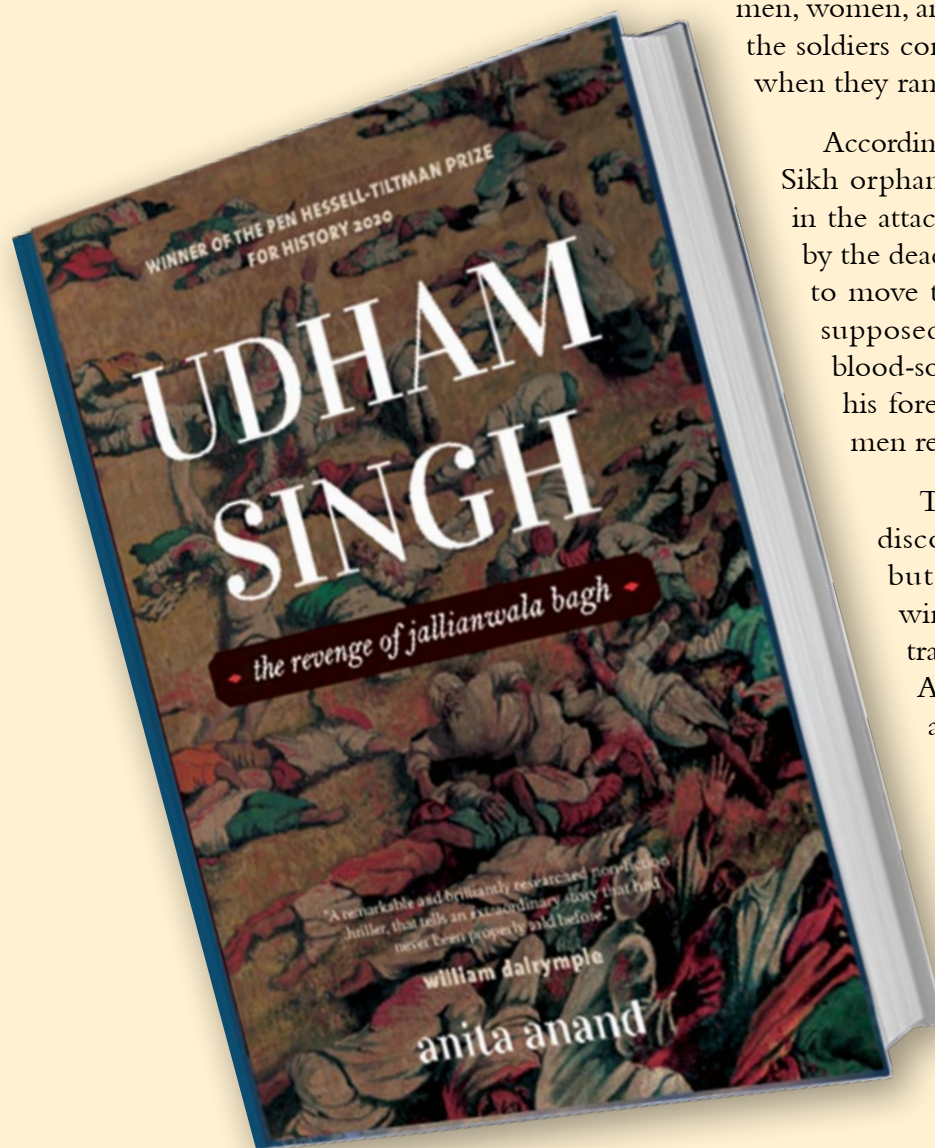
When Sir Michael O'Dwyer, the Lieutenant Governor of Punjab, ordered Brigadier General Reginald Dyer to Amritsar, he wanted Dyer to bring the troublesome city to heel. Sir Michael had become increasingly alarmed at the effect

Gandhi was having on his province, as well as recent demonstrations, strikes, and shows of Hindu-Muslim unity. All these things, to Sir Michael, were a precursor to a second Indian revolt. What happened next shocked the world. An unauthorized gathering in the Jallianwallah Bagh in Amritsar in April 1919 became the focal point for Sir Michael's law enforcers. Dyer marched his soldiers into the walled garden, blocking the only exit. Then, without issuing any order to disperse, he instructed his men to open fire, turning their guns on the thickest parts of the crowd, filled with over a thousand unarmed men, women, and children. For ten minutes, the soldiers continued firing, stopping only when they ran out of ammunition.

According to legend, eighteen-year-old Sikh orphan Udham Singh was injured in the attack, and remained surrounded by the dead and dying until he was able to move the next morning. Then, he supposedly picked up a handful of blood-soaked earth, smeared it across his forehead, and vowed to kill the men responsible.

The truth, as the author has discovered, is more complex—but no less dramatic. Award-winning journalist Anita Anand traced Singh's journey through Africa, the United States, and across Europe until, in March 1940, he finally arrived in front of O'Dwyer himself in a London hall ready to shoot him down. *The Patient Assassin* shines a devastating light on one of history's most horrific events, but it reads like a taut thriller and reveals the incredible but true story behind a legend that still endures today. (Simon

and Schuster)





the Romans. I think it's an affront. This is living memory. There are people who I have talked to for all of these books, who are alive, and who have had a hand-touch with the people who are front and centre in these books. I was able to interview people who knew Sophia personally. I was also able to interview people whose fathers and grandfathers knew Udham Singh. It wasn't so long ago. How can we ignore something that has just happened, something so seismic, that it split the world up? This is far more relevant to the geopolitics of the world today than the hypocast system of the Romans, for that matter, which I know about from school. Though it's also important to know that, it shouldn't be an either-or option. It's lovely how, here in Britain, we have commemorated the 100th anniversary of World War 1. The events that I am talking about in my books, also happened at the same time. It's funny how we, as a society, allow ourselves to remember some things and eject others. So it's the job of bloody-minded people, and I am proud to be one, to say, what about this?

### **How has the book on Udham Singh been received in Britain?**

It's been a runaway success here. It's by far, my most successful book. It's had extraordinary reviews and I have been invited to many literary festivals, with huge crowds gathering to hear me. What touched me was the emotional response to it, because people didn't know. Particularly in Ireland, it was a bestseller for weeks. I also have a radio show, and every time I went to work, I would have a little pile of letters from Ireland, saying, 'Dear Anita, I have read your book and I just want to apologise. I had no idea that one of our Irishmen did this'. They felt terrible about Michael O'Dwyer. They identified so closely with the struggle of determination that India was having, that they were shocked. Every time I went there to do a literary festival, I would have someone line up for me to sign a book, in tears, apologising. I would tell them not to apologise because they had not done anything. 'We were supposed to be the good guys. We had no idea,' said one person.

### **Other than your own books, which is your favourite genre?**

I love nonfiction, especially the books where women take centre stage. I have just finished a book about Ethel Rosenberg, who was famously executed in America, for being a communist spy. Another one I just read is about Emily Hobhouse, who makes a slight appearance in Sophia. This one woman overturned foreign policy in South Africa by providing evidence of the atrocities that were committed. I read as much as I can, but not as much as I would like. Most of my time is consumed by these little cards that I am amassing for my books, and my work as a political journalist. I've also got two small children and they need my time. There are only so many hours in a day, sometimes not enough.

Another try about finding out what was next, and all Anita said was, "All I can tell you is that it is very exciting and I feel my skin bristling every time I think about it."



Anita Anand is the presenter of Any Answers, the Reith Lectures and various documentaries on BBC Radio 4. She has also presented The Daily Politics, The Heaven and Earth Show, The Sunday Politics and Newsnight, on BBC Television and Drive and The Anita Anand Show on BBC Five Live.

She is the author of '*SOPHIA: princess, suffragette, revolutionary*'. Published by Bloomsbury 2015; '*Kohinoor*' published by Bloomsbury 2017; '*Udham Singh – The Patient Assassin*', published by Simon and Schuster 2019

She lives in London with her husband and two sons.

**By Artika Aurora Bakshi**



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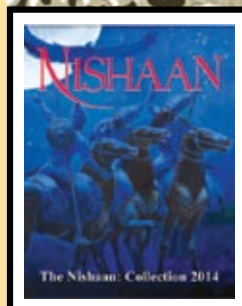
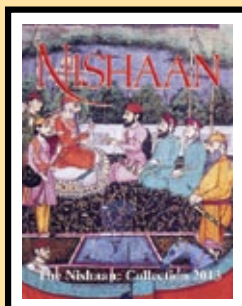
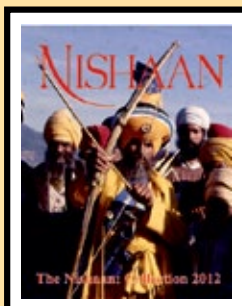
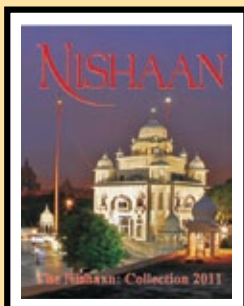
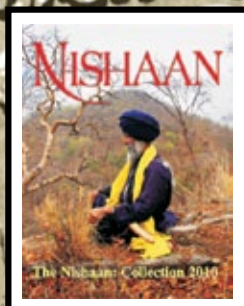
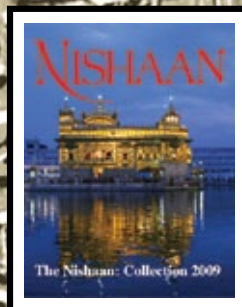
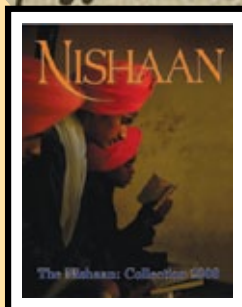
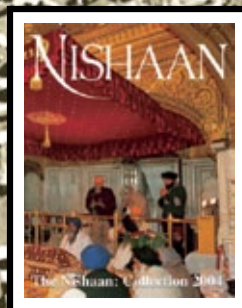
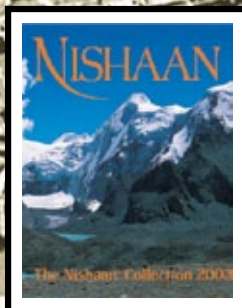
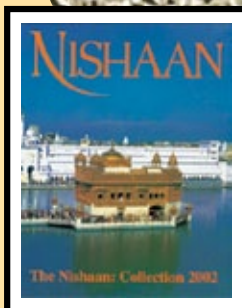
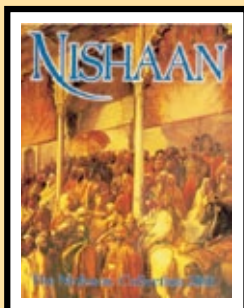
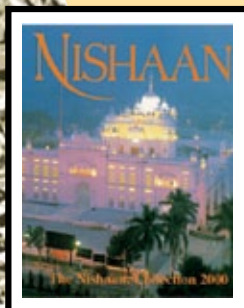
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