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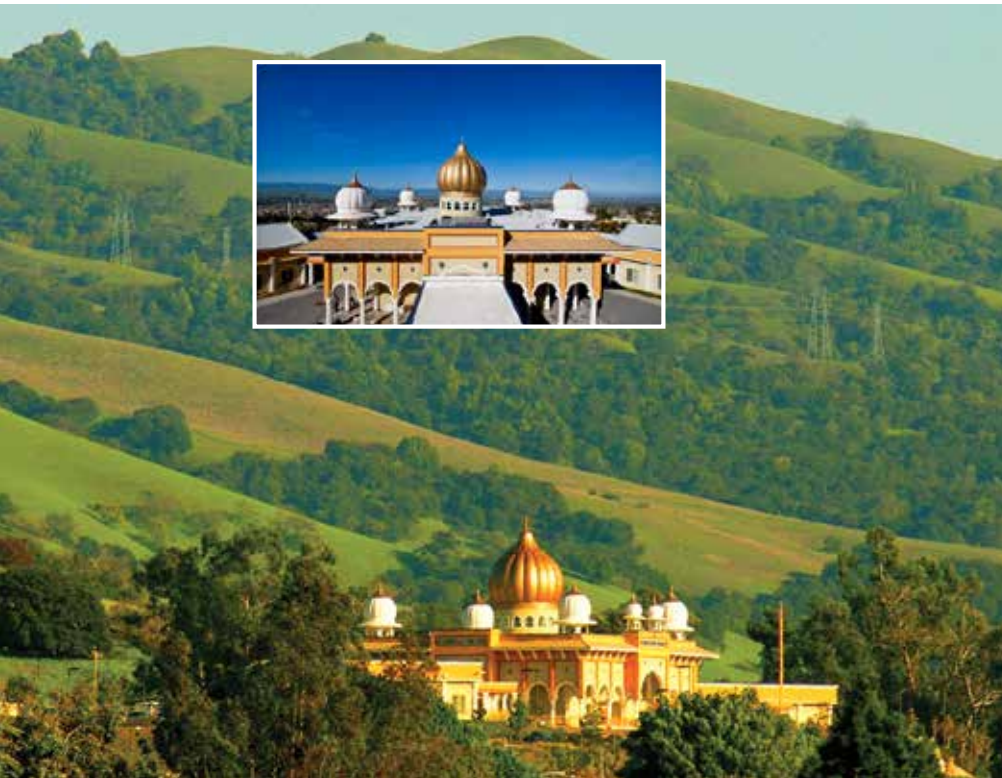
NAGAARA

**IN DEDICATION**

**Dr. Jaswant Singh Neki**

*Chhapa 2015*

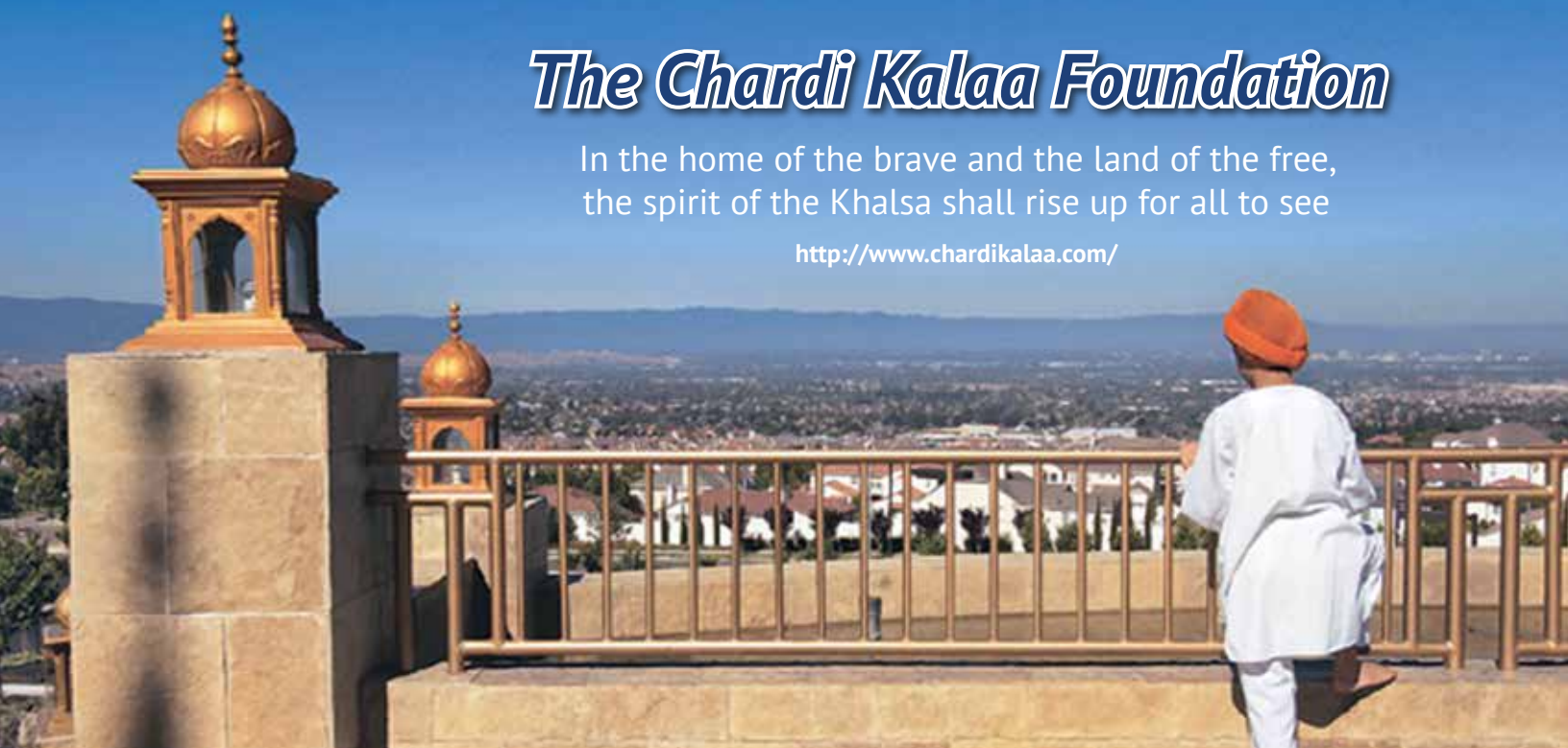




## ***The Chardi Kalaa Foundation***

In the home of the brave and the land of the free,  
the spirit of the Khalsa shall rise up for all to see

<http://www.chardikalaa.com/>





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**Cover:** The painting of Mardana by Arpana Caur depicts 'how Mardana's whole life was devoted to following his Guru's footsteps in all kinds of circumstances, all over the world'. This was greatly admired by Dr JS Neki

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

**Associated with**  
**The Chardi Kalaa Foundation**  
San Jose, USA

**Printed by**  
Colourbar Communications  
at G.S. Graphics  
Naraina Industrial Area  
New Delhi.

**Please visit us at:**  
[www.nishaannagaara.com](http://www.nishaannagaara.com)

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

## JASWANT SINGH NEKI

### A Life to Celebrate

**G**uru Granth Sahib repeatedly warns us that whoever and whatever is born must die: “Jo aayaa so challsee sabh koi aayee vaarye” (p.473). Furthermore, we have only one life to live.

An obituary, reckoning of a life, is not always easy to capture in words and some lives make it a daunting undertaking; today is such an occasion. Eulogies, for some people like Dr Jaswant Singh Neki, are an almost impossible task.

A wag reminds us that only two things are inevitable in life: death and taxes. Gurbani, and common sense, are clear that death must come to us all. With the many legal loopholes available around the world taxes are not quite the certainty they used to be. But from death none is spared; not those that are justly famous, not those that pass through life unknown, not even those who are famous for just being famous.

Eulogy should help us visualise, indeed, capture a life, make us cry or laugh; certainly enjoy the persona under the lens, especially if your heart aches or there is a sense of loss at his departure. Life teaches us that none of us is perfect. Eulogies tell us how humans can be beautiful and yet imperfect.

Jaswant Singh Neki was one of a kind. A polymath and a first rate mind. He was a trained academic psychiatrist who nimbly climbed the ladder of his profession. He rose to enviable heights in his chosen bailiwick. In time he became a distinguished analyst of our needs, wants, obsessions, complexities and idiosyncrasies. He became Director of that premier medical

institution in Chandigarh that imparted postgraduate specialty training to Indian medical graduates. I have run across many who graduated from there – clearly their academic standards were first rate and a compliment to the students and faculty. He also spent some time in France and rounded off a distinguished career with a stint with the World Health Organisation. Essays within this Issue will explore his life-journey in more detail.

Focusing on such professional achievements alone would diminish Dr Neki to a highly successful but exactly a one-dimensional scholar (shrink!) and that he definitely was not. When I met him in the 1970s, I was aware of his scholarly academic record. At that time my interest in Sikhi was somewhat embryonic, and that’s putting it charitably. Over the years I learned to appreciate a very different man whose work awes us even today. He was absolutely passionate about Sikhi. His achievements in and about Sikhi are destined to outlive him for posterity.

I find that people with a well-lived intellectually evolved life are few and they lead a bifid existence. There is the passion of the profession that makes possible a satisfactory and rewarding life in the style that successful people emulate pretty much everywhere. But then there is another kind of life yoked to this and it provides the dimension of art, intellectual curiosity, artistic richness, philosophic depth and the like – while never neglecting the spiritual core of our existence. These are the two different dimensions to a good life: making a living and making a life. The two together moving symmetrically, like two oxen tethered to one plow,

make for a fuller, richer and fruitful life. A talented and lucky few are then remembered and celebrated as public intellectuals.

This is where I pigeonhole Dr Jaswant Singh Neki; this is where Dr Neki excelled. And I speak from the vantage point of one who helped edit the translation of his seminal work – *Ardaas* in English – and also participated with him at many a symposia on Sikhs and Sikhi over the years where we shared the same platform.

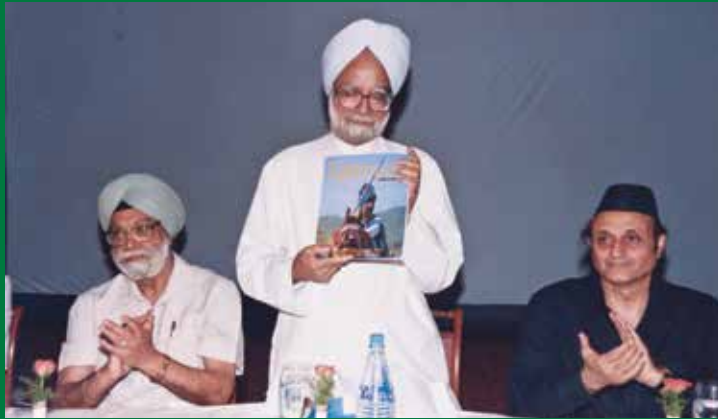
In a nutshell, and in lay terms, Sikhi speaks of reconstructing and reconfiguring human behaviour towards a more centered, productive and socially responsive life. Quite obviously there is then an overwhelmingly large perspective that is common to both behavioral science and religion when it is correctly understood and meaningfully practiced.

This then became the driving force in Dr Neki’s life. And like a public intellectual in the style of cultural philosophers he wrote extensively about the Punjab as well as the underpinnings and teachings of Sikhi.

He was a prolific writer in both Punjabi and English. There are more than six books in Punjabi, a lot of poetry and also an autobiographic volume. Only two of his voluminous production appeared originally in English: *The Spiritual Heritage of the Punjab* commissioned by Guru Nanak Dev University and a small book titled *The Pilgrimage to Hemkunt*.

He wrote that classic which deconstructs the Sikh *Ardaas* line by line and traces the meaning and application of every word in the





*Dr Jaswant Singh Neki was Editorial Director of the Nishaan journal for a decade from 2005. In this photograph he is seen with Dr Manmohan Singh (later Prime Minister of India) and Dr Karan Singh of Kashmir. The Nishaan was formally launched at New Delhi on 22 April 1999 when Dr Neki gave the keynote address in which he hoped that “all communities will join us in this dedication so that all of us together can create a new world, with a new vision and a great new future.”*

historic *Ardaas*. This has become an instruction manual for generations of Sikhs. It first appeared in Punjabi in 1989. A generation later, just last year he translated it into English. I am proud to acknowledge my own collaboration in editing it. It has already become a 'go to reference' for a whole generation of young Sikhs growing up in the diaspora, as well for many of their non-Sikh associates.

His books on Punjabi poetry have become an institution and won much praise and recognition with multiple of awards by the governments of Punjab as well as India, along with honorary degrees. In his younger, college days Dr Neki had a seminal role in the politics of the day. He, with assistance by his old friend Bhai Harbans Lal, briefly edited a newspaper at the behest of Master Tara Singh, the uncrowned Sikh leader of pre-independence times. He also served as President of the All India Sikh Students Federation. I will not dwell on this chapter in any further detail here, and leave such matters to other contributors in this special issue.

In effect, I would say that Dr Jaswant Singh Neki has left us a treasure trove of writings. They have become indispensable to readers who are struggling to connect with the fundamentals and the joys of Sikhi. His writings transcend the age gaps that hold us back and often divide us: of language, culture, geography and generations.

As I see it, among the plethora of periodicals, newsletters and journals across the world that speak about Sikhs

and Sikhism, two major publications appear from India. They are the Kolkata - based *Sikh Review* that appears monthly and has a track record of over 50 years, and the quarterly *Nishaan* from New Delhi that has just celebrated its fifteenth years. Each publication is outstanding in its own unique way and they are absolutely not copycats of each other. If anything they are 'kissing cousins' that cover the worldwide Sikh presence with articles, news and relevant snippets of our 25 to 30 million strong community. And the two are as different as night and day from each other in content, style, presentation and readership. The two complement each other wonderfully and present a thoroughly comprehensive and coherent view of the world of Sikhi. And I am honoured, privileged and happy to tell you that both Dr Jaswant Singh Neki and I have served for many years as members of the Editorial Boards of both journals. We never saw any conflict in serving these two masters (media) in the interest of our community.

Jaswant Singh Neki is no more but I assure you that he will be missed by both *Nishaan* and the *Sikh Review* and their very loyal readers.

After expending much verbiage on the life of our friend and mentor Jaswant Singh Neki, the question that we resolutely face is how to really take the measure of such a man. How would he like to be remembered? How we think he deserves to be remembered? Each of us must answer for ourselves so I leave the judgment to readers.

But I want to leave you with a yardstick that comes from the Guru Granth Sahib. Guru Amardas (p.921) posits the question while challenging us tersely and bluntly: “*Eh sareera merya iss jug meh aaye ke kya tudh karam kamayya.*” To me, a meaningful, but not literal, translation nudges us awake with an admonition, “At the end of the day what footprints will you leave in the sands of time.” Each of us has to answer the Guru’s challenge for ourselves.

I submit to you that Jaswant Singh Neki’s footprints are unquestionably larger than life. He strode like a colossus and did much good by his walking. We would do well indeed if we stepped into those footsteps to explore where they lead us.

Dr Neki lived a full life most productively. He was 90 when he moved on. I interpret the Sikh concept of *Hukum* as living life fully in the Creator’s grace - in the moment - neither in the past nor for an unknown future.

Such a life deserves and asks to be celebrated, not mourned. How to build on his legacy, not to merely ape or mimic it, is now our onus. That would be the definition of moving forward.

In the final analysis, I celebrate Dr. Jaswant Singh Neki’s life and his many writings simply because they connect Sikhs to their best hopes, not to their worst fears, to our confidence in the future rather than our doubts. Our past has been glorious; our future will be no less.

**Dr IJ Singh**

# IN DEDICATION

Dr. Jaswant Singh Neki (27 August 1925 – 11 September 2015)

**T**his conference at San Jose, September 2015 is dedicated to the memory of Dr. Jaswant Singh Neki. He was slated to be a keynote speaker at this conference, but unfortunately he was taken ill and had to return to India, where he passed away on 11 September 2015. He has been an inspiration and a supporter of these conferences and he participated as a speaker at the first conferences in 2012.

I had the privilege of knowing Dr. Neki for many years through his daughter Rahat and son-in-law Amarpal. A very devout Sikh who was extremely knowledgeable and deeply interested in the study of Sikhi, he was at the same time very liberal and progressive in his views. He was clearly brilliant but also very humble and possessed a great sense of humour. He was a wonderful conversationalist and I always found him to be very inspiring.

Dr. Neki was involved with the *Chardi Kalaa Foundation* since its founding in 1998 as the Chardi Kalaa Sikh Community Centre. He joined us for some of our English language services at the centre and was very supportive of the concept. More recently, he participated in our monthly Vichaar programmes whenever he was here in the U.S. He led the discussion for two very inspiring Vichaar sessions on 'Concept of Naam' and 'Revelation in Sikhi'. The *Chardi Kalaa Foundation* has provided financial support for the Bhai Vir Singh Sahitya Sadan, of which Dr. Neki was the Honorary General Secretary, and the Foundation has a seat on the Sadan's board represented by S. Rawel Singh.

Dr. Neki devoted the last 50 years of his life to the Gurmat studies in addition to award winning recognition in his professional life as the Director PGI Chandigarh and as Head of Department of Psychiatry at All India Institute of Medical Science, New Delhi. In the area of religious and literary activities he had the rare distinction of being recognised by all the major relevant



organisations.

As a poet he is best known for his poetry collections, *Asle to Ohle Tak* (Illusion and Reality, 1955) and autobiographical, *Koi Naon Na Jane Mera* (2000). He was awarded the Sahitya Akademi Award in 1979 for his work, 'Karuna di Chhoh Ton Magron' (The Compassionate Touch). His long autobiographical poem *Simriti De Kiran Ton Pehlan* (Before Memory Fades) published in 1975, is considered masterpiece of Indian literature.

His pristine works as a scholar of Sikhism include *Ardaas: Darshan Roop Te Abhiyas* which has been designated as an all-time classic, *Sada Vigas, Achetan di Leela,*

*Divine Intimations, Prophet of Devotion and Pilgrimage to Hemkunt, Spiritual Heritage of Punjab, Basking in the Divine Presence (A Study of Jaap Sahib)* and so many more. Two of his recent books that I personally found very inspiring are *Gurmat Manovigyan* (Psychology according to Gurmat) and *Haumai Ton Too Hi Val*.

For several years, Dr Jaswant Singh Neki was a member of the Dharam Prachar Committee of Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee. He was Chairman of the Board of Consultants constituted by the Delhi Sikh Gurdwara Management Committee for setting up of an Institute of Medical Sciences. In 1989, he received the Kohli Memorial Award for being the 'Best Professional of the Year'.

Dr Jaswant Singh Neki will be greatly missed by all of us at the *Chardi Kalaa Foundation* but throughout the Sikh community. We must be eternally grateful for the many years of support and friendship which he bestowed on us and we will always benefit from his erudite writings and philosophy.

**Dr Inder Mohan Singh**  
*Chardi Kalaa Foundation*



# A Remarkable Life:

## Dr. Jaswant Singh Neki

*In this evocative piece written in 2009, Ravinder Singh Taneja throws some light on Dr Jaswant Singh Neki's multi-faceted personality.*



**Accolades and awards were a part of Dr Jaswant Singh Neki's life**

A man of many dimensions and diverse accomplishments, Dr Jaswant Singh Neki is a veritable polymath and renaissance man in our midst, remains a visible and active presence in Sikh affairs as one of our most treasured of public intellectuals.

Trained as a physician, most of us know him in his avatar as a man of medicine: psychiatrist, public health policy expert, Head of the Department at The All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS), Delhi, and Director of the Post Graduate Institute (PGI), Chandigarh, Punjab. He also found time to spend time in Africa as advisor to the World Health Organization.

But we don't always connect Dr JS Neki, the medical man, with Jaswant Singh Neki, the award winning poet. Few of us know that his first published poem - in praise of Guru Gobind Singh written in *Braj Bhasha* - appeared in the *Khalsa Samachar* in 1937, when he was barely twelve years old.

Awarded the Sahitya Akademi award in 1978 for his work, *Karuna Di Chuh Ton Magron*, he has over a dozen published collections of poetry, beginning with *Asle to Ohle Tak* in 1955, through the ground breaking autobiographical, *Koi Naon Na Jane Mera* in 2000.

He is also a distinguished scholar of Sikhi with a prolific output - in English and Punjabi. His works include the classic *Ardaas: Darshan Roop Te Abhiyas*, an exposition of Sikh congregational prayer; *Sada Vigas*, a profoundly original interpretation of Gurbani; *Achetan di Leela*, a psychological perspective on Gurmat; *Divine Intimations*, an English

translation of Nitnem in verse; *Prophet of Devotion*, the life of Guru Angad; *Pilgrimage to Hemkunt*, a coffee table travelogue; *Punjabi Haas Vilas*, a book on Punjabi humour, and other works, too numerous to be listed herein.

Dr. Neki is also an invaluable original source for anyone interested in modern Sikh history. Since his days as the President of the All India Sikh Students Federation in 1949 to his present role as advisor to the Dharam Parchar Committee of the SGPC and General Secretary of the Bhai Vir Singh Sadan in New Delhi, he has been an active witness and participant in contemporary Sikh affairs, with a firsthand knowledge and acquaintance with the Who's Who of the Sikh world. Although I have known him over the years, our meetings have been intermittent and far between, usually in social settings that are not always conducive to the kind of systematic exploration of his thought and outlook that I wished to record.

His presence in Columbus, Ohio, gave me that opportunity. Over a couple of extended private conversations and a Sikhi workshop organised by the local sangat, we explored the entire range of Sikh experience, covering the gamut from the implication of being a Sikh, Sikh belief and practice, the current state of Sikh Institutions and the challenge of moral and ethical issues stemming from technology.

In the process, I also got a glimpse of defining events in his life.

Dr Neki would rank high on my list of individuals that I would want to have for an evening for scintillating conversation. He has a certain gravitas about him (not surprising in one devoted to literary and scholarly pursuits), but wears it lightly. He can expound on abstruse philosophical concepts, but always with a touch of humour and with an open mind. He is a raconteur extraordinaire, and can hold you spellbound with stories and anecdotes; or have you in peals of laughter with jokes - all used with great effect to put his point across.

Jaswant Singh Neki became the first "born Sikh" in his family when he arrived in 1925. Religious boundaries between Hindu and Sikh were quite porous then, unlike the hardened walls that we witness today. It was not uncommon for Punjabi families to straddle what can be termed "mixed identities." So it was with Dr Neki's family.

"Expect the Unexpected" would be an apt header for any narration of Dr Neki's life. Hearing him recount the sheer number of coincidences - or synchronicities, if you will - that have shaped the course of his life is nothing short of miraculous. I share a few of them, not so much to chronicle his life but to view these events from a Sikh perspective. The Partition of Punjab in 1947 found the young Jaswant Singh - then a medical student in Lahore - down and out in Amritsar where he had made his way. Cut off from family, homeless and penniless, he faced an uncertain future. A series of baffling synchronicities saw him through.

First, a generous landlord, moved by his plight, offers him a room with rent to be paid "when able". Just then, he chances upon the old canteen manager from Lahore, now a food stall owner in Amritsar. Free meals become available. But most remarkably, a windfall from the most unexpected - and unknown - source solves Jaswant Singh's money problem, at least temporarily, enabling him to complete his medical education.

Wandering aimlessly around town one evening, concerned about money, he heard a voice summon him out of the blue. It was an old Sikh, a total stranger, who approached him with a proposition. "I have two thousand rupees on me. Can I entrust them to you for safekeeping?" he asked. "No," Jaswant Singh responded, adding, "I am in desperate need and will be tempted to use the money."

The old man retorted: "And isn't that what money is for - to spend?"

Overcome by the moment, an immensely relieved Jaswant Singh took the money but failed to ask about the old man's identity or whereabouts or where he could return the money.

Fast forward to about a year later. Dr Neki, now a junior house physician, finds himself the beneficiary of a retroactive pay raise, with the arrears to be paid in a lump sum. His share: a princely two thousand and ten rupees! Happy at the windfall, he plans to dine out. No sooner does he step outside, that the same voice - the one that had summoned him a year ago - rang in his ears. It was the old Sikh again, back to claim his money.

Sometime later, Dr Neki found himself in a similar predicament yet, again. Now a Demonstrator at Christian Medical College, Ludhiana, he had a run in with the Principal over a day's personal leave that he needed to attend to an unwell grandmother. The Principal's intransigence led him to resign in a fit of anger. Jobless again, he found himself wandering aimlessly on the streets of Ludhiana this time, regretting his hasty decision. Sure enough, he had another inexplicable encounter. As he walked, an old man, a Sikh, who was selling his wares on the street, waved to him, saying, "Don't worry about your job; you have three offers coming." Dr Neki, needless to say, was incredulous. No sooner did he arrive home that he found two job offers waiting for him. One was from an old classmate, an industrialist, looking for a medical officer to run a clinic for his workers. The other was from S. Hukam Singh, the erstwhile Speaker of the Parliament of India, offering him an editorial position on his newly founded weekly.

What, I asked Dr Neki, was his reaction? He turned to me with a smile and said, "The old man had said three



offers; where is the third, I thought?" The third offer arrived the same night via telegram from the Medical College, Amritsar.

His marriage to the daughter of his Professor at Medical School, his appointment as PGI Director and assignment



**The Anand Karaj ceremony in 1955 at Amritsar**

as Consultant to the WHO, all followed a similar pattern. Dr Neki shared these and other events from his life to illustrate the point we happened to be discussing from Malcolm Gladwell's book, *The Outliers*: that successful and accomplished individuals are not propelled by genius and talent alone; they also rise on a tide of advantages, "some deserved, some not, some earned, some just plain lucky."

Dr Neki described the "lucky breaks" in his life in gurmata parlance as nadar, or Grace. "*Rabb aap aaya si*" (It was God Himself ...), he said. Ascribing success and accomplishment to nadar may be the humility of a Sikh, but surely, nadar shines indiscriminately on all of us. Why, then, do some of us appear to connect better with the flow of nadar? Why do these coincidences - synchronicities, if you will - appear more pronounced in some lives than others? While I don't have the answer, I can offer a tentative explanation. The title of Dr Neki's translation of the *Sikh Nitnem* - *Divine Intimations* offers a clue. These are sure signs of the Divine working in our everyday, mundane lives.

While nadar may open doors and talent may provide the raw material, it takes hard work, discipline, persistence and perseverance to run leading medical institutions with distinction, stay actively engaged in Sikh affairs, and turn out literary and scholarly output of a high order over a long period of time.

There is no room for idlers in Sikhi. Honest effort (*udham*) is foundational to a Sikh's life and I got a glimpse of this in observing Dr Neki's punishing schedule in Columbus, Ohio, even when he was on holiday - he was up at 2 am, did his nitnem and then settled down to writing for the rest of the day, yet greeting intrusions like mine with cheer. It was obvious that the discipline and structure had been cultivated and honed over a lifetime.

Dr Neki's eclectic and holistic approach to Sikh scholarship was shaped early on by the influence of his grandfather, a man of learning with an abiding interest in scripture, and later, in Amritsar, by iconic figures of Sikh scholarship - Professor Sahib Singh, Bhai Jodh Singh and Principal Teja Singh, with whom he kept regular contact.

An incident Dr Neki narrated that involved these three stalwarts is very telling and worth narrating because it highlights the mutual respect and camaraderie that they shared, but also because they left a lasting impression on Dr Neki that influences his thinking thereafter. Professor Sahib Singh had been invited to preside over an event organised by the All India Sikh Student Federation. Sahib Singh demurred, explaining that he was pressed for time. He was then completing his seminal work on Gurbani *Viakaran* (Scriptural Grammar). "A lot of what he said about viakaran went right over my head,"

Dr Neki told me with a laugh. But Sahib Singh suggested Bhai Jodh Singh as an alternative, "*Bhai Jodh Singh noon kyon nahin puchda?*" Bhai Jodh Singh, it turned out, had a prior commitment and had suggested Sahib Singh instead, "*Sahib Singh horan noon kyon nahin puchda?*"

When told that Sahib Singh could not make it, he solicited Bhai Jodh Singh's view about the importance of grammar in understanding gurbani. Bhai Jodh Singh responded with a chicken-and-egg question of his own, "*Kaka, mainu eh das, grammar pehlon aaya see keh language?*" (Son, what came first - grammar or language?)

Professor Teja Singh agreed to preside over the event. His response to the grammar and language question is a gem, in my opinion. Conceding that both Sahib Singh and Jodh Singh were more learned than he, Teja Singh agreed that both grammar and meaning (language) were important, but the true import of gurbani rested on personal experience as well. "*Mere naalon siyaneh neh, par anubhav jaruri hai.*" (They are wiser than me ... but I'd say that experience is important!) That alone will lead to the Transcendent.

In speaking of a Sikh's engagement with the Guru Granth Sahib, Dr Neki sounded a similar note of caution. There are multiple senses in gurbani, and we can get caught up in the literal or allegorical but miss the anagogical. The mode of communication that the Guru's have employed,





**Dr Jaswant Singh Neki seen with the Pope**

poetry, is not meant to be informational only - but transformational as well. Poetry is letting the WORD be heard beyond the literal meaning of the textual words. Gurbani must not just be read and understood but "ingested", which involves assimilation and absorption.

It is this natural amalgamation of science and poetry, of combining metaphor and analogy of multiple senses and ways of looking at Reality - that is so visible in Dr Neki's work, and gives it a beauty and transcendence

that can be transporting. An example from Sada Vigas comes to mind.

In an essay on the different dimensions of transcendence (*Pargamta Da Deedar*), Dr Neki uses the reproductive process as an illustration of transcending oneself (*haumai*) in an exquisitely poetic way: the metaphor of a delirious lover used for the male sperm; its wiggling tail as a sign of its delight in finding the beloved female egg, and in the ultimate loss of a separate sense of self that results from the union. While such a fruitful combination of the scientific and poetic outlook within an individual like Dr Neki may be deemed nadar, it is nonetheless an attitude that we need to consciously cultivate.

This fusion of science and poetry is a necessary framework to understand Sikhi in our current context. The two are not quite as apart as we have been led to believe. I found the following quote from the *Scientific Activist* very apt, "A scientist is an empirical poet and a poet is a scientist of more imaginative and creative hypotheses." A Sikh life must be at once musical, mathematical, precise and poetic.

My motive in capturing and recording these conversations goes beyond a personal desire to share vignettes from the life of a multi-faceted personality and a much admired role model. Dr Neki is an important literary figure in his own right and a living link to many iconic figures

in our recent history, as well as an active participant in shaping our community. There is a compelling need to maintain that link to our past by cultivating the habit of recording, documenting and archiving - of not neglecting - individuals like Dr Jaswant Singh Neki while they are still in our midst. I have attempted to capture a bit of oral history which I believe is just as significant as the written tradition in keeping our past alive. These recordings are bits and bytes of our larger history.



**Dr Jaswant Singh Neki and Sardarni Kanwerjit Kaur Neki**



*Dr Mohinder Singh, Professor of Eminence, Punjabi University, Patiala and Director, National Institute of Panjab Studies, Bhai Vir Singh Sahitya Sadan, New Delhi recalls some*

# Encounters with a Literary Giant



A psychiatrist of international fame, a leading metaphysical poet, a linguist with knowledge of Sanskrit, Braj, Punjabi, Hindi, Urdu, Persian and English, Dr Jaswant Singh Neki was a unique personality- deeply religious, yet totally secular in his outlook; highly read, yet modest about his scholarship; blessed with all the material comforts of life and yet humble. With the passing away of Dr. Neki, the Sikh community has lost its best known scholar and the family and friends, a patriarch who was dear to all.

While I had heard a lot about Dr Neki's qualities of head and heart, it was during my tenure as a Lecturer in the SGTB. Khalsa College, Delhi that I got an opportunity of listening to him. I learnt that Dr Harbhajan Singh, then Head of the Modern Indian Languages Department in the University of Delhi, had invited Dr Neki for a lecture in Arts Faculty of the University. I was advised that if I wanted to listen to Dr Neki, I should reach there at least 15 minutes earlier to be able to get a seat. While I reached

20 minutes before the schedule, the hall was already packed. I could find with difficulty a little space for standing in a corner. I was so mesmerised by this lecture that then onwards I became one of his lesser known admirers.

It was in 1982 when I took over as Director of the Guru Nanak Foundation that I had a close encounter with Dr Jaswant Singh Neki. We had invited Giani Zail Singh, then President of India, to inaugurate a function. Dr Neki was sitting in the front row in the audience. An astute politician that Gianiji

was, he noticed Dr Neki's presence. The lecture being over, he advised me to bring Dr Neki and some other scholars for a cup of tea at the Rashtrapati Bhawan. Politically naive as I was, I could not get the sense of that impromptu invitation. During the meeting over a cup of tea the hidden agenda — *discussion over the burning issue of Khalistan* — became open. It will be impolitic to discuss what transpired during the closed door meeting, but what impressed me most was Dr. Neki's ability to speak the truth unmindful of the consequences. This greatly enhanced my respect for him.

Some months later I shared my impression with Dr. Amrik Singh who advised me that it would be appropriate if I could persuade my management to invite Dr. Neki to accept the position of General Secretary of the Guru Nanak Foundation. Dr Amrik Singh's rationale was that, because of his scholarship and standing in the Sikh community as well as his courage of conviction,

Dr Neki would become a cushion between me and the management and thus help the Foundation, develop into a first rate centre of research in Sikh studies in the national capital. Dr Amrik Singh's suggestion, valuable as it was, could not be put into practice as the conservative management of the Foundation thought Dr Neki was too independent minded to manage and direct towards the self-interest of the management.



**Dr JS Neki honouring Dr Dalip Kaur Tiwana on her being conferred with Saraswati Sanman**

Nevertheless, this dream was fulfilled a few years later when Dr Manmohan Singh was invited to take over as President of Bhai Vir Singh Sahitya Sadan, a premier literary organisation, where I was then working as Director. Learning from past experience we did not float Dr Neki's name for the position of General Secretary but instead authorised Dr Manmohan Singh to appoint a person of his choice. Since Dr Manmohan Singh did not believe in manipulating, he had no difficulty in appointing Dr. Jaswant Singh Neki as General Secretary of the Sadan. With such distinguished scholars and prominent citizens as Dr Manmohan Singh, Lt Gen Jagjit Singh Arora, Shri Kuldeep Nayar, Justice Kuldeep Singh, Dr Amrik Singh and Dr JS Neki on the Governing Council, the Sadan was soon put on the right track and achieved new heights not only in promoting the writings of Bhai Vir Singh but essentially the unifying message of Guru Granth Sahib. It was during tenure of the new management with leading figures of the time on the Governing Board that the Sadan arranged two International Seminars - one on *Guru Granth Sahib and its Context* which was inaugurated by Dr. Manmohan Singh, then Prime Minister of India, in the Vigyan Bhawan at New Delhi on 30 October 2005, and the other on *Pluralistic Vision in Guru Granth Sahib*, which was inaugurated by Smt. Pratibha Patil, then President of

India, at the Vigyan Bhawan on 16 December, 2010. Dr Neki not only designed these seminars but also ably edited the proceedings which were published by the Sadan

During my 25 years' close association with Dr Jaswant Singh Neki, I found that his faith in the Guru was beyond any review: absolutely unquestionable. After taking over as President of the Sadan, Dr Manmohan Singh



**Dr JS Neki, flanked by the then Prime Minister IK Gujral and the future Prime Minister Dr Manmohan Singh**

called a meeting of the office bearers to understand the functioning of the Sadan. During the discussion it transpired that the Sadan had defaulted on payment of property taxes to the NDMC and there was a massive arrear running into tens of lakhs. Meticulous and law abiding as he has always been, Dr Manmohan Singh pointed out that he would not like to be associated with an institution "which was living in sin" and advised us to clear the dues forthwith if we wanted him to continue as President of the Sadan. We pleaded that we had no savings to clear the arrears. It was at this critical juncture that Dr Neki volunteered to find some donors to enable us to clear the arrears. Subsequently a special meeting was called at Dr Manmohan Singh's residence for the purpose, where names of three prominent Sikh millionaires in California were discussed as possible donors. Dr Manmohan Singh instructed me to provide full details and telephone numbers of the suggested donors whom Dr Neki could approach during his visit to California.

I provided Dr Neki with the information on the donors. On my asking how he intended to approach the donors his response was simply awesome: "I have never begged from any individual. I always beg from my Guru". Sure enough, just days later I got a call from Dr Neki from US informing me that he was able to get a cheque of one lakh





**Dr JS Neki and Dr MS Gill honouring Dr Jarnail Singh for his translation of Guru Granth Sahib into French**

dollars from someone whose name was not suggested in our earlier meeting and was unknown to us in Delhi. (Since then, this GurSikh is very well known and regarded by the Sadan – and Nishaan). Unable to believe my ears I asked him, “Is the cheque for one lakh rupees or one lakh dollars”, Dr Neki’s reply was, “I begged from the Guru and the Guru had sent a donor with the required amount.”

I would also like to share another incidence of his strong faith in the Guru. One day while travelling with my friend who had opened a nursing home near Rohini, I noticed a Nishaan Sahib fluttering above a cluster of slums. We halted for a while and asked someone about the area. We were told that this was ‘Sardar Colony’. It was later that I found that this was a corner of Sector 36 of the colony where VP Singh, then Prime Minister of India, had given small plots to victims of the 1984 carnage. The colony lacked all basic facilities with no provision for education and health. Back home I discussed this issue with Dr Neki, who, like many of us, was not aware that apart

from Tilak Vihar another widows’ colony existed in Delhi. At his suggestion – more like an order -- that we immediately visited the area. On seeing the condition of the inmates there, Dr Neki was so moved that he decided that we should set-up a dispensary and a primary school there. He asked my wife to perform the Ardaas with which our project was ‘inaugurated’ on the road without any office or funds. I asked Dr Neki, “How will we run the centre without any space and funds?” Quickly came the reply “The Guru will provide the resources”. To my utter surprise

when I returned to my office in the Sadan, I noticed an old man with flowing beard, holding a stick waiting in the lobby of the Sadan. I did not know who he was or the purpose of his visit. On enquiry I was told that Dr Neki had mentioned about his new project to him and he had come to make a donation for the purpose. That beloved son of the Guru was late S Kanwar Singh Bhasin. Soon after we were also allotted accommodation for the purpose by the Slum Wing of the Delhi Development Authority. Fortunately this project was taken over by a devout team from the Sikh Humanitarian Society, who created proper facilities for the children of the lesser God.

Promoting Gurus’ teachings was one of the abiding passions of Dr Jaswant Singh Neki. When the Delhi Sikh Gurdwara Management Committee set up a *Guru Granth Sahib Research Centre*, he happily agreed to be its Chairman and I was made the Convener. When it



***Dr Jaswant Singh Neki with Sardarni Gursharan Kaur and Dr Mohinder Singh at a function at the Bhai Vir Singh Sahitya Sadan, New Delhi***

seemed that, like other politicians, those in control of the Gurdwaras were not serious about the cause, we decided to set up such a centre of the Bhai Vir Singh Sahitya Sadan itself. The Guru heard our prayers again and the Central Government gave us handsome grant for the Centre which has now become an active platform for meaningful research on Guru Granth Sahib.

Dr JS Neki had a great sense of humour and sometimes would defuse tense situations by intervening with an appropriate joke. Once during the meeting of our Institute in the office of Prof Bipan Chandra, then Chairman of the National Book Trust, Dr Amrik Singh and Prof. Bipan Chandra got into an argument on some issue. When the debate became rather hot and heavy, Dr Neki intervened by narrating a joke which made both of them burst into laughter. After a while I asked them "what should I record?" I was told that both of them had forgotten the point of contention. While appreciating Punjabis' sense of humour and ability to laugh at their own expense, Prof. Bipan Chandra asked Dr Neki if he could narrate some more Punjabi jokes, to which he replied that he had a treasure of such jokes. Prof. Bipan Chandra asked him, "Why don't you write a book on Punjabi humour which National Book Trust will be happy to publish?" Dr Neki happily agreed. Lo and behold! At the next meeting before we could take up the agenda, Dr Neki handed over the manuscript (which was published by the National Book Trust under the



***Dr JS Neki at an Exhibition organised in the Sadan to conserve rare Guru Granth Sahib manuscripts. In the picture are Dr Amrik Singh, Singh Sahib Prof Manjit Singh, former Jathedar of Akal Takhat and others***

title of *Punjabi Haas Villaas* in 2008). Upon going through the manuscript, Prof. Bipan Chandra asked Dr Neki as to how could he compile this collection in such a short time? Dr Neki's reply was that this was only half of what he had written and he was planning to publish another book on the subject (which was subsequently printed by Aarsee Publishers in 2010 under the title of *Hasiay te Rasiye*).

Dr Jaswant Singh Neki retained his sense of humour till the very end. A few days before leaving for the USA we went to meet him at the hospital. As he was in the ICU, I entered his room with special permission from the doctor. While responding to my greetings, he asked as to where was my wife? I told him that she has always been accompanying me but did not wish to break the hospital rules by entering the ICU. He insisted that she should come and meet him. While greeting Dr. Neki, my wife expressed a wish that in return to her greetings he should give her a *Thapra* (pat on the back) rather than just responding to her *Fateh*. He mustered enough courage and gave *Thapra* to both of us which remains our treasured memory. When asked if the hospital was taking due care of his food, he promptly replied, "Yes, they are giving me variety of tablets for breakfast, for lunch and for dinner".

***That was the many splendoured being whom we knew as Dr Jaswant Singh Neki.***



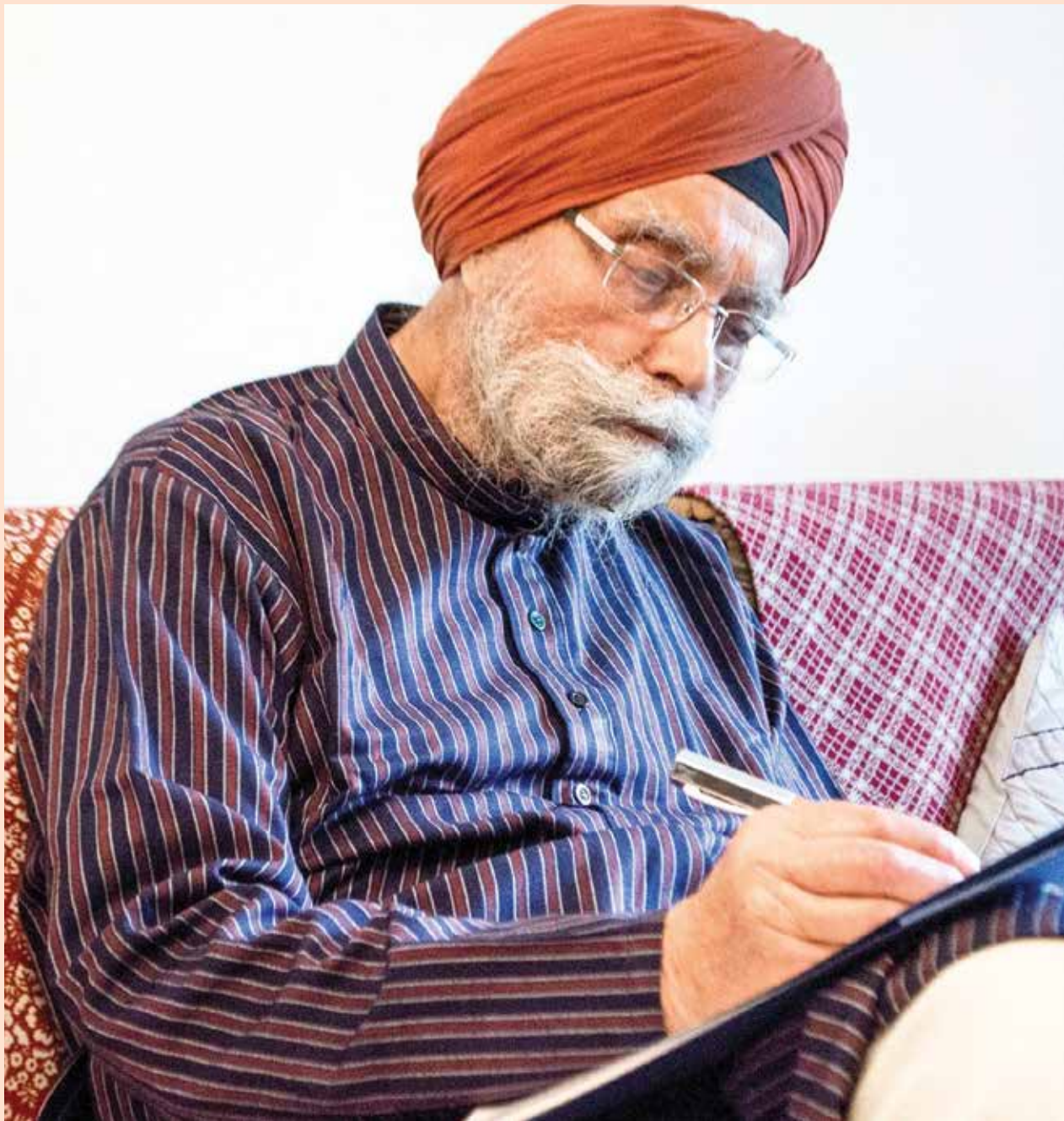
# Dr Bhai Harbans Lal recalls his “Friend and Mentor”

**D**r. Jaswant Singh had been my close colleague for almost a decade during my formative years (1946-56) before I migrated to the USA. Even from there, I continued to remain in close touch with him and visited him in India whenever possible.

In spite of long intervals, I never forgot the vivid radiance on Nekiji's face and his kindly disposition towards me. Therefore, at his departure on his Timeless

Journey, as we recognise death in our tradition, it is an almost sacred obligation to honour Nekiji's memories with several anecdotes recalled here in my memorie.

Our earliest association was with Haripur, a small town in the northwest frontier province, so named by Maharaja Ranjit Singh to honour his great general, Hari Singh Nalwa. Sikhs of this town remained a small community amongst a predominantly Muslim area in the





***A village in the hills of Haripur Hazara in the NWFP***

NWFP. It is the main city of the Haripur District in Hazara, now Khyber Pukhtunkhwa of Pakistan, with Swabi and Buner to the west, some 65 km north of Islamabad and 35 km south of Abbottabad. Hari Singh Nalwa was appointed as the second Nazim of Hazara after the first Nazim Amar Singh Majithia had been killed during battle at Nara.

Haripur was built as a fortress surrounded by a wall 12 feet thick and 50 feet high which had only four entrances. That fort later became the city police station and housed the local government offices. Several miles to the south of Haripur is the ancient Buddhist university town of Taxila. There was no high school established for Sikhs in Haripur. Then a transformation occurred. After his graduation, Sardar Mohan Singh developed a High School curriculum for Sikhs and it so happened that a Sehajdhari Sikh came with an offer to build this school.

Bhai Lakshmi Chand, a prominent contractor and real estate developer of the Hazara District was a keen

philanthropist. He won a contract to build railway tracks from Taxila to Havelian, which consequently not only brought wealth to Bhai Sahib, but there were sizeable stockpiles of left-over material suitable to build a school.

Bhai Lakshmi Chand got the school building built and also helped to furnish it, besides providing the much needed start-up funds for its operation. The managing board proposed to name the school as Lakshmi Chand High School after its chief beneficiary, but he would not consider any such proposal and eventually the school was called Bhai Lakshmi Chand Khalsa High School.

One of the first students at the Khalsa High School was Ayub Khan, who grew up in that area. He was transferred from his earlier Islamia School of Haripur to the Khalsa School because of the latter's higher educational standards. In the years to come, Ayub Khan was to join the Army become a General and eventually in 1958, take over as the President of Pakistan.

## **Sikh Students Federation founded**

It was at Haripur that Sikh students founded first unit of the All India Sikh Students' Federation (AISSF), and it is a fact that actually owing to Ayub Khan's persistent pleas for educated Sikhs to organise and help their community in challenging circumstances that this took place.

Then it was in 1944 when a meeting was held in the orchard adjoining the school where the Sikh Students Federation was founded. Besides me, there were four other students who were its founding members: Manmohan Singh Kohli, Gurbachan Singh, Harbans Singh Nanda and Harbhajan Singh. We drafted a news item to send to the Sikh press as well as to the SGPC. Soon after the news was published, Dr. Gopal Singh Dardi, who edited and published the first ever English Sikh weekly, *The Liberator*, wrote to us about the AISSF being formed in Lahore. We immediately responded to become the Hazara Unit of that AISSF.



***Insignia of the AISSF***





**A young Dr Jaswant Singh Neki at the Forman Christian College in Lahore, in the early 1940s**

### My first meeting with Nekiji

Manmohan Singh Kohli, Gurbachan Singh and I travelled to Amritsar to participate in the General Body meeting to be held in Amritsar in January 1946, where I acquainted myself with fellow students including Sarup Singh, Amar Singh Ambalvi, Satbir Singh and Jaswant Singh Neki, all of whom were AISSF activists at that time.

During my stay in Amritsar, we also made friends with several Akali leaders. Our relationship with the AISSF and friendship with the Akali leaders was abiding. Not long thereafter, Sikh leaders Giani Kartar Singh and Sardar Amar Singh Ambalvi travelled to Haripur to visit us there.

I recall meeting various SGPC leaders when they were discussing ways to augment the Sikh population in the bordering

districts for better representation of the community in legislation matters. Select missionaries were tasked to accomplish this goal and AISSF volunteers designed a manual for those missionaries to guide the newly converted Sikhs in establishing new congregations.

The general body of the SGPC approved the final draft of *Raho Reeti* document on 3 February 1945, to be known as the *Sikh Rehat Maryada*, and appointed an eight-member subcommittee to refine it where necessary. In view of the urgency, the printers were asked

to print the available document as soon as possible with help from Sikh youth leaders and Sikh intelligentsia as represented by the AISSF.

I recall a typesetter at the SGPC printing press bringing proof of the draft of the *Rehat Maryada* for correction to Jaswant Singh Neki late at night. Nekiji was preoccupied in drafting something for the AISSF General Meeting. Satbir Singh and I were present at the time and Nekiji assigned the task to us.

I clearly recall Satbir and myself making three major corrections besides the type setting errors and took the documents to Nekiji for double checking. He accepted them all. This was my first experience of working with Nekiji and getting aware of his immense knowledge about Gurmat and commitment to Sikhi.

### Nekiji as Editor of Daily Prabhat

Dr. Jaswant Singh was elected President of the AISSF on 20 November 1948 and remained so until 28 January 1950. He was at the time completing his studies at the Amritsar Medical College but this was also the time when the Sikh community was plunging into a crises. On 21 February 1949, Master Tara Singh was arrested at Narela railway station, near Delhi and sent to Almora jail. That news was followed by wide spread protests and police actions, the cops even entering the Golden Temple premises to make arrests. Several Akali and AISSF workers were arrested or forced to go underground to lead the struggle.

Before his arrest, Master Tara Singh had taken over the *Daily Parbhat* newspaper published in Urdu, for publishing his policies and programmes. However, he did not have time to appoint permanent editorial staff. Moreover, he feared that the editor of the *Parbhat* could be arrested to stop the Akali Dal from disseminating their cause among the public.

After much consideration, he appointed Dr. Jaswant Singh Neki as *Parbhat's* editor and Bhai Harbans Lal to assist him as both of were well-versed with Urdu and more pertinently, were not under police's radar for possible arrest.

I asked Nekiji how would he manage his studies, duties at the hospital and still edit a daily newspaper and likewise how assisting him would impact on my studies at the Pharmacy School at Amritsar. In his typical calm and composed manner he assured me that divine Guru "would take care of those matters".

When the AISSF appointed me as their Public Relations Secretary



**Jaswant Singh Neki's Anand Karaj Ceremony**

('Propaganda Secretary' was the exact title), working with Nekiji became my official responsibility. Nekiji in turn worked at the hospital for his education and training, but also spent nights writing editorials and news articles for the daily newspaper as it had to be at news stands all over entire northern India in early hours of the morning.

Nekiji's diligence and discipline were exemplary as he completed editorials for the newspaper a few hours before dawn. The editorials had to be motivational for the community and much thought went into their compilation. I remember two editorial headings until this day: 'Khatre-ki-Ghanti' or 'Bell of Danger' and 'Giani Kartar Singh ne kafir honay se pehley kya kaha' (What did Giani Kartar Singh say before he became a kafir). This referred to Gianiji's leaving the Akali Dal to join the Congress Party and Nekiji deeming that akin to becoming a kafir: an infidel who discords his commitments or loyalties.

### **Sikh Youth Training Camps**

It was also in 1949 that the AISSF began Annual Training Retreats for Sikh students in order to provide

leadership training. The first of those retreats were held at Paonta Sahib followed by some at Kanda Ghaat and thereafter at other places in India.

The choice of Paonta Sahib was inspired with its origins, Guru Gobind Singh having founded this town on banks of the river Jamuna in 1686 and then inviting 52 scholar-poets to serve at the Guru's court. Mata Gujari had stayed there for three years and the Guru's elder son, Baba Ajit Singh, was born there.

### **Guru Granth Exegesis**

Sardar Sarup Singh was the Camp Principal with Sardar Amar Singh Ambalvi as Vice Principal (who specialised in political affairs); Dr. Jaswant Singh Neki (on religious studies); Sardar Satbir Singh (Sikh History) and I (on leadership) were the Course Directors for the AISSF retreats. Dr. Neki was also responsible for classes on Sikh religion and philosophy. In that capacity he asked me and Satbir to learn to perform the Guru Granth exegesis. I was only 18 at the time and Satbir was even younger. After some preparation I commenced with the exegesis.

I recall the subject of two of the exegeses I performed at the retreat. I was nervous but was confident under the tutelage of Nekiji and Satbir; Sardar Sarup Singh boosted my confidence.

My first public exegesis was of the Sabd on page 12 of Sri Guru Granth Sahib (SGGS), ॥ ਭਈ ਪਰਾਪਤੀ ਮਾਨੁਖ ਦੇਹੁਰੀਆ ॥ ਗੋਬਿੰਦ ਮਲਿਣ ਕੀ ਇਹ ਤੇਰੀ ਬਰੀਆ ॥

The second public exegesis was of the Sabd on page 175 ॥ ਕਨਿ ਬਧਿੰ ਰੁਸਲੁ ਹੇਤ ਮੇਰੇ ਭਾਈ ॥ ਕਉ ਪਾਈਐ ਹਰ ਰਾਮ ਸਹਾਈ ॥੧॥ ਰਹਾਉ ॥

### **Experience on the Simla Mall**

The AISSF had enrolled potential students and made arrangements at Kanda Ghat for the Camp. We always paid for the transportation of the trainees as well as the cost of trainees' boarding and lodging. Panthic organisations under the leadership of Master Tara Singh underwrote those costs.

A week before the camp, Masterji walked into my residence at the Sikh Missionary College Amritsar and asked me to inform AISSF officials that he would not be able to bear the expenses of the youth retreat as he had also undertaken to train workers to help the Akali Dal in the forthcoming elections for legislative bodies and needed funds for that.

I panicked and rushed to Nekiji's hospital quarters to convey Masterji's message. We then both cycled to Sardar Sarup Singh's residence for an urgent meeting. There we resolved to continue with the plans for the retreat at Kanda Ghat and also to seek financial support directly from the Sikh public.

As a result of this situation, Satbir Singh and I were deputed to Simla for collecting much needed funds whilst the camp was in progress. We





***Bhai Arjan Singh Bagrian, Maharaja Bhupendra Singh of Patiala and Maharaja Ripudaman Singh of Nabha seen seated in this picture of 1917***



***Typical building along the Mall in Simla during the late 1940s***



***Many years on, Nekiji addresses the sangat at Gurdwara Dallas in Texas***

would visit Sikh families in Simla and in our desperation request tourists and local Sikh residents who would be strolling along the Mall Road for contributions in our desperation. I remember visiting Mrs. Mohan Oberoi at her Hotel suite and Bhai Sahib Bagrian at his summer residence for the same purpose.

Although it was hectic travelling between Kanda Ghat and Simla on a daily basis by public transportation and then to the Mall with virtual 'begging bowls' all day long, we learnt much from that experience.

### **Nekiji at Texas**

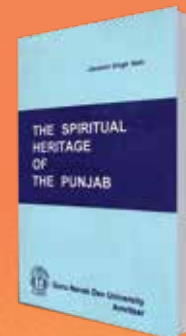
Many year later Nekiji stayed with me at Texas during a visit to the USA. I introduced him to the Sikh community in Texas and also requested him to address the sangat at the main gurdwara in Dallas. He spoke for 30 minutes and the listeners were spellbound.

During his presentation on Universal Sikhi, Nekiji paused for a moment and asked the sangat, "Bolo ji Waheguru". As usual about half the sangat responded. After a few minutes, he again asked the sangat to utter "Bolo ji Ram Ram", but this time no one responded. He used this as an example to impress upon the listeners how biased we were in discriminating among God's many names that our Guru, Sri Guru Granth Sahib, endorsed.

In my tribute, I would offer that Dr. Jaswant Singh Nekiji was no ordinary Sikh citizen. He was a tireless champion of the Sikh causes, an encyclopedia of the wisdom of Sikhi, and a beacon for many of us. The AISSF family joins the Sikh nation in offering their eternal tribute to their departed leader.



# Spiritual Heritage of the Punjab



***'Spiritual Heritage of the Punjab' dwells on the rise of religion and spiritualism in India, particularly in the Punjab right from the times of the Indus Valley Civilisation to the Vedic traditions and the compilation of the great epics, followed by the 'Dark Ages' and 'Bhakti' movement to the life and times of the prolific ten Sikh Gurus. Written by Dr Jaswant Singh Neki in his inimitable style of simplicity and great insight, Nishaan carries some gems from this collection.***



**S**pirituality means being related to spirit in contrast to the tangible or material. Its sublime reaches pertain to the relationship between man and God.

Although the spiritual urge is present in man everywhere, it seems safe to say that there is something special about the genius of the Punjab. The Punjab's spiritual heritage is not only among the most ancient, it is also among the most varied.

It has been said, "Those born in the Punjab ever face new expeditions." This land, for millennia, has been the gateway for an almost unceasing series of invasions. How very devastating must have been the effect of such invasions, borne out that recorded by Guru Nanak Dev of one such invasion, that of Babur in 1521:

*Where are the games, the horse, the stables,  
Where are the drums and the bugles?  
Where are the sword-belts, where the chariots,  
Where the uniforms scarlet?  
Where are the mirrors and the beauteous faces,  
I see them no more!*

*This world is Yours, You are its Master,  
Just as You create, in an instant, so too You destroy,  
And distribute wealth as You please.*

*Where are the houses, where their portals,  
Where are the mansions and serais?*

*Where are the pretty brides lounging on the couches,  
Seeing whom, folk lose their sleep?  
Where are the betel leaves and their vendors,  
Where are the harems? Like shadows all gone!  
So many perished for the greed of wealth,  
For the greed of gold disgraced.  
Those whom the Creator does choose to destroy,  
Of virtues strips them first.*

*Hearing of Babur's invasion, divines  
Prayed for the halt of his hordes.  
Burnt the temples and burnt the mansions,  
Princes he cut up, and cast to the winds.  
Yet no divine could a miracle work,*

*And not a Mughal, by the mantras, was blinded.  
Mughals and Pathans, fought they each other,  
Clanged their swords in the battleground.  
Mughals fired their smoky guns,*

*And Pathans advanced their elephants.  
Those whose license was torn by the Lord,  
They, sure, were destined to breathe their last.  
Hindu and Muslim and Bhatti, Rajput  
Women, disrobed, into pyres were thrown.  
How did the poor souls pass their nights,  
Whose husbands returned not home?*

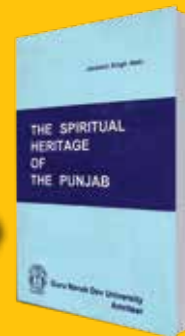
**SGGS, pp. 417-418**

Yet it is in times of such distress that man becomes more inclined to matters of the spirit. Spirituality, in essence, is based largely on intuition and emotion and not on a purely rational attitude of mind. That is, perhaps, the reason why, although the Punjab has not been the soil where great philosophies sprouted, it certainly has been the soil that yielded rich spiritual harvests.

The pre-Vedic, the Vedic, the Upanishadic, and the Pauranic ages were followed by a dark period of amorphous folk religion. This was terminated by a renaissance through Bhakti and Sufi influences. Finally, the flowering of the Sikh faith completed the outstanding landmarks of spiritual advancement of the Punjab, each one of them deserving our reverential attention.



# On the Punjab



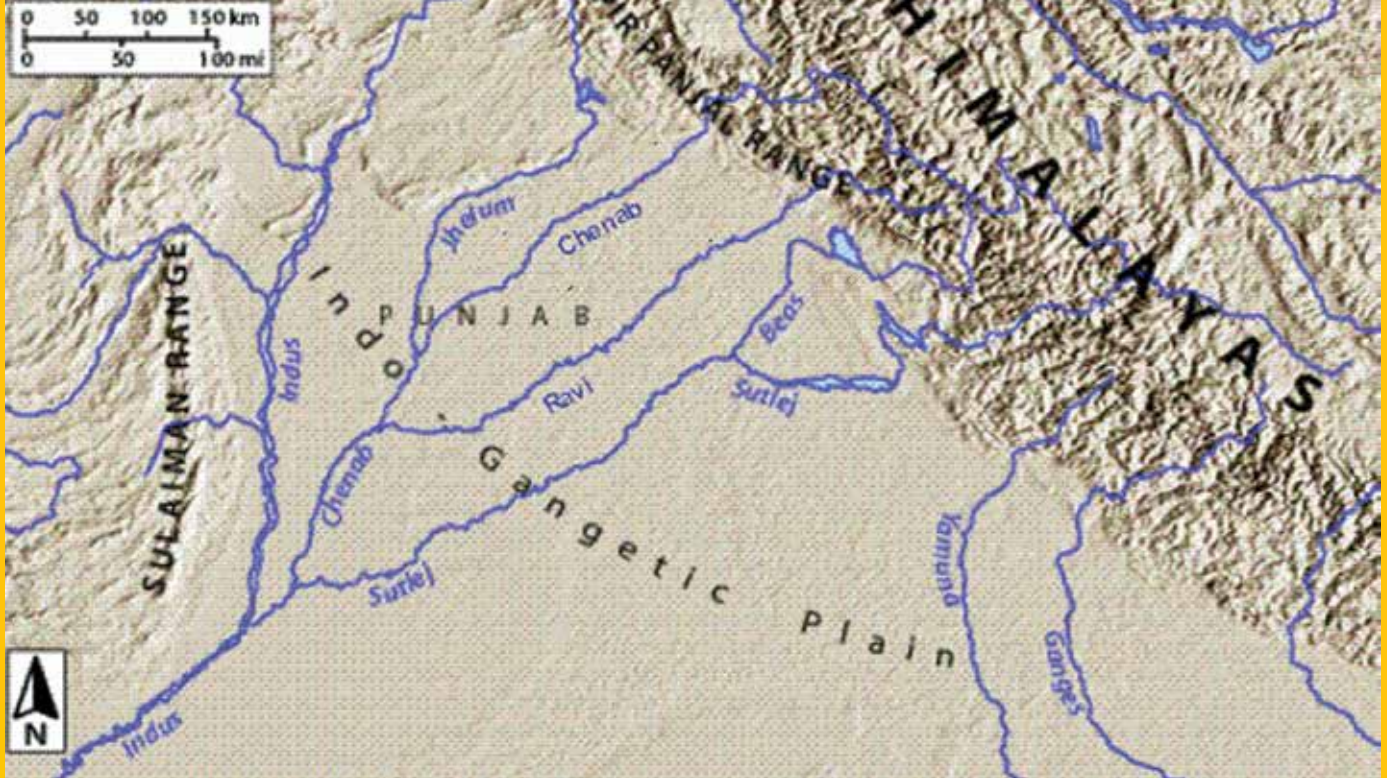
*The river Sutlej as it enters the Punjab*

**T**hink of the Punjab and a host of images will, at once, flood your mind. The word Punjab literally means the land of five rivers. Traditionally, these five rivers are the Sutlej, Beas, Ravi, Chenab and the Jhelum, but the earliest name of this land during the Vedic times was Sapta Sindhu or the land of seven rivers, which stretched farther west to the river

Indus (Sindhu), and farther east to the river Saraswati.

The Greeks called it Pentopotamia (the Land of Five Rivers), while residents of the Punjab began to call it Punj-Nad, but meaning the same. During the times of Muslim rulers it began to be called Punjab, which is actually the Persian version of 'Punj-Nad' and 'Punjab' has remained ever since.





*The five rivers whence the name 'Pun-jab' has been derived*

As a geographical entity, the Punjab in British times embraced the entire expanse between Jammu and the Indus. The Himalayas stood at its north while a vast desert stretched beyond its southern boundary.

Punjab's rivers, from time to time, have been changing course and the most major change seems to have taken place with the river Saraswati. At one time it either flowed directly into the sea or was a major tributary of the Indus but now only its vestiges remain in the form of a virtual stream called the Ghaggar.

Ever since Emperor Akbar chose to refer to the Province of Lahore as the Punjab, the awareness of a Punjabi identity began to grow, first among the

nobility, and later among the laity. This consciousness first developed as a focus of spatial reference, but later evolved into a point of soulful reference.

When the Kingdom of Maharaja Ranjit Singh (1780-1839) was at its zenith, the Punjab stretched up to the river Kabul in the north (flanking the Khyber Pass) down towards the river Sutlej. The river Saraswati was virtually extinct by then. It may be said that forces of the great Maharaja had carved out a new Sapta Sindhu. However, soon after the Maharaja passed away, dismemberment of his Empire over this new Sapta Sindhu set about. By 1849, the British were able to annex this entire land into their 'Raj'.



*The river Jhelum flows into the Punjab from Kashmir*



*Court of Maharaja Ranjit Singh*

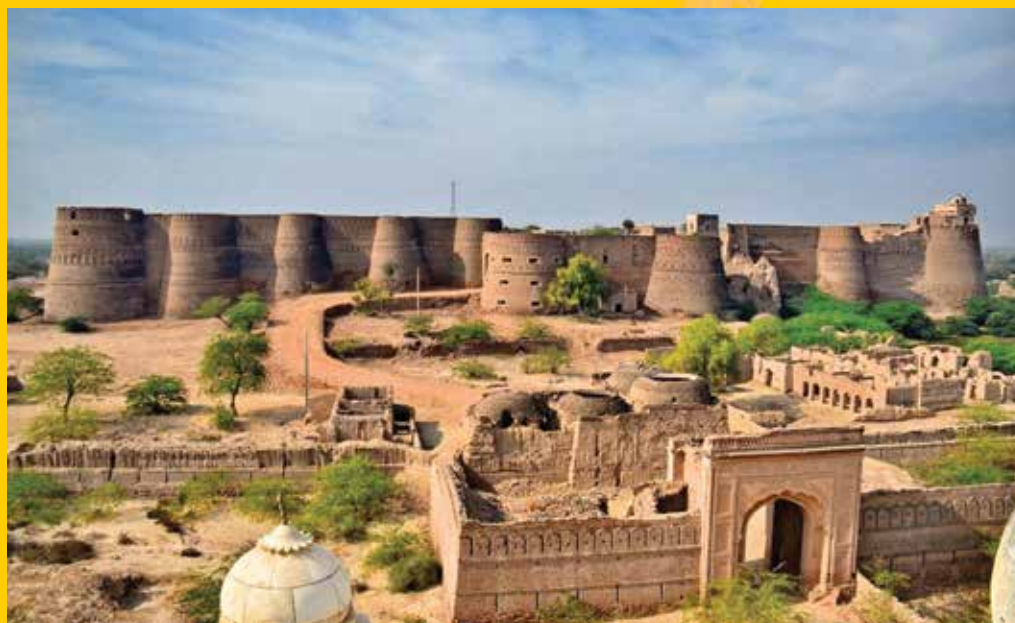




***A painting of the Hazara area in the erstwhile North West Frontier Province by General James Abbott 1850***

After the War of Independence (or Mutiny, depending on points of view) in 1857, the British incorporated the areas of Haryana and Delhi into this land and established an ever bigger province of the Punjab. But then, in 1901,

Lord Curzon, the then Viceroy, sliced away from it an area of thousands of square miles to create the North-West Frontier Province. Ten years later, even Delhi was wrested from it. Yet, the core of this province all the time continued to be the land of those traditional five rivers.



***Derawar Fort in Bahawalpur, Punjab***

Tragedy befell the region in 1947 with the Partition of India when the country became independent of the British. Tragically, the Punjab was divided into two: an Indian area in the east, and a Pakistani area in the west. Regardless, both these divisions have been called 'Punjab', although, ironically, each of them has been left with just two and a half rivers, which conveys the deep sensitivity and sentimental attachment the people of this land have to this name.





*Lahore Railway Station, pre-August 1947: the name in English, Gurmukhi, Hindi and Urdu*



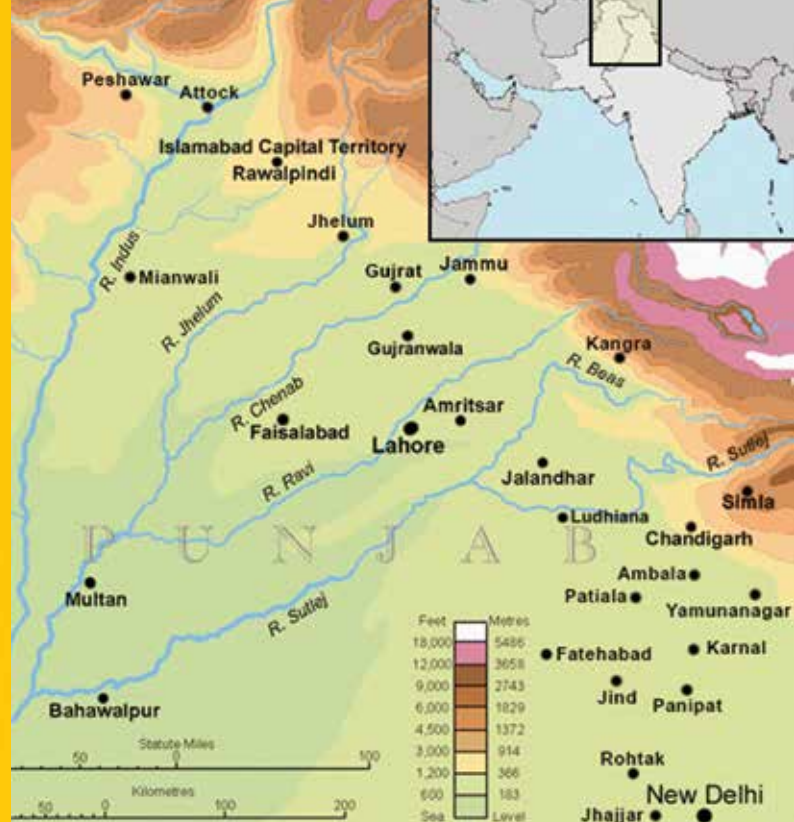
### **Tragedy of partition**

More division was to come: when the linguistic reorganisation of India was embarked upon, the Indian Punjab got trisected. The states of Haryana and Himachal were created from it, yet, even this diminished territory still continues as 'Punjab'.

### **What is Des Punjab?**

Whenever a Punjabi refers to what he calls *Des Punjab*, he/she mentally still refers to the larger Punjab – the original Land of the Five Rivers. I once asked a Punjabi, now settled in England, as to what he missed most while in England? "Of course, my *Des Punjab*" was his prompt reply. "Which Punjab are you referring to?" I asked him more. "I know what you want to ask," he said, "Although my Punjab has been politically divided, yet in our minds its old image stands intact. It is that non-truncated image that I refer to as *Des Punjab*."

The people of this land, the Punjabis, are a very adventurous people. They have settled down in large



numbers in over a hundred countries of the world. Yet, they all continue to refer to 'Des Punjab' with fondness and much pride. It is with such intense feelings that they often sing:

*As the rose stands out among the flowers, O my friends,  
So does Des Punjab among the lands o' the World.*

### **Cradle of culture and spirituality**

The Punjab has been the cradle of India's pristine culture, the land of the Indus Valley civilisation. When the Aryans came to India from central Asia, they also first settled along the rivers of the Punjab, clearly evidenced in the Nadi Sutra of the Rig Veda. It was in the forests of this land that their rishis sat in meditation. Names such as those of Udalaka, Aruni, and Svetaketu are outstanding among them. It was also in this land that Valmiki composed his world famous epic, the Ramayana. Kaushalya, the mother of Lord Rama was a daughter of the Punjab. Kautilya wrote his Arthshastra here, and the famous physician Charaka also compiled his Samhita (compendium) here. Panini, the great Sanskrit grammarian belonged to the area around Taxila. Again, it was in the Punjab, in Kurukshetra, that Lord Krishna delivered his sermon to Arjuna. This sermon constitutes the text of the renowned scripture, the Bhagvad Gita.

The atmosphere of this land has remained continually charged with spiritual inspiration from the Harappan civilisation, to the times of the Gurubani (sacred word) of the great Sikh Gurus. If the Punjab has been called *Brahmaurata* (The Divine Jewel), it is so true.





## Glory of the Punjab

Swami Vivekananda described the Punjab as “the holiest land”. Rabindra Nath Tagore, the Nobel laureate poet of India described this land as “one of those tracks on the surface of the earth where streams of history flowed with full vigour. Punjab is that wondrous land on which the first ray of morn sprouted, in the forests of which the sacred hymns echoed for the first time, on the surface of which was born the first civilised man of India, and on the bosom of which Indian culture originated”.

Dhani Ram Chatrik, a recent Punjabi poet writes:

*Ancient is your civilisation, O’ Punjab,*

*Unmatched your glory.*

As Puran Singh, perhaps, the Punjab’s great lyricist observed:

*The Punjab is alive because of the Guru’s name.*

*Extracted from ‘The spiritual Heritage of the Punjab’  
by Dr Jaswant Singh Neki*



# The Sufi Way



the Sultans. On account of this type of dress, they began to be called Sufis. They wanted to purify Islam from within.

They insisted that externals should yield to internals, matter to meaning. Theirs was a reaction to the materialistic and sensuous life of the Califs who were reducing Islam to external formalities only. For the majority of Muslims, God's obvious aspects seemed to suffice. The Sufis, however, wanted to delve into Allah's depths. They wanted to experience God in this very lifetime, and not wait until after-life. They wanted decisive knowledge of God.

Sufism, by and large, developed within the framework of orthodox Islam. There may have been some influence by religious currents from the Indian world. Within such influences on the Sufis

were pantheistic and monist ideas. The ideas of the great Spanish Muslim mystic Ibn-al-Arabi (1165 – 1240) especially were of this nature and revolved round 'the unity of all existence'.

## The Sufi spiritual way

Most Sufis regard the Sufi path as progress through the 'stations' of worldly renunciation, and the 'states' of spiritual gifts conferred by God such as nearness to Him, as the means of communion with and knowledge of God.

In general, the Sufi spiritual way is characterised by the following:

- \* Preparing the soil: This is done by dying in oneself (fanah), that is, removing all egoism by practicing such virtues as humility, contentment, repentance (tauba), and renunciation (lark).
- \* Sowing the seed of trust (tawaaqqal) in one God

**A**lthough Islam is basically a non-Indian religion founded by Prophet Mohammed of Arabia, it reached India in two different ways. One was through the Muslim invaders and conquerors of India. Conversion of 'infidels' to Islam, whether by persuasion or by force, has ever been considered an act of great merit. In India, under the Mughal kings, especially the later ones, such conversion had become a state policy. Not unexpectedly, many Indians adopted the faith of the rulers. One such ruler, Aurangzeb (1616-1707) stands out for forcible conversion of non-Muslims to Islam.

The other way was the way of Sufi dervishes who did not employ any coercion but influenced the hearts of people.

Within two centuries after the death of Mohammed (632 AD), a new sect of Muslims, especially attached to the teachings of Koran, began to wear coarse woollen garments, or *suf*, to protest against the silks and satins of



(tauheed), the Creator of the universe.

- \* Staying reminded of evanescence of life and of certainty of death.
- \* Loving God with intensity, remembering Him (zikr) all the time with devotion, and staying absorbed (mahav) in the ecstasy (wajad) of love.
- \* Wailing with the pangs of separation (faraq) from God. And finally,
- \* Attaining union (wasal) with God.

### The three routes

Although they aimed at drawing close to God, yet the Sufis developed three overlapping, relatively distinct, routes for this purpose. These may respectively be called the mysticism of love, of ecstasy, and of intuitive discernment. The mysticism of love is well known because of Sufi love-poetry. Rabia of Basra, and the Persian poet Maulana Rumi both sang of the pangs of separation from their Love. The mysticism of ecstasy (*math*) was characterised, in its adherents, by loss of awareness of who they were, and thus getting entranced. They were called the 'drunken Sufis'.

Intuitive mysticism was the route of direct apprehension of Reality.

If love-mysticism yields 'heart knowledge', and ecstasy-mysticism yields 'visionary knowledge', then, intuitive mysticism brings forth 'mental knowledge'— mental here refers to a really deep level of mines where Reality is directly experienced.

### The Indian Sufi silsilas

There are many Sufi orders that are essentially Indian, though some originating outside also came to claim their widest popularity only in India. Today India is the biggest centre of Sufism in the world. The well-known four Sufi silsilas (orders) in India are the Qadri, Chishti, Naqshbandi, and Suhrawardi. They are all monotheistic and humanistic.

### Sufism in the Punjab

It appears that the influence of Sufis in the Punjab was much more widespread than anywhere else in India. Lahore was known as the center of many sheikhs since the time of Ali-al-Hujwiri who was venerated by people as Data Ganj Bakhsh (The Giver of Treasures). Panipat was the place of Bu-Ali-Qalandar. Multan was another important centre.

Pakpattan was the abode of a highly venerated and popular Sufi dervish, Sheikh Baba Farid. He has been the most highly respected and admired Sufi Saint of the Punjab.

### Sheikh Baba Farid

Sheikh Baba Farid belonged to the Chishtiya Silsila and practised the 'Mysticism of love'. His ancestors came from Afghanistan, though he himself was born and brought up in the district of Multan in the Punjab. The story of their emigration from Afghanistan is quite interesting.

During the twelfth century AD the Sultanate of Kabul and Ghazni were engaged in serious mutual feuds. Then a brother of the King of Ghazni, Sheikh Shoaib by name, along with his three sons, left his home and migrated to the Punjab. His eldest son was Jamal-ud-d in Suleman.

One Mau Ivi Wahid-ud-din, a descendant of an uncle of Prophet Mohammed, also emigrated from Kabul on account of great turbulence there. He also settled down in a town in the district of Multan. He had adopted as his daughter a girl called Mariam, who was a descendant of the Muslim Calif Ali. This girl, when she grew up, was married to Jamal-ud-d in Suleman. They had three sons and a daughter. Their middle son was Farid-ud-din Masud, born in 1173 AD.



At the age of fourteen, Farid accompanied his parents on the pilgrimage of Mecca. After he returned from there, he was sent to Kabul to receive instruction in Islamic learning. Having completed his course there, he came back to Multan. There he met Khwaja Qutub-





**Ruined Sufi tombs in Uch Sharif, Punjab, now Pakistan**

ud-din Bakhtiar Ushi of Delhi and became his disciple. As advised by him, Farid received further Islamic instruction from schools in Hansi and Sirsa. After the death of the Khwaja, Farid shifted to Ajodhan, now known as Pakpattan.

By then Farid had been married. He had six sons and two daughters. His eldest son, Sheikh Badr-ud-din Suleman became his spiritual descendant.

Farid was popularly known as Shakar Ganj ('the treasure of sweetness') because of his delightful manners and honeyed tongue. Describing the characteristics of a godly dervish, he says:

*Do one thing: never utter a harsh word,*

*For the Lord abides in all.*

*Do not break anyone's heart*

*These hearts are priceless jewels.*

—SGGS, p. 1384

According to him, a dervish (mendicant) must be above worldly greed. He should practice the presence of God all the time, he should not hurt anyone's feelings, and humility and tolerance should be his special virtues. His sole reliance should be on God whom he should serve by serving mankind.

His eleventh successor, Sheikh Ibrahim was on the gaddi (seat) of Farid when Guru Nanak Dev visited Pakpattan during one of his odysseys. It was from him that the Guru obtained the works of Baba Farid. He was so impressed by the sublimity of those works that he passed them on to 11 successors. Eventually, when the fifth Guru, Arjan Dev, compiled the Sikh holy book, Sri Guru Granth Sahib, he gave a place to the works of Baba Farid in it.

None of the successors of Farid could match his reputation. However, Sufi thought became a good source of inspiration for a large number of Punjabi poets, some of whom were highly accomplished. Outstanding among these Sufi Punjabi poets were Shah Hussain (1538-1600 AD), Vazeed (1550-1660 AD), Sultan Bahu (1629-1691 AD), Bulleh Shah (1680-1758 AD), and Ali Haider (1690-1785 AD). The works of these Sufi poets are in chaste Punjabi language and have been very popular with the masses. Of them, Bulleh Shah and Shah Hussain have been the most outstanding. Bulleh Shah's kafis have been enjoyed over generations. The Sufi poets of the Punjab have made outstanding contribution to the Sufi literature of India.

*Extracted from 'The Spiritual Heritage of the Punjab' by Dr Jaswant Singh Neki*



# The Bhakti Movement



**S**till, the medieval age was spiritually fertile. There was much introspection concerning 'religion'. People had begun to ask new questions: How had religion, the relationship between God and man, degenerated into empty rituals controlled by the priestly class? How had it been reduced to merely an outward form? How had it become dominated by superstitious practices? Questions like these were as well being asked in Europe as well as other parts of Asia.

In India, two diverse religious traditions, Hinduism and Islam, had begun to raise searching questions as were bound to reshape them. S Khushwant Singh holds that while Islam's compromise with Hinduism led to the development of Sufism, Hinduism's compromise with Islam led to the Bhakti movement. This observation appears to be only partially correct as the seeds of both Sufism and Bhakti lie in antiquity.

Strictly speaking, the Bhakti movement did not arise in the Punjab. Yet, we have chosen to consider it here as there are some compelling reasons for including it. First of all, the works of many Bhakts such as Kabir, Ravidas, Jaidev, Trilochan, Namdev, Ramanad, Sain, Dhanna and Pipa have found a place in Sri Guru Granth Sahib, which is the most outstanding contribution of the Punjab to religious literature of the world. Secondly, there is historical evidence that some of these Bhaktas toured through the Punjab and established folk contact



**Sant Kabir**

there. The memorial of Namdev in Ghuman (District Gurdaspur) exemplifies such contact. The contact of itinerant Bhaktas with the people of the Punjab led to bilateral cultural enrichment. Thirdly, the language of Bhakti literature is a mixture of many Indian languages, in which the contribution of the Punjabi language is very discernable.

## The Influence of Bhakti

By end of the fifteenth century AD, the influence of Bhakti was much greater than that of orthodox Brahmanical Hinduism. Many bhaktas had actively taken steps towards a rapprochement with Islam. Ramanand, fifth in the descent from Ramanuja gave a great impetus to this. He had Hindu as well as Muslim disciples. Kabir, one of his disciples described himself as "the offspring of Rama and Allah". Though born a Muslim, Kabir found no difficulty in practicing the Hindu way of worship.

The bhaktas believed in the necessity of a Guru, or spiritual Master, for everyone. They considered all men as equal and in view, caste distinctions were not divinely ordained. They, however, continued to worship some incarnation of Vishnu or Shiva, often represented by stone idols. Such a practice prevailed in spite of the fact that some of them such as Kabir strongly decried idol-worship:

*The stone, which he calls as his God,  
Pulls him down and drowns him – SGGS p. 739.*



**Dhanna Bhagat**





The Bhakti awakening was taking place all over India. Besides Ramanand and Kabir, there was Ravidas in Uttar Pradesh. Mirabai in Rajasthan, Sadhna in Sind, Tuka Ram, Namdev, Trilochan and Jnaneshwar in Maharashtra, and Vallabha in Telangana. Because of them there was a major religious awakening was taking place.

Bhakti is the actual activity in emotional side of man, an emotional attachment distinct from knowledge or action. Through it one offers one's emotional possibilities to the Divine. Emotion creates a living relationship between individuals, binds God with man when it becomes" charged with the force of religious feeling. When rightly regulated, it leads us to the perception of the Supreme.

The forms taken by Bhakti include contemplation of God's power, wisdom, goodness and love. It also includes constant remembrance of God and practicing His presence. Conversing about His virtues and qualities with other devotees, singing His praise and doing acts as His service.

## Not synthesis, but evolution

Many people have described the Sikh faith as the synthesis of Hinduism and Islam. This is far too naïve a view – as simplistic as the view that “Islam’s influence on Hinduism led to the Bhakti Movement and Hinduism’s influence on Islam led to Sufism.” A synthesis is an artifice, the assemblage of separate elements from disparate sources to form a synthetic, possibly coherent whole. Its foundation is logical. Evolution, on the other hand, is a continual process of natural growth that carries forward productive and serviceable patterns while discarding counter-productive and inept ones. Thus, it changes something into a different, more productive form. Its basis is developmental.

While physical evolution is a process oriented principally towards ensuring physical survival, spiritual evolution is a process oriented towards the experience of ever more assuring intimations of Reality. Spiritual evolution forges ahead through mystical and supra-physical mutations and their experiential extensions. It is in this sense that we consider the Sikh faith as the purest evolve of the spiritual tradition of the Punjab.



# The Sikh Faith and The Sikh People



**E**ven while the major religions of the world – Christianity, Hinduism and Islam – were undergoing renaissance, the Punjab proudly offered to the world a new religion: the Sikh faith. The word Sikh (from Sanskrit shishya) means a disciple. Sikhism, thus, is a discipline of discipleship. A disciple, essentially, is the counterpart of a Master or Guru. A Guru is one who dispels darkness of the mind, removes ignorance and thus illumines the soul.

## The Guru

The 'Guru' is the pivotal institution in this religion. It was Guru Nanak (1469-1539) who founded this religion, and so was the first Guru of the Sikhs. Here one may legitimately ask, 'who was the Guru of Guru Nanak himself?' He informs us in his own words:

The transcendent Lord, the Essence and Light of all,  
Who abides in me, inseparable from me,  
He is the Guru that Nanak met.

**SGGS p. 599**

It appears that God Almighty instructed Nanak and commissioned him to be the Guru. The hagiographic chronicles of his life (janamsakhis) describe in detail the critical event of the Guru being thus commissioned.

It was his daily practice to visit the nearby river for his morning ablutions. One day he went as usual but did not return for three days. This was a period of vivid mystical experience for him which the Puratan janamsakhi describes in terms of a direct communion with God:

As per the Supreme Lord's wishes Nanak, the devotee, was escorted to His exalted presence. A cup filled with amrit (divine ambrosia) was offered him which he gratefully accepted. A command was then given him,

'This is the draught of adoration. Drink it...I am with you and hereby do bless and exalt you. This cup of amrit that I have given you is a pledge of my regard. Whoever follows you will have my favour. Go and rejoice in My Name and instruct others to do so... I bestow upon you the gift of my Name. Let this be your calling'.

Nanak then stood up and made salutation. The voice spoke again, 'Nanak! Do you discern me well?' Nanak then recited what the Sikh tradition now knows as the mool-mantra (the Prime

Revelation):

*The One Transcendent God,  
The Truth Eternal,  
Creator of the Universe,  
The Person all-pervading,  
Without Fear and Hate,  
Existence Eternal,  
Unbegotten,  
Self resplendent  
Whose Grace knows no bounds.*

**SGGS, p.1**

The voice was heard again: 'He who receives your Grace, Nanak, shall abide in mine. My name is the Supreme Lord; yours, the divine Guru'. From the Heavenly Court a robe of honour was conferred upon him and he was ferried back.

Thus was Nanak commissioned to be the first Guru. He had nine successors. The tenth Guru, Gobind Singh, discontinued the line of personal succession and established the holy book, Sri Guru Granth Sahib, as Eternal Guru of the Sikhs.

So, God Almighty, the ten personal Gurus, and Sri Guru Granth Sahib, severally as well as collectively, constitute the Gurus for the Sikhs. Whoever reposes his faith in them and follows their teachings is a Sikh or a disciple. The identity of the Sikh is thus tied with faith in the ten Gurus, the Holy Book, and above all in the One Transcendent God.

*Extracted from 'The Spiritual Heritage of the Punjab'  
by Dr Jaswant Singh Neki*



# The Dark Ages



**A**fter the Aryans settled down in the plains of the Punjab, there was a relatively long period of peaceful life during which they could find time to contemplate. The Vedas, the Upanishads, and the Bhagvad Gita were all fruits of this contemplation.

Then from the fifth century BC onwards, the Punjab became prey to a continuous series of invasions. The Persian king Darius was the first to invade this land in the fifth century BC. In 326 BC, Alexander the Great led his Macedonian army here. He overran the Northern half of the Punjab when his armies, weary and homesick, declined to move any further, which is why he had to return.

In 305 BC, Seleucus Nikator had invaded the Punjab with his Bactrian forces. After this, the Bactrian Greeks ruled this land for nearly two centuries. It was Emperor Ashoka (274-232 BC), who was able to wrest this land from the Bactrians. Not just this land, he was the first to conquer virtually the whole of India. He later became a Buddhist, set up a university of Buddhist learning, situated at Taxila (Taksashila) in the Punjab (now part of Pakistan).

In fact, Gautama the Buddha (567-487 BC), along with Mahavira (5th century BC) were among the first to revolt against Brahmanical Hinduism. Within a hundred years of passing of the Buddha, his teachings spread all over northern India. For seven centuries AD, the prominent faith of India was Buddhism. It possibly may have come to the Punjab also as is evident from the Taxila University and a number of pagoda-type structures. However, the Buddhist impact on the Punjab did not survive long enough for Guru Nanak to be influenced by this.



*Alexander of Macedonia*





**Mahmud of Ghazni crossing the Ganges during his conquests**

From the second century BC to the seventh century AD, a series of invaders from the north-west trampled over this land one after another. These invaders included the Shakas, the Parthians, the Kushans and the Huns. The Huns came in during the fifth century AD. Two outstanding Hun kings were Torman and Meharkul. The former adopted Jainism and the latter became a Vaishnavite. King Harsha Vardhana (606-647 AD) was able to throw out the Huns and establish his rule over almost the whole of North India. During his rule, the Punjab had some respite, but this was not to last long.

In 712 AD, Mohammed bin Qasim invaded India from the Arabian Gulf, conquered Sind and the southern part of the Punjab including Multan. During the 11th century (1000-1026 AD), Mahmud of Ghazni invaded India as many as seventeen times, each time demolishing Hindu temples and Buddhist stupas. In



**Emperor Bahadur Shah Zafar**

1025-1026, he destroyed the temple of Somnath, and carried away its priceless riches. Mohammed Ghauri, who followed Mahmud of

Ghazni, did not merely invade and return, but stayed back and established his own dynastic rule in India in 1206 AD.

Thereafter, dynasty after dynasty of Pathan rulers ruled India right up to 1526 AD. Still while the Pathans were still ruling India, the Mongols began their invasion of this country. In 1221, Chagiz Khan invaded India for the first time. In 1398, Taimur led his invasion. During the Lodhi era (1450-1526 AD), Babur made several invasions. In 1526, Babur defeated the Lodhi king at Panipat and founded the Mughal dynasty.

From the above it is clear that it was always the Punjab which was target of one invasion after another over the many centuries. This protracted unrest prevailed here and, hence, there was little scope for religious contemplation.

*Extracted from 'The Spiritual Heritage of the Punjab' by Dr Jaswant Singh Neki*



# Concept of Naam

*The famed scholar, Dr JS Neki spoke on the Concept of 'Naam' on 15 September 2012 at a Vichaar session of the Chardi Kala Foundation in San Jose, California on 'Revelation'. Some excerpts from his talk:*

**R**evelation or uncovering may have already taken place for mankind and our ignorance may be due to our ignoring this ! Mankind, by and large, ignores its Creator. Hence over the ages, sages have appeared to re-acquaint us with what we have ignored. As per Tantric, Vedantic and to some extent Sikhi, there have been three methods of revelation.

The first one - Verbal - has four stages: Shakti or ascendant energy; undifferentiated pure thought; differentiation into name and form; and lastly, phonetic expression of thought as in our day-to-day conversation. All four are present in the four uttered phonemes of the sound *Om*. In the transcendent stage this becomes *Shabd Brahm*.

The second method of revelation is through nature. As one ponders at Creation, its immensity, its extent, and its beauty, one becomes wonderstruck. Even scientists, who may not acknowledge the existence of God and do not know much about consciousness, often concede that they see a design behind nature. But on to whom the designer is, that may still be debatable.

The third method of revelation is nonverbal, propositional. A holy man, seeing you may simply give a pat on the back as a comprehensive act of communication with you.

In Judaism, one of the world's first Semitic religions, man by himself cannot know God except through Torah, a divinely-sent holy book. In the Christianity of the New Testament, one can know God only through the person of Jesus. Is he God himself or is he revealing God? St. Paul and St. John pondered this question. Their reconciliation in either case is that Jesus is God. He came to atone for the sins of humanity after the fall. Regardless of the nature of the sins, atonement is possible only through Jesus.

In Islam there is a personal God who revealed Himself to Prophet Mohammed. It acknowledges that earlier prophets, from Abraham through Jesus, also had revelations, but revelations to Mohammed were exclusive and final. Both *Waheez* (inspiration) and

*Tanzeel* (what descended on Mohammed) are included in Quran.

In Hinduism, which is a way of life rather than a religion, two sacred writings must be considered: Vedas and Bhagwat Gita. Sages dispelled darkness and revealed the Truth in a clear form, which is now contained in Rig Veda and other Vedas. In Vedanta, God reveals Himself as un-struck melody, to those able to shield themselves from worldly sounds. Arjun, in Gita, declares that whenever the world is in an object state of misery, He appears as an incarnate of God.

In Sikhism, unlike in Judaism or Christianity or Islam and to some extent, in the Vedas, 'Revelation' is non-exclusive. Just as many seasons are caused by the same Sun, many religions have emanated from one God. Hence, Sikhs are admonished against considering other holy books as false: indeed false are those who ignore them. Revelation is possible only through the mystic experience of a Guru. Sikhs such as Mardana, Satta and Balwant were also able to attain such a stage of revelation, but no incarnation of God is possible through the womb.

As Guru Gobind Singh directed, anyone who regards such a Guru as God, will burn in hell.

There are some verses that do suggest that at some advanced spiritual stage a Guru becomes indistinguishable from God. But the emphasis is on spiritual ascension of man rather than God descending to become human. Unlike in Christianity, there is no vicarious atonement, what must be earned by each human on his own. A right hand cannot atone for the misdeeds of one's left hand.

During Guru Nanak's mystic experience in the river Beins, he was revealed the Mool Mantra in sets of nine syllables. In this description the absence of certain attributes e.g., *akal*, *nirbhau*, *nirvair*, *ajooni* are at least as significant as the affirmative ones e.g. Omniscient. One can have mystic experience by meditating on these attributes to a point of content-less consciousness or super-consciousness where one becomes part of



the creation beyond oneself, like a vessel of water is when immersed in an ocean. The focus of attention, on the word Waheguru and dhyan melts away in such a samadhi.

Three experiential dimensions of such a mystic experience are Spiritual Wonderment (expressed in spontaneous *Wah Wahs*); Anand of a non-ephemeral nature; and an all-inclusive expansion of the Self in which everything else has a part in one and vice versa, so that it becomes impossible to hate anyone or anything.

God was *Daata* before He was *Karta*. To bestow divine love he created Naam, the universe and took abode in what He created. But in Sikhi He also extends beyond His creation. Whatever love you get from one's mother, father, sister, brother, spouse, friend or foe is His own

love flowing to you. Whoever serves you, even metal has God and His love in it, because of one's love for the divine, in a *Sehaj Samadhi*.

Thus Revelation in Sikhi is of many more varieties, it is an evolutionary, ecumenical and inclusive revolution. It stresses spiritual egalitarianism and the dignity of labour. Guru Nanak never claimed to be God, excluded no religion from his respect. He identified with the lowliest of the lowly. He said, "Wherever the lowliest are cared for, there is '*nazar of teri bakhshish*'." As Guru Arjun reiterated, "I am not alienated from anyone, no one is my enemy. This is the wisdom I acquired from my Guru, to keep."

*Compiled by Balbir Singh of Palo Alto, California*

## ੴ ਸਤਿ ਨਾਮੁ ਕਰਤਾ ਪੁਰਖੁ ਨਿਰਭਉ ਨਿਰਵੈਰੁ ਅਕਾਲ ਮੂਰਤਿ ਅਜੂਨੀ ਸੈਭੰ ਗੁਰ ਪ੍ਰਸਾਦਿ ॥

- **Ik:** There is ONE(Ik) reality, the origin and the source of everything. The creation did not come out of nothing. When there was nothing, there was ONE, Ik.
- **Onkaar:** When Ik becomes the creative principal it becomes Onkaar. Onkaar manifests as visible and invisible phenomenon. The creative principle is not separated from the created, it is present throughout the creation in an unbroken form, 'kaar'.
- **Satnaam:** The sustaining principle of Ik is Satnaam, the True Name, True Name.
- **Kartaa Purakh:** Ik Onkaar is Creator and Doer (Kartaa) of everything, all the seen and unseen phenomenon. It is not just a law or a system, it is a Purakh, a Person.
- **Nirbhau:** That Ik Onkaar is devoid of any fear, because there is nothing but itself.
- **Nirvair:** That Ik Onkaar is devoid of any enmity because there is nothing but itself.
- **Akaal Moorat:** That Ik Onkaar is beyond Time (Akaal) and yet it is existing. Its a Form(Moorat) which does not exist in Time.
- **Ajoooni:** That Ik Onkaar does not condense and come into any birth. All the phenomenon of birth and death of forms are within it.
- **Saibhang:** That Ik Onkaar exists on its own, by its own. It is not caused by anything before it or beyond it.
- **Gurprasaad:** That Ik Onkaar is expresses itself through a channel known as Guru and it is only its own Grace and Mercy (Prasaad) that this happens.

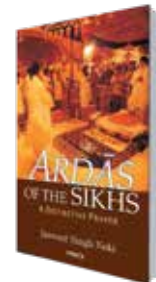
*Ik oa'nkār sat nām kartā purakh nirbh ao nirvair akāl mūrat ajūnī saibh a'n gur parsād.*

One Universal Creator God. The Name Is Truth. Creative Being Personified. No Fear. No Hatred. Image Of The Undying, Beyond Birth, Self-Existent. By Guru's Grace



In our tribute to that great philosopher and teacher, Dr Jaswant Singh Neki, readers of the Nishaan are presented select articles from his book.

# Ardaas of the Sikhs: A Distinctive Prayer



Dr Jaswant Singh Neki's 'Ardaas of the Sikhs' is an inclusive yet discreet work on the subject. Ardaas for the Sikhs is the way of life ordained by the Gurus. It is but another way of Simran or practising the Presence of God. Profoundly expounding

every phrase of the Ardaas, the book is considered a precious addition to the existing spiritual literature of the world. Its original in the Punjabi language had been described as 'an all-time classic' by the *Encyclopedia of Sikhism*.

Who has not prayed? Someone might pretend that he hasn't but almost everyone who finds himself in a state of utter helplessness during threatening or trying times, tends to turn to prayer. That is why, prayer has been perennial as well as universal. However, historians have always chosen to keep quiet about them. They talk at length about emperors and potentates, invaders and conquerors, autocrats and despots, tyrant dictators and paranoid proprietors, but say little about those who suffered at the hands of such personages. Undoubtedly, millions in distress must have prayed. In spite of the negligent silence of history, there yet exists an important document that has sought

to fill this gap. It is the congregational prayer of the Sikhs popularly known as the *Ardaas*.

To pray without words, one needs to be on top of spiritual form. However, spiritually accomplished souls might occasionally have uttered a phrase or two that history gets compelled to preserve. The Ardaas is a remarkable album of such spiritually charged phrases that have come to be incorporated into it over a long series of generations. Occasionally a half-baked phrase also managed to sneak into it, but soon such phrases got weeded out. Thus the Ardaas became an ever evolving creative work of great significance.





The phrases that got incorporated into the Ardaas were no ordinary ones. Lives had actually been lived according to them before they found their place in the Ardaas. Divine Presence had actually been experienced. His Holy Name had verily been meditated upon. Bread had been shared with the needy, even with 'enemies'. Holy cauldrons had been

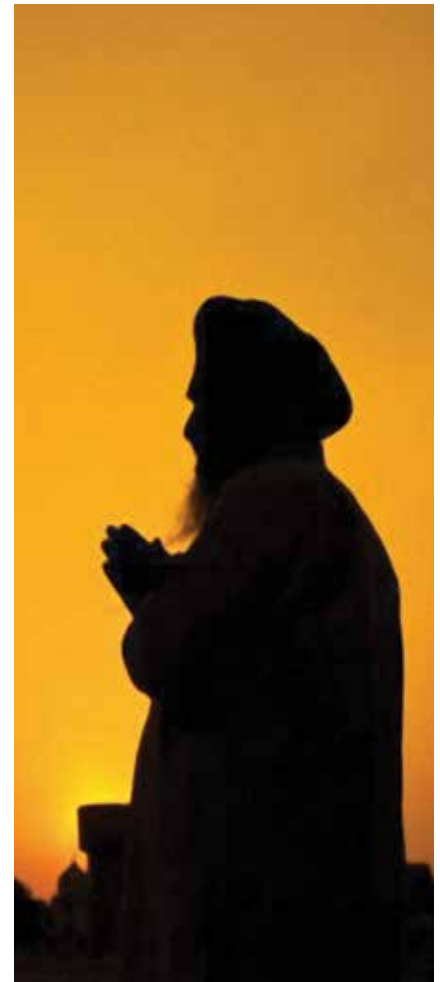
every phrase in the Ardaas became an epitome of a truly lived faith.

Multiple dimensions seem to characterise the structure of the Ardaas. It is at once an invocation, a laudation, an inspiration, a dedication, an affirmation of faith and a supplication. Every supplication is on behalf of the entire congregation. In its first part, it speaks for the entire commonwealth of those who have pledged to be the Lord's saint-soldiers, the Khalsa. It reinforces the fraternity of the Khalsa by awakening their pride in the lofty traditions of the religious fraternity to which they belong, and praying for the fulfilment of their collective



continually kept warm. The sacred sword had been plied to protect the oppressed from the oppressors. Faults of others had actually been overlooked. Divine Will had been accepted without demur. Thus

aspirations. The next supplication is for those who claim themselves as belonging to the Sikh faith. Then there is space for supplication on behalf of an individual or individuals for any specified purpose. The

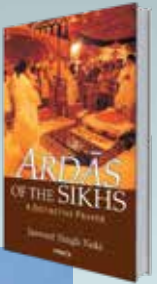


penultimate supplication in ardaas is: 'Grant us, O Lord, company of such lovely souls, meeting whom we may automatically remember Your Name'. The Ardaas does not conclude without an ardent supplication for the welfare of entire mankind under the Lord's Benevolent Will. Thus it becomes the prayer for all mankind for all times, transcending both time and space. It is a prayer that is held in utmost reverence, almost at par with Gurbani (the Gurus' word), even though it is the composition of the panth (the entire Sikh fraternity).

This hermeneutic study of the Ardaas aims at providing a faithful exposition of every section of this delightful piece of poetic prose, the like of which, it is said, is hard to come by anywhere else.



# Gift of the Sikh Faith



**G**uru Nanak was commissioned by God Almighty to propagate what is now known as Sikhi, the Sikh Faith. Sikhi is disciplined spiritual life bequeathed us by enlightened Masters.'

According to Guru Amar Das the school of the Gurus leaves behind all the six schools of Indian philosophy because it enables one to achieve salvation as well as to attain God.

The way of Sikhi is not prescribed for any particular sect or caste. It is for the entire mankind. Whoever follows the Guru's instructions becomes our brother-in-faith.

The Bhagat Ratnavali mentions that Guru Nanak imparted the following instructions to Bhais Phirua and Jodha:

The Sikh faith prizes humility. Render unto Sikh brothers whatever service you can. Get up during the

last quarter of the night and concentrate on the Lord's Word. Reckon God as your Lord and yourself as His serf. Participate in the holy congregation, listen to the Guru's Word with devotion and faithfully carry out his instructions.

Sikhi involves the virtues of humility, zeal for effort (*uddam*), service (*seva*) and *simran*. It matures through congregational worship, observing the brotherhood of all. Similar qualities of Sikhi were described by Guru Hargobind to Bhai Cuhar:

One who stays humble, engages in honest work and service, keeps the company of godly men, makes effort to receive *gyan* (enlightenment) by which one recognises the world as illusory and the Light of the Lord as True, is an accomplished Sikh. All of you, Sikhs, should reckon only one God.

The Rahitnama of Bhai Caupa Singh provides a more detailed picture of Sikhi:



Sikhi preserves the sanctity of the holy hair unto the last breath, discourses on the holy word, profits from the holy congregation, sows the seeds of noble acts, contemplates over the Guru's instructions, earns one's livelihood through honest labour, wields self-control, speaks the truth, and harvests the fruit of such actions. A devout Sikh would elevate the glory of the Guru's langar, worship the Timeless Lord, revere the sacred weapons, preserve his merit and credibility. He would spread the fragrance of Sikhi through dignified service, sweetness of speech, modesty in the eyes, and by honouring women. Women, as good wives and mothers should mind house-holding. All should recognise the Presence of God, uphold healthy traditions, obey the Guru's commands, serve the Lord like a Sikh, receive instructions from the Granth, recognise the Guru in the Khalsa, wake up early, take a bath including hair-wash and sit for prayer. Avoid evil, interact with others with due deference and make controlled utterance, accept the prescribed discipline sincerely and practice the wisdom of discrimination between good and evil. Serve and love the Sikhs as siblings. Serve your parents and study with interest. Sing (the Lord's praises) throat fully. Conquer your own mind. Find eminence through service, love from the heart, share with others what you have, remain mindful of virtue, slay sin, live frugally—habituated to nothing but food. (Be ever prepared to) engage in war (with evil). Your word should be powerful (i.e. reliable), your manner should reflect and promote spirituality. Relate (with the Lord) through Sikhi, be desirous of meeting the Lord.

Bhai Santokh Singh recognises five levels of Sikhi:

- i) Merely professed: indifferent to the Gurus' instructions and selfish in outlook.
- ii) Imitative: merely copying others and doing what they do without knowing the significance thereof.
- iii) Covetous: interested in profiting materially, devoid of any knowledge of the real self, bereft of gurmat.
- iv) Faithful: reposing trust in the Gurus, staying firm and steadfast even in trying times, willing to do anything to uphold the ideals.
- v) Ardent: staying in constant love (of the Lord), lauding the Lord as well as the Guru and having sentiments of fraternity for brethren-in-faith.

The prayer for the gift of Sikhi in the ardaas is a prayer for those who are faithful and ardent. This gift is not asked for oneself only but for all members of the fraternity.

Living as a true Sikh is not an easy job. Indeed, it has been likened to walking on the edge of a sword.



*Sharper than the edge of a sword  
And narrower than the breadth of a hair  
Is the path you have to tread.*

— Ramkali m 3, p. 918

In real Sikhi, one shuns the counsel of one's egoistic mind and submits oneself wholeheartedly to the Gurus' guidance:

*Tread this path following the Guru's advice  
And do what he ordains.  
Eschew your own mind's counsel and abstain from duality.*

— Suhi m 5, p. 763

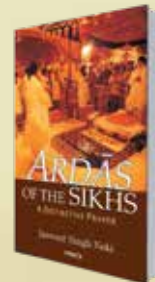
Once, Guru Arjan Dev was asked, 'Dear Master, how many true Sikhs have you known?' He replied, 'Only four and a half'. Further, he named his four predecessors as true Sikhs in every sense of the word and counted himself as a half-baked Sikh trying to become a true one.

Sikhi is mysterious. Here, if one becomes a true Sikh, he can reach the status of a Guru. However, at times, even after touching the summit of Sikhi, one might prefer remaining a Sikh to becoming a Guru. Bhai Faro Julka pleased Guru Arjan Dev so much by his missionary work that the Guru told him, 'I feel like installing you as my successor'. But, Bhai Par° said, 'My true King, I would love to remain a Sikh. Only a Guru can glorify that office.'

One cannot attain real Sikhi through one's own efforts. The Guru's grace is required as well for its attainment. That is why a special prayer is made in the ardaas for the grant of Sikhi.

*Extracted from 'Ardaas of the Sikhs: a distinctive Prayer' by Dr Jaswant Singh Neki*

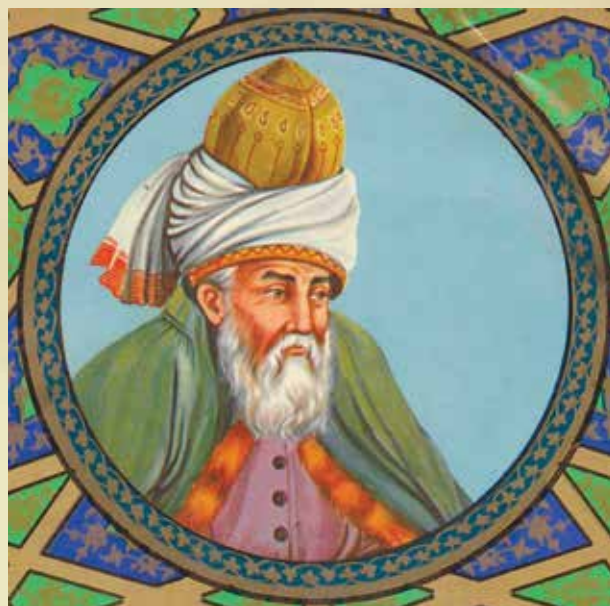
# What is Ardaas?



**T**here is a wonderful legend from the Persian mystic Rumi that reveals the essence of Ardaas. One day, a shepherd left his flock grazing in the forest and sat down meditating under the shade of a tree. His face lit up, his lips quivered, and he began to murmur, "O God, if you ever meet me, I'll serve you the milk of my goats, launder your clothes, give you a decent bath and scrub you dirt-free".

By chance, Prophet Moses was passing by. He heard what the shepherd was saying and took offence at the way he was caricaturing God. He shook the shepherd by his shoulder and said, "What are you saying, O fool? What need has the Master of the universe for the milk of your goats? How dare you propose to cleanse Him who can purify all the sinful? What you are saying is sheer insolence."

It is said that a voice was heard from the heavens, "Moses! You have been sent to unite people with me and not to tear them apart from me. You have been unjustly enraged over the words of the shepherd, you have scarcely appreciated his sentiments. He has in no way been insolent. You have been!" Moses felt ashamed and suddenly realised that Divine Light shines not only atop Mount Sinai; it also radiates from the depths of a



*Jalāl ad-Dīn Muhammad Rūmī was a 13th-century Persian poet, jurist, Islamic scholar, theologian, and Sufi mystic, whose influence transcended borders and ethnic divisions.*



prayerful heart.'

Prayer indeed does not rest in the rhetoric employed. It lives in the simple and chastened outpourings of an anguished soul. Words spoken can hardly reach the ceiling, how then can they reach the heavens? Prayer is the song of the spirit, and like a song, it transcends words. It is the anguish of apartness from God that cries out from the innermost core of one's being and goes out to tug at His hem. It is not a mere ritual of kneeling or lying prostrate; it is, rather, the soul bowing in reverence. Folded hands and lowered head are only external signs of inner feelings of absolute dedication, for if one's mind has not surrendered, bowing the head has little meaning.

Human history, as taught in schools, is lopsided. It tells us only distorted truth. It informs us mostly about kings, emperors, rulers, potentates, tyrants, invaders, rebels and traitors, but little about those innumerable men and women who fell a prey to oppression at the hands of despots and tyrants. It does not say a word about the wailing and mourning of multitudes. Though history is cruelly silent about this, we can be sure that the grief-stricken hearts of those unfortunate millions must have cried out to some higher Being for help. They must have implored Him and sought His intervention. Their imploring was nothing but ardaas. Indeed, human history has been an ever recurring tale of prayer, and that is why a prayerful heart is never alone. It is linked with the immemorial continuity of mankind's sufferings. In this way, ardaas embraces within its narrative, the all-pervasive suffering of the human race.

Pain and suffering are the fate of all humans. Our needs are enormous, but our abilities are small. Our existence is an endless tale of privations. However, when we cry out for help in moments of helplessness, we are in an ardaas. The ardaas invokes the Supreme Power of God to fulfil our wants and needs. Who can be better aware of our wants and privations than our Creator? That is why He has given us the right of calling upon Him for help. Ardaas is this right of ours to call out to Him. Whenever a helpless soul cries out, 'O my Father!' it always gets the loving response, 'Yes, my child!'

Two different etymological sources have been suggested for the term ardaas. According to one, it is an abbreviation of the Persian word *arzasht* that means 'a petition'. According to the other source, ardaas is compounded from two Sanskrit roots: *ard* n (to ask) and *s*(desire), thus meaning 'to ask for what one desires'. Both these roots appear equally relevant. The ingenuity of the originator of this term lay in that he made it accord



with Islamic as well as Hindu expressions—therefore giving it the ring of universality.

The term ardaas has acquired special theological connotations in the Sikh spiritual lore as well. Sprung from the collective consciousness of the entire Panth, it became a powerful spiritual vehicle for communicating the collective longings of the entire fraternity as well as the desires of any individual soul to Wah-e-guru (the Wonderful Lord). It is through the Divine Grace of Wah-e-guru that the welfare of one and all is invoked.

Some scholars ascribe the following meaningful significance to each phoneme of the term ardaas:

- A = Antaryami: The One who resides within us and so knows all about us from inside.
- R = Rakha: The One who is our protector.
- Da = Datar: Benevolent Giver.
- S = Sahara: Great support.

It follows that ardaas means invoking the benevolent Giver, who dwells within us, for His help and support.

Ardaas is one of the major Sikh practices of worship. It is 'knocking at the portal of the Lord's Court'. It is also 'the key to the door of one's own heart'. Only one whose prayers have been answered can realise that the door of one's own heart and the portal of the Divine Court are one and the same.

Ridden by our needs, we pray for the fulfilment of our desires. However, supplicatory prayers are of rudimentary spiritual significance only. Sublime prayers beg for higher spiritual attainments. Indeed, the loftiest prayers seek oneness with the Lord, and nothing else.

The ardaas is thus many things simultaneously: first, it is an acknowledgement of being a creature of God. It is affirmation of our own helplessness. And finally, it is inviting the Infinite to come and pervade the confines of



our finitude. A prayerful heart soon realises that Divine Grace does not merely respond to our yearnings, it actually even antedates them and even shapes the very yearnings that we think are ours. Thus every ardaas, ensues indeed from the Grace of God.

The ardaas has many dimensions. It may be a supplication, a thanksgiving, a laudatory exclamation, an expression of love and devotion, or a declaration of self-surrender. It may be soaked in tears of remorse or clothed in confident hope of redemption. An unending variety of sentiments can find expression in it.

Language seems to have a peculiar relationship with it, for it often serves as its medium of expression. The men of faith who chiselled the hallowed phrases of the ardaas were indeed spiritual giants. They had actually put into practice in their own lives the spirit of these phrases that reflect their spiritual stature. Every letter

of the ardaas illustrates the beauty of their mind and grandeur of their spirit.

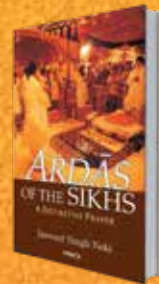
In the higher ranges of ardaas, one experiences Divine benevolence uninterruptedly. All one's worldly demands seem to vanish; even words tend to come to a standstill. At this stage, one does not perform ardaas; rather, one becomes ardaas – a living ardaas.

A prayerful soul always obeys the Divine Will. If one's supplication is accepted, it is considered to be God's gift; if it is not accepted, it is considered to be His wisdom. In either case, Divine Grace is seen to be at work. In this way, the prayerful heart feels blessed under all circumstances.

*Extracted from 'Ardaas of the Sikhs: a distinctive Prayer' by Dr Jaswant Singh Neki*



# The Spirit of Ardaas



*All that happens and all that'll happen is by His Will.  
Aught if we could, we would have done.  
Nothing by our own will ever come to happen.  
As it pleases Him, us He preserves.  
Dear Lord !  
All your beings are under your sway  
We, your creatures, have little say.  
Lord ! Forgive us through Your Grace.  
You gave us a body; You gave us a soul,  
And yoked us to such tasks as You chose.  
The way You command us, so we act.  
Whatever we do is per Your writ.  
Out o' five elements You shaped everything.  
Is there one who can fashion a sixth?  
Some, through the Guru, Your mysteries grasp.  
Self-centred others, but only grieve.  
Who can describe the glory of the Lord?  
I'm but the lowliest thoughtless fool.  
Forgive me, prays Nanak, Your bonded slave.  
The ignorant, I, Your refuge crave.*

*- Suhi m 4, p.736*



**T**he above quotation from Sri Guru Granth Sahib represents in every way many verses that express the spirit of prayer. Reflecting on this verse, one can identify three main sentiments of prayer. The first is the feeling of one's own frailty, lack of power, and the state of helplessness; the second is that of trusting faith in God's greatness, omnipotence and grace; and

the third comprises intense desire to receive that grace by taking refuge with God. The feeling of helplessness engenders humility; faith sprouts from the assurance of God's trustworthiness; and self-surrender results from the desire to take refuge with Him. Humility, faith and self-surrender, then, are the three fundamental sentiments involved in prayer.



## Humility

In a janam-sakhi (biography) of Guru Nanak Dev, the Guru says, 'The desires of the Sikhs who'll pray in utter humility shall be fulfilled'. The humility of ardaas is of a special kind—it arises from helplessness. When frail human clay cries out to God out of the feeling of land sliding underneath the feet, that cry is nothing short of ardaas. We must never despair of our helplessness as it is this that inspires us to pray and prevents us from going astray. Prayer is the special prerogative of the meek and the humble. Those proud of their own intellect are simply unable to pray. The greater our humility, the greater the approval our prayers receive. We cannot get admittance to the Lord's abode as long as our ego continues to hold its ground. 'The portal of grace opens only when the ego is dismembered'.

In the gracious kingdom of God, love is the only legal tender. Those who with the utmost humility take refuge with the loving God receive His ready care. One who has no one to look after him receives God's protection. Divine nature favours the humble and protects the unprotected. Out of compassion, God becomes the haven for the destitute. He reveals His mysteries only to an unassuming mind. The more one bows before Him, the higher He elevates him. During his dialogue with Sheikh Brahm, Guru Nanak Dev said, 'the deeper the water of a fountain sinks, the higher does it rise. Likewise, those who practice humility rise to sublime divinity'.

Humility, besides being the fundamental sentiment of the ardaas, is also the basis of our relationship with God. When we realize our utter impotence before His absolute omnipotence, we have no option but to humbly bare our helplessness before Him, saying :

*Poor and meek, we are but Yours,*

*Save us, pray, O Greatest of the great.*

— *Gauri Purbi m 4, p. 171*

In humility rests the mystery of ardaas.

## Faith

Faith implies sincere devotion to, confidence in, and reliance upon God. There can be no faith without sincerity and candour, and there can be no prayer without confidence or trust.

If faith is absent, helplessness turns into hopelessness. Losing hope is tantamount to turning one's face away from the portal of grace. Faith lends us strength and sustains us even during absolute helplessness. A faithful heart proclaims thus:

*While some might have others to support them,  
Poor and humble, I, have only You.*

— *Var Sulhi m 3 sl. m 2, p. 791*

Thereafter, he leaves his concerns to God. The faithful consider their God not just their support, but also their power, fortune, and intellect.

The following event in Sikh history is a fine example of unflinching faith.

Sulhi Khan, a Pathan military officer, set out to mount an attack on Guru Arjan Dev. The news caused much concern in the Guru's court. Some made the suggestion that a letter be sent to the Emperor asking him to order Sulhi to desist from his evil design. A few others proposed that a deputation of a couple of men be sent to wait upon the Emperor and beseech Him to forbid Sulhi from attacking the Guru. There were some others who counselled 'prompt action ourselves to stem Sulhi's march'. The Guru, however, simply prayed and had faith in divine intervention. The prayer was answered. Sulhi met with a fatal accident while still on his way.

A man of faith never loses his poise even under the most adverse circumstances. He advances his begging bowl with absolute hopefulness and awaits His gift with calm patience. Faith, hope and patience are the essential ingredients of ardaas. A man of faith fears nothing because wherever he casts his glance, he finds his Lord present to take care of him.

One whose faith is not resolute is often in two minds and cannot focus single-pointedly on God. However, ardaas is essentially the function of a single-minded focus. One, in two minds, is in doubt about whether or not his prayers shall be answered. This doubt erupts in him even before he begins his prayer, continues to be present while he is praying, and remains alive even after he has said his prayer. This is a pity; to pray to God, and yet be doubtful about the outcome of the prayer. It is both blasphemy and hypocrisy.

How may this doubt and skepticism, that can muddle our mind, be dispelled? Guru Amar Das instructs us thus:

*The mind gets polluted with skepticism.*

*How may it be cleansed?*

*Wash your mind with (the precept of) the Word,*

*And keep your thought focused on God.*

— *Ramkali m 3, p. 919*

Doubt does not mean that faith is absent. Rather, it signifies that faith has not yet matured. Even rudimentary faith is helpful because it can cause one to pray for relief from doubt. 'O Lord! Doubt and double-mindedness do not let my mind be focused on you. You





have always helped your devotees get rid of these. Pray, help poor me as well.' God first dispels the doubt and double-mindedness of those unto whom he decides to reveal His mystery. Then the devotee, rid of skepticism, focuses on God with redoubled faith and love.

### Self-Surrender

The ardaas must contain nothing apart from prayer. If anything else is attempted during ardaas, it is bound to interfere with its sentiment. Lest his prayers should go unanswered, a skeptical person tends to supplement his ardaas with many other practices. He might consult an astrologer or a soothsayer. He might even practise austerities or penance. There can be no prayer when the self is engaged in such efforts. Prayer reveals one's powerlessness to God, and when there is less of the self, there is more of God.

O Lord! I know not what to ask of you. You are aware of my needs more than I can ever be. You love me intensely. O Father, give your child that which he cannot even ask for. Whether you keep me alive or let

me perish, give me pleasure or expose me to pain, please keep me under your Will. I do not know your ways. I can only surrender myself before you. That I do! Teach me how to pray. Pervade in my prayerful outpourings.

Such prayer can be a prayer of self-surrender.

*I hereby surrender my mind, my body, my soul unto You,  
Pray, keep me, as You Will.*

— *Prabhati m 1, p. 1345*

Whenever a person surrenders his self before God and seeks refuge with Him, God provides him His custody with pleasure. This is His eternal covenant with us.

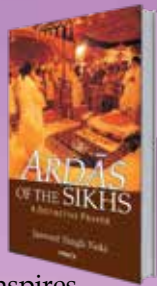
Lovingly the Lord embraces him whoever comes to His sanctuary.

*This, indeed, is His covenant.*

— *Bihagra m 5, p. 544*

*Extracted from 'Ardaas of the Sikhs: a distinctive Prayer' by Dr Jaswant Singh Neki*





# Homage to Guru Panth



**Guru Arjun Dev being martyred; Painting by Bhagat Singh**

**F**ollowing the invocation to Guru Granth Sahib, the ardaas pays homage to Guru Panth—the Gurmukh Panth which stands uniquely at variance with the other religions of the world. Sikhism is a faith that inspires an undaunted spirit coupled with the lack of malevolence. It values moral *ahimsa*, or non-violence, but not one that becomes culpable for inaction against grave injustice and the armed aggression against the meek, the helpless and the down-trodden. It values valour and courage to hold out against aggression, yet never attacks anyone first.

The gallantry taught by the Gurus has two aspects: inner and outer. The former pertains to facing and subduing the inner enemies such as lust, anger, avarice, worldly attachment and pride. The latter pertains to the valour that destroys tyranny, savagery and other inhuman behaviour in order to protect the meek, the poor and the unprivileged. This bi-modal gallantry is a hard task, for martyrdom is its pledge and sacrifices its vow. This has an appropriate connection with the two swords of miri and piri.

Ardaas inspires readiness for martyrdom. The Sikh Panth has carved its history through high moral courage. History has not carved its ideals, its ideals have carved its history. Ardaas remembers the eternal heroes not by their names but by their acts. The Sikh heroes carved history by living their ideals and by dying for them. They were the ones who remembered the Lord, shared their resources with fellow brethren, kept the 'temple of bread' active, wielded the sacred sword when time came, overlooked the shortcomings and faults of others, never gave up righteousness but gave up their lives

instead, preserved the sanctity of their *keshas* (unshorn hair) until their last breath, had themselves severed joint by joint, boiled in cauldrons, sawn alive and suffered the cruellest labour.

It pays homage to the spiritual fortitude of those mothers whose infant offspring were cut into pieces and thrown back into their laps, but they did not flinch from their faith. Great homage is paid in the ardaas unto such martyrs, disciples of faith, and the Guru's loved ones.

Such valourous morality relied on the concept of Guru Panth—the collectivity of great souls. It is to them that adequate homage has been paid in the ardaas. Guru Gobind Singh alluded to the loftiest traditions of the Panth when he said, 'The Khalsa is my own special form' and acknowledge that:

*Through their (the Khalsa's) benevolence have I been decked,*

*Else, there exist a million wrecks like me.*

—DG: Keshodas Prabodh 2-4





The concept of Guru Panth is a sublime concept that mirrors the lofty spiritual achievements of the Khalsa. It is a unique contribution of the Sikh faith to the religious thought of the world. No other religion is known to have transformed the community to the status of a prophet, a community where the spirit of His Word percolated so admirably into the collective consciousness of the community.

It is important to identify the characteristics of the Khalsa as Guru. It is nothing but single-pointed undaunted sublime consciousness which has become one with supernal spiritual inspiration provided by the Gurus' Word. Guru Gobind Singh bowed in reverence before this type of Khalsa and obediently carried out their command given in the fortress of Chamkaur. Those five Sikhs to whom Guru Gobind Singh thus submitted were imbued with *liv*. It is the collectivity of the followers of the path of *liv* that can be considered Guru Panth. The Khalsa with whom Guru Gobind Singh entered into such a covenant were no other than men of great spiritual endowment. What follows is the word that Guru Gobind Singh gave the Khalsa:

*As long as the Khalsa preserve their uniqueness,  
I shall bestow on them all glory.*

*If they begin to follow the Brahmanical ways,  
From them will I withdraw my trust.*

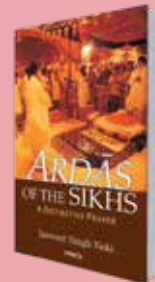
In other words, the Guru meant that as long as the Khalsa preserve their unique identity and their lofty conduct, he will continue to bless them with the benediction from which they originally sprouted.

Such is the Khalsa of Guru Gobind Singh whom he created out of the fullness of spiritual awareness, beauty of conduct, and sheer dauntlessness. On the altar of Time, it manifested itself as Guru Panth. Every time one remembers the unprecedented achievements of Guru Panth, one is spontaneously impelled to utter Waheguru. In doing so, every Sikh heart, drenched in Guru-consciousness, renews its faith and determination.

*Extracted from 'Ardaas of the Sikhs: a distinctive Prayer' by Dr Jaswant Singh Neki*



# “From which the Panth has been Separated”



*In the eighth stanza of the Ardaas, the Akal Purkh (immortal being) is beseeched to bestow on the Khalsa the beneficence of unobstructed visit to and free management of Sri Nankana Sahib and other Gurdwaras and places of the Guru from which the Panth has been separated.*



**Gurdwara Nankana Sahib, now in Pakistan**

**T**he life of Punjab centres around the memory of the Gurus. 'Punjab survives by the Gurus' name', said Puran Singh. This holy land, however, was bifurcated in 1947 when the predominantly Muslim Pakistan separated from the predominantly Hindu India. The Sikhs, relying on promises given by Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru, decided to side with the Hindu India. So, they were forcibly thrown by Muslims out of Pakistan. With that, the political misfortune of the Sikhs set in. The promises they had been given were meant to be forgotten. That undermined the desire of an independent entity of that simple nation. The grief of this tragedy was enormous but an even greater tragedy was the one for having been deprived of free access to their holy places that were located in the land from which they had been exiled. Many gurdwaras of historical importance are situated here now in Pakistan.



During Guru Nanak's time, Rae Bular was the chief of that town. His descendants who still live there continue to look after the Nanak's lands with great reverence.

Every Sikh longs to pay a visit now and then to that holy place. But they are no longer in a position to look after even their founder Guru's birthplace.

Besides this, there are several other shrines in Nankana Sahib that have been consecrated by the Guru's touch. These include: Gurdwara Bal Lila, where the Guru used to play with his peers during his childhood; Gurdwara Patti Sahib, the school where the Guru learnt his alphabet and wrote his patti (tablet); Gurdwara Malji Sahib where he grazed his cattle; Gurdwara Kiara Sahib, where the Guru blessed the ruined harvest back to lush life; Gurdwara Sacha Sauda, where the Guru fed hungry sadhus and considered this a profitable bargain; and Gurdwara Tambu Sahib where the Guru, during his childhood, hid himself fearing his father's wrath.

During the early twentieth century, the management of these gurdwaras was wrested from the hands of a corrupt mahant, Narain Das, at the cost of several Sikh lives who participated in the agitation. The memory of how they were tied to trees and set on fire still haunts the Sikhs.



**Gurdwara Dera Sahib in Lahore, now in Pakistan**

Dera Sahib, where Guru Arjan Dev was martyred is an important gurdwara there. It used to be thronged by Sikhs everyday. It was left in Lahore, where also stands Shahid Ganj that commemorates several martyrs who gave up their lives for the sake of their faith in Mir Mannu's captivity. There Sikh women, children and even infants also suffered indescribable torture.

The other gurdwaras in Lahore are the birthplace of Guru Ram Das in Chuna Mandi, gurdwara commemorating Guru Hargobind in Mozang, and the martyrdom site of Bhai Taru' Singh, who was descalped.

Apart from the above-mentioned important historic gurdwaras, there were thousands of other gurdwaras from which the Panth has been deprived.

The intolerable pain that this deprivation produced resulted in the issuance of a *hukamnama* from the Akal Takht advising the Sikhs wherever they may be to include the following prayer in their daily congregational ardaas:

*O Supreme Giver, who has always taken care of the Khalsa Panth, pray, grant the boon to the Khalsa Panth of having free access to, and to take care of Nankana Sahib and other gurdwaras from which the Panth has*

*been deprived.*

This prayerful plea has since been repeated at our congregational ardaas daily in all gurdwaras.

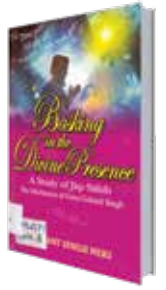
**Extracted from 'Ardaas of the Sikhs: a distinctive Prayer' by Dr Jaswant Singh Neki**



**Pilgrims at the sarovar at Panja Sahib, Hasan Abdal, now in Pakistan**

Apart from Nankana Sahib, several other holy places have been lost to the Sikhs. Prominent among these is Panja Sahib where Guru Nanak demolished the arrogance of Wali Qandhari who declined to let Mardana, the Guru's companion, take water from his spring. The other spring that the Guru opened for Mardana is still resplendent.





# Dr. Jaswant Singh Neki Lecture Series

## JAP(u)ji Sahib: The Psalm Eternal

**T**he Sikh scripture, Sri Guru Granth Sahib, opens with a basic creedal text called *Jap(u)*, meaning 'meditation'. However, the Sikhs call it *Jap(u) ji* or even *Jap(u)ji Sahib*, 'ji' and 'sahib' being two honorific epithets that are added out of reverence. In the 'index' of Sri Guru Granth Sahib, *Jap(u)* has been indexed as *Jap(u) Neesan*. In the earliest available breviary (*gutka*), dated 1710 AD (manuscript in the Punjab University Library, Lahore), Guru Nanak Dev thus addresses his successor, Guru Angad Dev:

*Dear Man! None shall attain my proximity in the Lord's Court without reciting Jap(u)ji. Only he who possesses the pass (neesan) of Jap(u)ji shall be admitted there.*

The Sikhs are a religious community, traditionally identified by their unshorn hair (which they hold as sacred), and men by their colourful headgear, the turban. Although the Punjab is their seat of domicile, they can now be found, on account of massive diaspora, in most countries of the world, generally as an infinitesimal minority. Their total population in the world would be around 25 million.

Guru Nanak Dev (1469-1539) founded the faith. A line of nine successor gurus followed him. Of them, the fifth, Guru Arjan Dev (1563-1606), compiled the Sikh scripture *Sri Guru Granth Sahib*. The tenth Guru, Gobind Singh (1666-1708) brought to an end the succession of corporal Gurus and vested the holy book with 'eternal Guruship'. Thus, he made 'the holy Word', the perpetual living Guru of the Sikhs. He also infused among them an insatiable zest for freedom and with the baptism of the sword transformed them into an Order of God's own knights-at-arms, known as the *Khalsa*.

The Sikh holy book *Sri Guru Granth Sahib*, is a truly pluralist scripture because, besides the works of the Sikh Gurus, it also embodies the works of a number of Hindu saints as well as Muslim Sufi dervishes. It opens with the seminal work of Guru Nanak, the *Jap(u) ji* that is the basic creedal text incorporating the fundamentals of the Sikh faith. It is also considered the prime burden of the scripture.

This is a poetic text consisting of 38 stanzas with two slokas, one serving as its prologue and the other as its epilogue. Altogether, it is comprised of 383 lines made up of 2090 words, not one of which is inept or superfluous. Altogether this composition is of great philosophical import, it presents neither a discursive nor a logically structured format. On the contrary, it is characterised by a mellifluous poetic form. Its highly inspired verse absorbs the mind of a seeker and brings tranquility through its placid rhythms.

*Mool Mantra* or 'the Prime Revelation,' that pithily enunciates the nature and essential attributes of the One God (*Ik Oankar*) prefaces it. This singular Deity (*Oankar*) not only pervades every pore of whatever is but also transcends even its fullest entirety. He is unbegotten (*Ajooni*), immortal (*Akal*) and self-resplendent (*Sanbhau*), yet, is the Essence of Existence (*Sat Naam*). Being the Creator (*Karta Purakh*), and having none higher than Him or even coequal, He is naturally without fear (*Nirbhau*) and without jealousy (*Nirvair*), but ever brims with sovereign grace (*Gurprasadi*).

The *sloka* with which the *Jap(u) ji* opens, and which serves as its prologue, delineates the trans-temporal nature of this Supreme Existent:

*He was in the very Beginning,  
He was when Times began,  
He is Now,  
And, in Truth, shall always be*

Thirty-eight stanzas or *pauris* (literally: rungs of a ladder) follow this prologue. These vary in size, metric measure, and rhyme scheme. In spite of such structural diversity, the *Jap(u)ji* uniformly preserves its poetic finesse as well as contemplative profundity. At places, it appears, the author flies into a kind of lyrical ecstasy and goes into inspired repetitiveness - repetitiveness that is the essential requirement in the practice of *Jap(u)* or meditation.

The *Jap(u)ji* is a work in the *sutrik* tradition. A *sutra* is an aphoristic statement, revelatory in nature, without exegesis or argument and trans-subjective in import. It



freely draws its symbols and allusions from history, mythology, and philosophy (*darshanas*). Its sutrik style coupled with the vast resource of its symbolism, makes *Jap(u)ji* a work that is not only profound but also complex in spite of the simplicity and clarity of its language. That is, perhaps, why despite hundreds of exegeses, the *Jap(u)ji* still awaits an all-satisfying exposition.

The text of the *Jap(u) ji*, with occasional digressions, outlines the path that a spiritual seeker is expected to pursue in order to achieve his aim. In order to make this aim explicit, the Guru, in the very first stanza of this work raises a question:

*How can we, then, Truth attain?*

*How to rend illusion's veil?*

And then goes on to explain 'the how':

*Know you this immutable writ*

*His Will only shall prevail.*

We must live in accord with the Divine Will that has been inscribed into our very being. In order to live thus requires that we identify that Writ. That would be possible only if we can de-alienate ourselves to unite with Him. The Guru provides us with instruction about how to overcome alienation, and proceed step by step so as to have the Beatific Vision of the Lord.

*Rung by rung we would thus ascend*

*To unite with the One that is our aim.*

Here and there, as we proceed through the text of *Jap(u)ji*, we do come across a few digressions that serve some significant functions. Some of them affirm the dignity of human life, others stress rejection of ritual formalism, and still others embody comments of cosmological import. They do appear kind of parenthetical statements, but they have fundamental reformatory import, often of ethical significance.

According to Guru Nanak, God's language is of 'infinite love' (*Bhakhia bhao apar*). In this very tongue God Almighty must have revealed Himself to the Guru, who would have received that revelation in sublime wonderment (*vismad*). What the Guru thus received, he, in turn, revealed unto the whole world in the tongue of the people.

The language of *Jap(u)ji* is Punjabi of those times. (According to a UNESCO report, Punjabi is now amongst the major languages of the world, 13th in order according to the number of people that speak it). Before Guru Nanak, Sanskrit alone had been accepted as the authentic

medium of divine revelation (*shruti*). However, the priestly class, the Brahmins, had made learning of that language their sole proprietary right. So, it had come to be far removed from ordinary people. No religious ceremony or ritual was possible without the help of a Brahmin. Guru Nanak sought to break the hegemony of the priestly class and make Divine Revelation directly available to the people.

Some pundits, in the arrogance of their learning, raised academic objections against his work. They said, "It is not flawless grammatically". However, retorted the devout scholars, "Who can ever raise the wall of grammar in the mighty torrent of inspired lyricity?" The pundits called its languages "a broken tongue". However, retorted the devout, "Do not his words represent the broken hearts of the people? Doesn't he empathically echo throbbing of the people's hearts?" The pundits said, "His poetry lacks ornamental figures of speech", "But", said the devout, "do you expect royal glory from ill-clad people?" Guru Nanak was simultaneously the people's poet and the Lord's minstrel. He spoke to the people in their own idiom. Thus, he became the interpreter par excellence of the Divine Revelation for the people. The complexity that one comes across in the *Jap(u)ji* is very little of its language, it pertains principally to its content that is replete with ineffable mysteries.

Among the ineffable mysteries that it undertakes to allude to are God, His nature and essential attributes, the Word and its inherent creativity, Creation and the nature of the universe, human personality in its sublime state, the nature of ethical values and their polarity, spiritual practices and their mystic import, and the spiritscapes through which the soul of a devout practitioner progresses.

The five spiritscapes, or *Khands* as the Guru designates them, are the paramount mysteries whose ineffability the Guru time and again underlines, and whose barest outlines he could make available to us. These cannot be intellectually understood, because they have been scantily described, and they could not have been fully described because they are experiences beyond the gamut and prowess of our language. What compounds the situation is that there are no cross references pertaining to them available in any other place in the entire scripture. The seeker is just made aware of them and of their barest outlines. The rest he has to discover himself through practice "about which there are ample instructions, but their success only a Guru or his word can ensure".



The concluding *sloka* of this work, which is considered its epilogue, seeks to underline three basics one must ever be aware of. First, that man is placed in the lap of nature the air being his guru, the earth being his mother, water being his father, and day and night being his two nurses that nurture him. Second, that in the cozy lap of nature, man not only lives but also acts. However, his actions are subject to divine judgment. Only through meritorious actions may he attain proximity of God. Finally but most importantly, it need be realised that they alone pass beyond the travails of life and attain the vision of God, who ever remember the Lord, practice His presence, and dwell upon His *Naam* (*Naam*, although literally translated as 'name' to imply the Name of God, has a much wider import in Sikh theology. It represents God's creativity and Power as well).

Finally, a word about when this divine work was composed. Nothing definite can be said because of lack of unanimity among the various sources of information. Two of the Guru's biographies, the *Puratan Janamsakhi* (ed. H. T. Colebrooke) and the *Janamsakhi of Hajizabad* (ed. M. A. Macauliffe), place the inception of this work during the Guru's crucial communion with God in Sultanpur. While Sodhi Meharban refers this event to the year 1505, other historians (Seva Ram Singh, Hari Ram Gupta etc) consider that it took place sometime between 1496 and 1499.

Another source, namely, Pothi Hari ji, however, considers that *Jap(u) ji* was not composed all in one go, but in parts on different occasions. *Pauris* 28-38 are said to have been composed during the Guru's visit, in 1539 AD, to Achal Batala where he held a dialogue with the Yogis. Some parts, including *pauri* 22 came to be composed during the Guru's dialogue with Parbrahman. It was even later that the whole text - 38 *pauris* and two *slokas* - came to be completed.

Thus, there is no consensus about the date of *Jap(u) ji* Sahib. However, do such works really require to be dated? They are eternal. One thing is sure, however, that during the final sojourn of the Guru in Kartarpur, it had become customary for the congregations of his Sikhs to recite *Jap(u) ji* every morning.

Bhai Gurdas bears testimony to this in his Vars:

*Sodar and Arti were chanted (during the evening), In the ambrosial hours of the morning, Jap(u) was recited*

**Var 1: 38**

This practice is integral with devout Sikhs.

Another significant initiative taken by The Nagaara Trust towards dissemination of values and traditions of the Sikh way of life was to arrange an expose of the *Jap(u) ji* Sahib which is the first composition enshrined in the Sikh Holy Book, Sri Guru Granth Sahib and embodies the fundamentals of the Sikh faith. The



lectures were delivered by the eminent Sikh Scholar, Dr. Jaswant Singh Neki at the prestigious India International Centre, New Delhi during March 2001. In consonance with the Sikh message of Universal Brotherhood, the five-lecture series was presided over by eminent personalities representing various faiths, including Rev. Valson Thampu, Professor of English at St. Stephens College, University of Delhi and Vice Chairman Minorities Commission, Government of Delhi; Maulana Wahid-ud-din Khan the renowned Muslim scholar and President of the Islamic Centre, Delhi; Sardar Bhagwant Singh Dilawari missionary and head of the leprosy home Tapovan at Amravati, Madhya Pradesh, who gave up a promising career in the Indian Foreign Service to 'serve the needy' in consonances with the Sikh values; and the Honorable Ranjit Singh Narula, retired Chief Justice of the Punjab and Haryana High Court, and shining light of the Sikh Community for a long time.

The lecture series were received with great enthusiasm and the cassette-set of the lectures is under issue, Dr. Jaswant Singh Neki has also prepared a treatise on the many facets dealt with in the *Jap(u) ji* Sahib. This is the first of a series of articles on this subject, which we hope to publish with the conviction that this will be of great interest to readers, and will provide clarifications for the uninitiated

*This first appeared in Nishaan IV/2001.*



# ‘The Sikhs, Sikhism and Order of the Khalsa’\*

In April 1999 the Sikhs world over are celebrating the tercentenary of the Order of the Khalsa. The Sikhs form the world’s fifth largest religious group, around 20 million strong. The Order of the Khalsa is their elite Order. Previously inhabiting only the Indian subcontinent, the Sikhs are now living in virtually every country of the world.

The term Sikh means a disciple – a seeker of Truth, not withdrawing from the world for his spiritual pursuit, but realising it while participating in life in a disciplined way. Sikhism is thus the discipline of spiritual discipleship.

It is a revealed monotheistic faith founded by Guru Nanak (1469-1539). He and his nine successors generated among their Sikhs a spiritual awakening characterised by the love of God, respect for all human beings, dignity of labour, vigorous altruism, fearless upholding of righteousness, and a corporate identity.

The Indian sub-continent, where this faith first came into light, had been under the shackles of foreign invaders for centuries, even a dynasty of slaves having ruled Indians for several decades. The Sikh Gurus planned to infuse their followers not only with spiritual awakening, but also with indomitable courage to be able to shake off such age-old slavery. This was an incredible feat that required a couple of centuries to accomplish, and so took a

succession of ten Gurus to accomplish it. During the course of about two centuries, the ten Gurus were able to demonstrate how Sikh ideals could be practiced in different, even under the most difficult of circumstances.

Of the Mughal rulers over that time, Akbar the Great (1542-1605), himself a pluralist, evinced cordiality towards the Sikh faith. However, after him, the later





Mughal rulers began to apprehend that this new faith had begun to invaginate into the religious dominion of Islam. Worse than that, they even began to suspect that the temporal activities of the Sikhs were heading towards creating an *imperium in imperio* and they decided to extinguish it. Guru Arjan Dev, the fifth Guru was tortured to death in 1606 under the orders of Emperor Jehangir and Guru Tegh Bahadur, the ninth Guru was ordered to be beheaded by Emperor Aurangzeb in 1675. ('Hind ki Chadhar'). Uniquely, and unprecedented in the story of mankind, the Sikh Guru was martyred because he chose to champion the right of freedom of faith for the Hindus.

Guru Gobind Singh, the tenth Sikh Master, was attacked again and again by Aurangzeb's mighty Mughal armies. However, his Sikhs fought so valiantly, that in spite of eventual physical defeat, their moral victory irretrievably undermined Continuity of the Mughal rule. Later, when the Sikhs were able to create their own kingdom extending across northern India, this soon extended to Afghanistan, reversing the decades of invasion.

Guru Gobind Singh brought about momentous changes. Firstly, he discontinued the line of personal succession and vested the holy book, Sri Guru Granth Sahib with the status of the Eternal Living Guru i.e. the Guru living as the Holy Word. Initially, this holy-book was compiled by Guru Arjan Dev, the fifth Guru. Guru Gobind Singh included in it the works of his worthy father, Guru Tegh Bahadur. This scripture is, thus mankind's only pluralistic scripture because, apart from the works of the Sikh Gurus, it also embodies the compositions of many learned sages of the Aryan as well as the Semitic religious traditions. This holy book, painstakingly compiled, competently edited and carefully preserved by the Gurus themselves, so begins with the following invocation:

*The One God  
Immanent and Transcendent,  
Whose Name is Truth,  
Who is the Creator,  
Without fear or enmity,  
Beyond the throes of Time,  
Un-begotten,  
Self-existent,  
Whose grace is Sovereign.*

The cardinal principles of Sikhism have been epitomised in a three-word phrase: *naam, daan, ishnan*.

*Naam* signifies remembering God and practicing His presence. *Daan* stands for prayerfully begging from and receiving from God and thankfully sharing the bounty with others. *Ishnan* (lit: ablutions) signifies cleanliness, not just of the body, but that of thought, word and deed.

Sikhism imbibes the householder's way of life over that of the ascetic because 'everyone, even the ascetic, is blessed by the householder'. It emphasises the earning of one's living with honest labour (*kirt karni*) and sharing the fruits of one's labour with the needy (*Wand Chakna*).

*One who labours for what he eats, and gives some of what he has,*

*He alone, says Nanak, knows the Path.*

Praising God for His innumerable gifts and looking after His creation with affection and care are among one's prescribed duties. A Sikh is expected also to act as God's own Knight-at-arms (*sant-sipahi*) to prevent tyranny and oppression as also uphold justice and righteousness. Sikhism condemns all types of discrimination, be it based on gender, colour, ethnicity or class.

The Guru's precept is that:

*"There is only One Father of us all, and we are all His children".*

The Guru emphasises the proper place of women in society:

*"Man is born of woman,*

*Of her conceived.*

*Is wedded to a woman, befriends her,*

*And through her the future generations come.*

*When his woman dies, he seeks another,*

*To woman is he bound.*

*Why consider her inferior, when even kings and prophets are born of her?"*

The Guru always identified himself with the downtrodden.

*"Myself I identify with the lowliest among the low;*

*What have I to do with the high born?"*

*God's Grace rains down where the lowly are cared for".*

Guru Gobind Singh was the greatest nation-builder. In the words of Sir Gokul Chand Narang, there was no existent concept of an Indian nation before Guru Gobind Singh: A nation he began when he initiated the Order of the Khalsa.

*\*Dr Jaswant Singh Neki at Tercentenary of birth of the Khalsa*



# That Vaisakhi of 1699



*Keshgarh Sahib, at Anandpur Sahib, where the Khalsa was born*

On that Vaisakhi (30 March 1699), Guru Gobind Singh, the Tenth Guru, in an extraordinarily spectacular way, established the Order of the Khalsa. The term 'Khalsa' means the 'pure' and also means 'those belonging to God alone'. On that momentous day, the Guru had convened a large assembly

of Sikhs from all over, historians putting the attendance at around 40,000. In the midst of this assembly, the Guru stood on a specially erected platform, and addressing the congregation in a somber voice, said that he wanted someone to come forward and offer his head for his faith.



*Early painting depicting Guru Gobind Singh with the Panj Pyaras*





People were spell bound, yet, up sprang a devotee and offered his head saying that his life had already been pledged to the Guru. Him the Guru heralded into an enclosure, and a while later, himself came back, blood dripping from his sword and called for another head. Another volunteer came forth. Five times he made the

The Guru then took a steel bowl, filled it with water and started stirring it with a double-edged steel dagger (*khanda*), sitting by it in a heroic posture (*bir asan*), and reciting five specially selected holy texts. While this process was going on, came the Guru's wife, Jeetaji, and added sugar-crystals to sweeten the water. Thus was



demand and every time a man came forth. Then, when the Guru re-emerged from the enclosure, he brought back all the five who had volunteered their heads and declared from the pulpit that they were his five beloved ones (*panj piarey*).

prepared the holy water (*amrit*) with which the Guru anointed the five beloved ones to initiate them into the new Order.





The Guru then stood before his five beloved ones with folded hands, and entreated them to administer the amrit to them in like manner. This established the unexceptional identity between the disciple and the Master (*Aape Gur Chela*). Since then, it has become the standard baptismal ceremony for the Sikhs to be initiated into the Order of the Khalsa. Many thousands were baptised during the week that followed. After initiation, a Sikh is obliged to follow a prescribed code of conduct (*rehat*). This consists in recitation of prescribed liturgical texts every day, remembering God all the time and upholding righteousness. It also involves wearing, on one's person, the following five symbols/markers:

*Kesh* (unshorn hair), signifying holiness.

*Kanga* (comb), to keep the hair clean as also to signify cleanliness.

*Kirpan* (a short sword), to signify defence of righteousness alongside spiritual wisdom.

*Karra* (a steel bracelet), a reminder of one's vows.

*Kachha* (underwear), signifying control of passions and discipline of desires.

The Khalsa, its male members in particular, are required to adorn their heads with a turban. Men get the new last name Singh (lion), and the women Kaur (princess). This signifies that they are now the Guru's spiritual progeny, and have been rid of their previous identities of religion, lineage, ethnicity, caste and rituals. This resulted in emergence of Commonwealth of the Khalsa where all have a shared corporate identity.

Sikhs hold their congregations in special places of worship, known as the gurdwaras. At every gurdwara, a volume of Guru Granth Sahib is sited with full royal decorum. The holy book, being the living Guru for the Sikhs, presides over the congregation.

Services in a Gurdwara consist of meditation on the Divine Name (*simran*), singing hymns of praise (*kirtan*), recitation of liturgical texts (*paath*), expositions of the holy texts (*katha*), and prayerful supplication (*ardaas*) followed by reading a random message from the holy book which is taken by all present as the commandment (*hukamnama*) for the day. After conclusion of a service, the congregation shifts to the adjoining 'temple-of-bread' (*langar*) where everyone partakes of the complimentary holy food prepared and served by volunteers with great devotion. The Guru's langar ensures that no one goes without food and also provides devotees an outstanding opportunity for service, and where the essential equality of mankind is practiced.

Three hundred years since the Order of the Khalsa was promulgated, the tercentenary celebrations shall make the Sikhs everywhere re-pledge their dedication to the precepts of the Gurus, to uphold their lofty traditions, and to be worthy citizens of this world which, for them, should be the great arena of righteousness (*dharamsal*).

*This paper was presented by Dr Jaswant Singh Neki at the 2012 Annual Conference on Sri Guru Granth Sahib held at San Jose in California*



# ‘Pilgrimage to Hemkunt’

Dr Manmohan Singh, then President of the National Institute of Panjab Studies at New Delhi, handed over Presidentship to Dr Jaswant Singh Neki when he assumed the Prime Ministership of India. He had earlier written the Foreword for the book ‘Pilgrimage to Hemkunt’, extracts of which are reproduced along with some images.



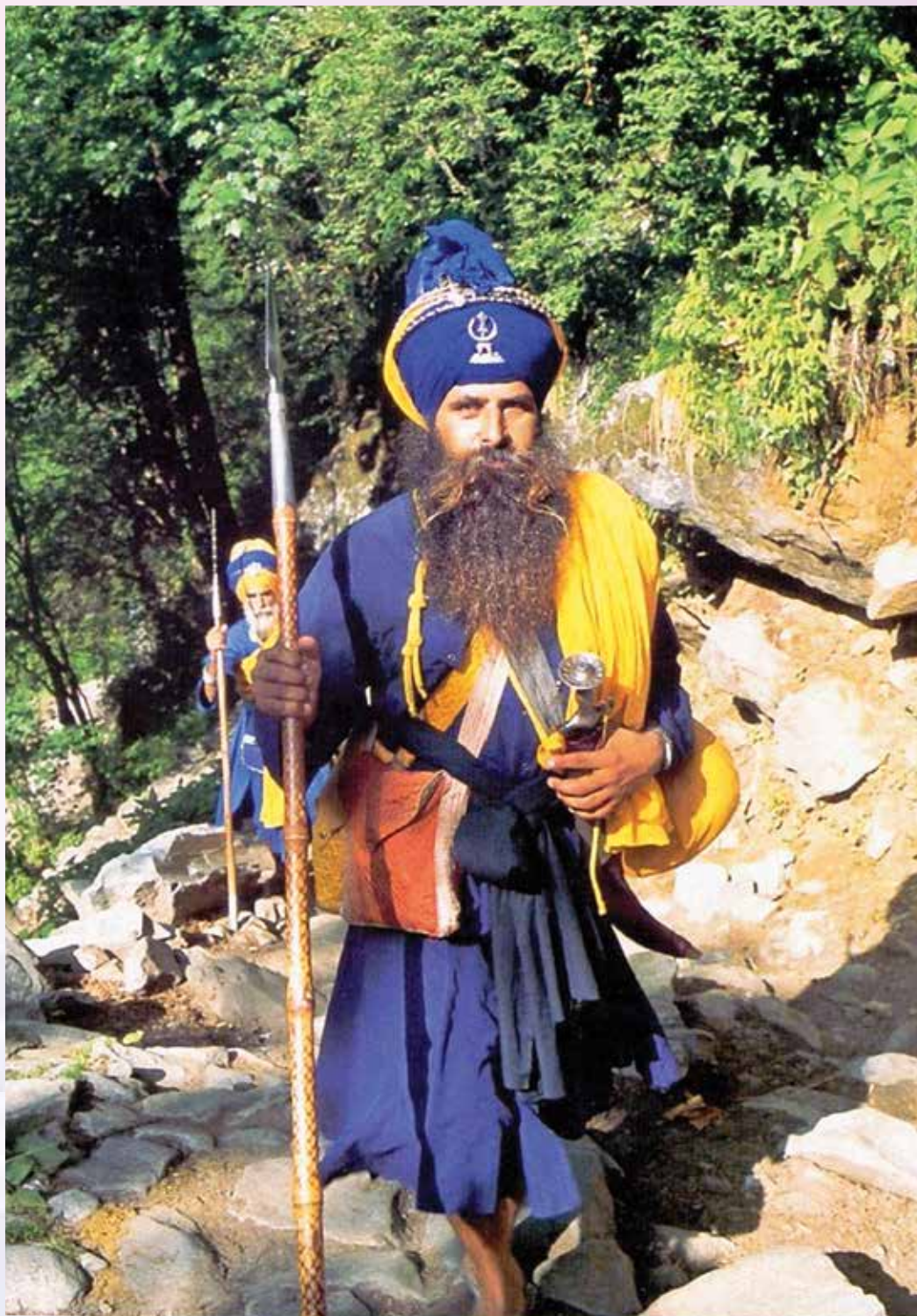
*A view of snow-clad peaks from Gobind Dham, looking towards Hemkunt Sahib*

In the book ‘Pilgrimage to Hemkunt’, Dr Jaswant Singh Neki recreates the entire journey of pilgrims embarking on a visit to Hemkunt Sahib nestled amidst glorious Himalayan peaks. Snow clad for most part of the year, the author has relived the arduous trek undertaken via the resplendent Valley of Flowers upto Gobind Dham and the final leg up to the gurdwara by the sarovar at over 15,000 feet.

In the lap of higher Himalayan ranges in Uttranchal is situated one of the highest Sikh shrines of the world, at the summit of *Devabhum* (abode of gods) where ancient sages

and seers are known to have meditated. This is Sri Hemkunt Sahib. *Sri* and *Sahib* are reverential appellations indicative of the deference with which the Sikhs hold this holy place.





***Nihang Sikhs on the climb to Sri Hemkunt Sahib***

This shrine is visited by multitudes of pilgrims every year. From a little over a hundred in the 1960s, the number of pilgrims who visit this holy place every year has gone up to over two lakhs. Devotees

from far and wide are attracted to the shrine. They come by any available mode of transport: buses, trucks, cars, scooters and bicycles, some even walking from far off places. It seems to be assuming ever-

increasing importance in minds of the devotees. Old men and women treading the arduous path, young men sporting colourful turbans, women with infants in their arms or astride their hips, young boys and girls bubbling with vigour and enthusiasm, all chanting the guru's word fervently, provide evidence of their faith and the devoted veneration they have in their hearts for this shrine.

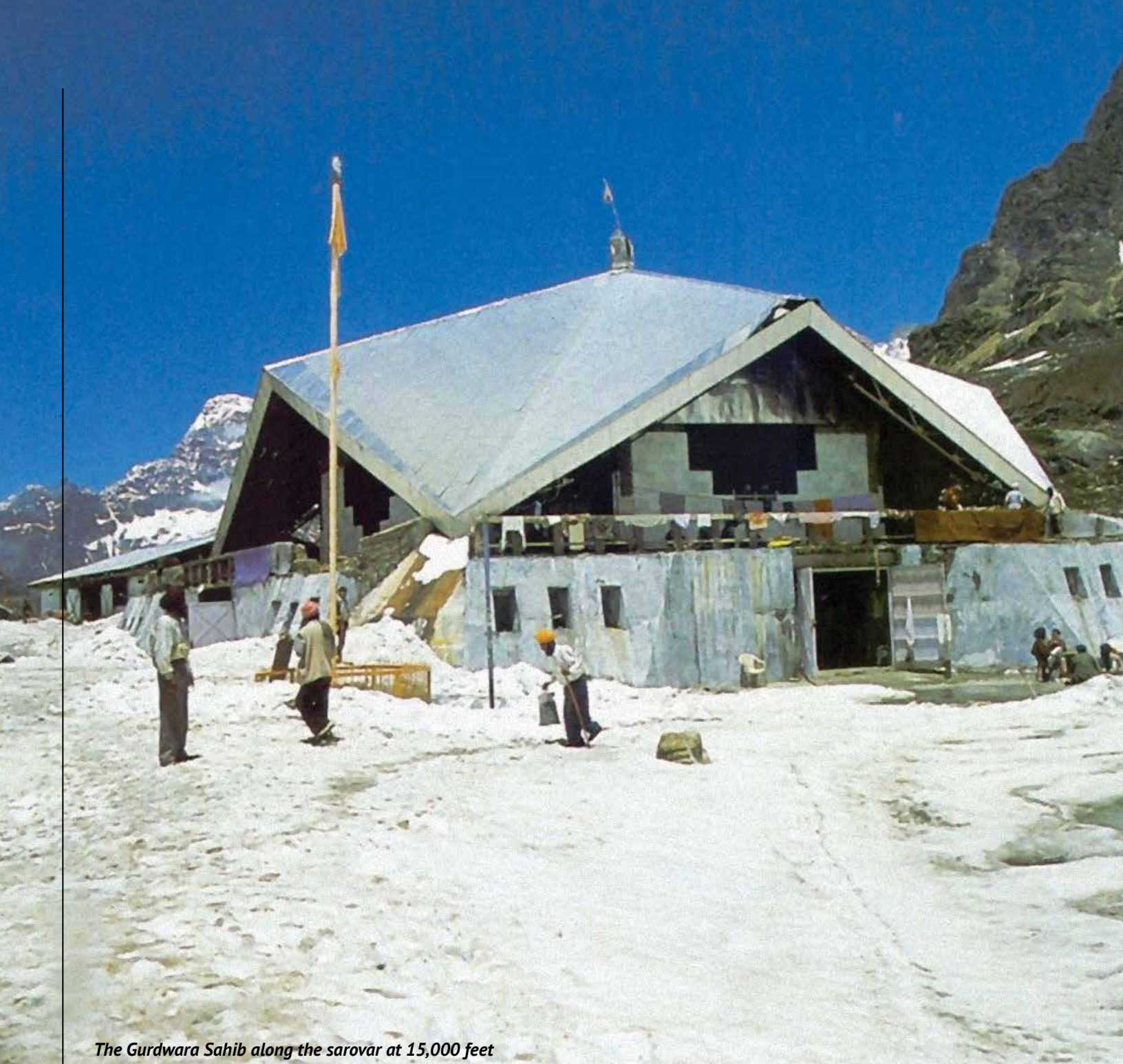
### **The 'Discovery' of Sri Hemkunt Sahib**

Long before Sikhs started frequenting Sri Hemkunt Sahib, local inhabitants of that area held the lake there with great awe and reverence and called the area around it Lokpal or sustainer of people.

In spite of the fact that Hemkunt was mentioned in the autobiography of Guru Gobind Singh, its site remained in mystery for well over two centuries in spite of its location having been provided in the Guru's own account. It was the Sikh historian-poet Bhai Santokh Singh (1787-1843), who used his imagination to describe and elaborate the story of the *Dusht Daman*, the name

he chose for the Guru (literally 'vanquisher of the evil'). He also provided the description of his tapasthan or the place where he meditated. In the late 19th century, a





***The Gurdwara Sahib along the sarovar at 15,000 feet***

Nirmala scholar, Pandit Tara Singh Narotam, prepared a compendium of various Sikh pilgrim places along with their description. That included Sri Hemkunt Sahib. On the basis of the indication provided in the Mahabharata (1:199) about the site where the Pandu king had meditated, Narotam trekked up to

the place and was able to verify the site of Sri Hemkunt Sahib.

More recently, the well-known poet-historian-theologian, Bhai Vir Singh (1872-1957), carefully examined Narotam's evidence relating to the discovery of Sri Hemkunt Sahib and accepted to be authentic. He provided an

elaborated description of the spot in his biography of the Tenth Guru, *Kalghidar Chamtkar*, employing more scientific information about the flora and fauna seen at such an altitude.

However, the first person to physically discover the actual location of the tapasthan was Sant





Sohan Singh (of Tehri, Garhwal) a retired granthi from the army. He had been inspired by the description of the spot in the work of Bhai Vir Singh. He trekked to the holy and a number of times. In 1934, he visited the spot in the company of Baba Kartar Singh Bedi, and came back determined to set up a gurdwara there. He met Bhai Vir Singh, who

*A specimen of the vast variety of flowers at the adjoining Valley of Flowers*

also sensed that the place that the saint had visited was the right one. He provided the sant with the necessary material support and furnished him with the wherewithal required for setting up a gurdwara. The sant, along with Havaladar Baba Modan Singh, engaged a contractor and had a ten-foot square room for the gurdwara constructed there. By installing the sacred volume of Sri Guru Granth Sahib in the room they had built, they established the gurdwara there. The Havaladar and one of his companions stayed on to perform services at the gurdwara.

In 1960, the Havaladar established a seven-member trust: *Gurdwara Hemkunt Sahib Management Trust*. The founder members of the trust were Havaladar Modan Singh,

Colonel Joginder Singh Mann, S Shamsheer Singh, S Raghubir Singh Kabaria, Baba Gurmukh Singh, S Gurbaksh Singh Bindra and Colonel Amar Singh. This Trust not only took over the management of Sri Hemkunt Sahib but also established gurdwaras all along the way to it: in Hardwar, Rishikesh, Shrinagar, Joshimath, Gobind Ghat and Gobind Dham. At all these places, the Trust steadily upgraded the facilities for the increasing number of pilgrims.

*Dr Jaswant Singh Neki authored the text for highly illustrated book 'Pilgrimage to Hemkunt' published by the National Institute of Panjab Studies in 2002.*

*All photographs by Sondeep Shankar*



## Trekking to Hemkunt Sahib



Located at an elevation of around 4633m above sea level, Hemkunt Sahib offers easy to moderate treks that can be explored by beginners as well. The trek ends at the consecrated Hemkunt Sahib situated beside a crystal clear lake. Seven lofty mountain peaks enclose this lake with their breathtaking snow coated beauty and mesmerises the first timers in Garhwal Himalaya.

The trek starts from Gobindghat which is around 22 km drive from Joshimath. From Gobindghat the tracks lead up to Ghangaria where the route gets bifurcated. While one of the two routes heads to Hemkunt, the other leads to the amazing Valley of Flowers. The trek leading from Ghangaria to Hemkunt is pebbly and mostly steep ascent and takes approximately 5-6 hours. In this part of Garhwal Himalaya a special variety of flower called Brahma Kamal is found at a height of 3500 meters.



After paying obeisance at Hemkunt the visitors come back to Ghangaria and head to the mesmerising meadows of Valley of Flowers. The trek is ideal for the beginners and adds to the repository of memorable experience. A gentle climb passes through a flourishing bed of nature perched with enormous medicinal plants and Himalayan trees behind which the lofty mountain

peaks peep with utmost grandeur. The Valley of Flowers hosts more than 5000 species of plants which include a rich variety of flowering plants along with medicinal as well as thousands of valuable trees. For nature lovers, the trek has rich varieties of avifauna and Himalayan animals that add to the experience of trekking in Hemkunt Sahib.



# Portrait of a Gurmukh Sardar Harchand Singh Jaijée

"Lives of great men all remind us  
That we can make our lives sublime  
And departing, leave behind us  
Footprints on the sands of time."

*Henry Long Fellow*



*Sardar Harchand Singh Jaijée*

A man of multiple geniuses is born once in an aeon. S Harchand Singh was the voice of Sikh Panth's conscience, the court of last appeal at time of danger to the Panth. Those who knew him well believe his motive power came from a blend of matchless energy combining staunch faith in Sikhi and a deep devotion to Gurbani. A few people appear destined to envelop themselves in trouble they are destroyers of ignorance and builders of the new world. Sardar Harchand Singh was one of them.

He inherited his strong will and deep spiritual sense from his forefathers, had good looks, good manners and good health, virtually all his worldly goods. He literally carved living space out of wild region called Bangar which was the last outpost of 'civilisation' in those days. His glittering personal magnetism roused the downtrodden tribes of Bangar to having fresh loyalty to Sikhi.

His ideas seemed to many Sardars then as visionary and unworldly. In the luxurious life style of the court of Maharaja of Patiala Bhupinder Singh, he kept a level head, walked with both kings and crowds, his genuine modesty remained untouched. He had an instinct for translating nascent thoughts into action. In the years that followed, he was to know happiness and tragedy, to be right and to be wrong. But nothing ever marred the perfection of his greatest hour, when he stood forward with an integrity and dignity that merited the unstinted gratitude of the Panth. The years gone have only added to his glory as one of the Panths' outstanding leaders.

S Harchand Singh Jaijée was born in 1892. His ancestors had come to Bangar from Majitha (District Amritsar). They were very brave





***Sardar Harchand Singh Jaijee and three generations of his family***

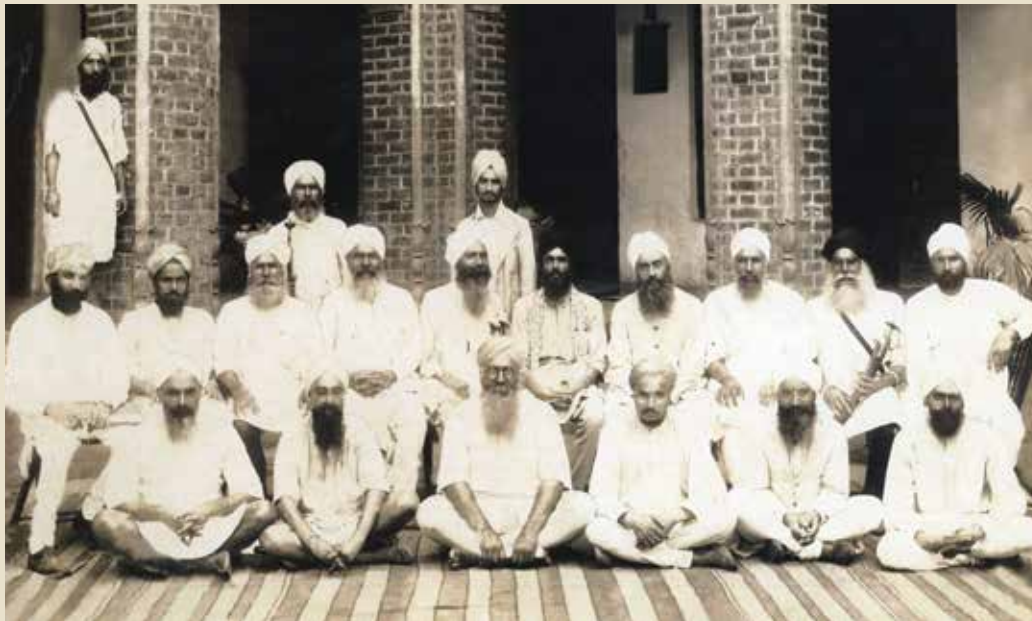
people and of independent nature refusing to pay *Jazia* to the Muslim government of the day, which is why the erstwhile Shergills have since been known as Jaijees. Maharaja Ala Singh had founded Patiala State and had spread Sikh culture and religion. Later, Bakshi Beer Singh, C-in-C Patiala State forces, gave a crushing defeat to the marauding Gorkhas and large territory (hilly area of present Himachal) were incorporated in the erstwhile Patiala State.

S Harchand Singh had lost his parents at childhood. His step-mother and his father's elder brother, S Gian Singh, brought him up with great love and affection. At his childhood the teaching of Sikhi practiced by his forefathers were instilled in him and Sikh tenets became the touchstone of his life. While observing the tenets of Sikhi he staked his worldly possessions and social status. His differences with the Maharaja of Patiala started after the Nankana Sahib episode. The British Government of India wanted to suppress agitations erupting after the massacre of Sikhs at Nankana Sahib. In sheer spite, Maharaja Bhupinder Singh confiscated all his property. He was arrested and the family was forced to go into exile. He suffered all this patiently because he was an upright man and did not get his family honour

tarnished. The Jaijee family was mercilessly persecuted and had to run from pillar to post. But all had happened according to a providential plan. The great Guru had blessed the Patiala family. "Your house is my house." S Harchand Singh was to become a medium of the Guru at a later stage in order to save the eclipsing flame of Sikhi in the House of Patiala.

Jaijee made great sacrifices and renunciation in life so as to follow the path of Sikhi. He demonstrated to the Sikh leaders of the day that a true Sikh is always ready to sacrifice himself, setting personal example because of his firm faith in benediction of the Guru. He was an admirer of Maharaja Ripudaman Singh of Nabha and Bhai Kahn Singh. When the Maharaja of Nabha was dethroned and sent into exile, the Sikhs resorted to agitation which was called the *Jaito-da-Morcha*. S Harchand Singh Jaijee organised Jathans to take part in the agitation, many of them shot and wounded. Political activities were not permitted in the princely States. With the help of Baba Kharak Singh and Master Tara Singh, S Harchand Singh Jaijee set up *Riasti Parj Mandal* while in exile. He appointed S Seva Singh as a leader who died in the prison while on hunger strike.





**Sardar Harchand Singh Jaijee and his contemporaries**

Sardar Sardol Singh Caweeshar was related to Bhai Sahib of Bagrian, who was president of the All India Congress and used to go to S Harchand Singh Jaijee so as to evade arrest. His friend Sardar Sewa Singh Thikriwala (then imprisoned) was made President of the *Praja Mandal* in his uncle's place and Bhagvan Singh Laungowalia became General Secretary. Sardar Harchand Singh was arrested and jailed many times, exiled from the state and went to live in Amritsar. His property was confiscated and his house at Patiala demolished. He was a staunch advocate of the Singh Sabha Movement, mobilised people to wear black turbans as a mark of protest during the Nankana Sahib episode.

Sardar Jaiji built three Gurdwaras at historic places and handed these over to the SGPC authorities.

- Gurdwara Makrod Sahib at Village Makrod, Sub Division Moonak, District Sangrur associated with the Ninth Guru.
- Gurdwara Moonak Sahib at Moonak, District Sangrur, associated with the Ninth Guru.
- Gurdwara Bhora Sahib at Village Khudaal, Budaladha, District Mansa associated with the Tenth Guru.

He espoused equal property rights for sons and daughters. In his own joint family, the daughter-in-law was very much part of the family even after one of his son's divorced his wife, however the family refused to break relations with her or her family. She remained at the family home in Chural, and then was educated and after some years got a job in her parental city of Kanpur. Ancestral land was also put in her name.

It is said that Sikhs must suffer for their righteousness, must know anguish and despair but their devotion to Sikhi gives them depth, strength, universal appeal and their character has an effect on others. S Harchand Singh had to undergo through ordeals of fire, but became the 'Revolution'. His towering will and awesome patience kept it going. He was realistic about some of the Panth's weakness, but in effect never lost the intuitive understanding of its strengths. His understanding sustained

the iron nerve which could risk everything. His practical sense, bold vision and conservatism characterised his lifestyle. He imparted to it the dignity of his own character, a man who could mould the mind and manners of the Panth. He taught his people that Sikhs, if they followed the path laid down by the Gurus, were a race apart, superior to others. "But the truth is that many Sardars and others hardly cared for people's liberties but only for the privileges of their own."

During the Partition, when severe riots took place in both the Punjabs, he was at Simla. When he heard that Muslims were being killed, he rushed back to Chural and converted his farm into a refugee camp for all Muslims. Out of fear, many Muslims wanted to convert to Sikhs. But S Harchand Singh told them "No conversion under duress: if you wish to become a Sikh later on then you are welcome." Chural Kothi became a refuge during those savage times. Langar was run by Mazhabi Sikhs to emphasise rejection of Casteism. Seven thousand Muslims took shelter under the benevolent guardianship of Sardar Sahib, all looked after in this well-organised camp at Chural. Those who opted to go to Pakistan, were safely escorted up to the Border and those who wanted to stay on in India were helped in settling in their native villages. Many were given land by Sardar Sahib from his personal holding : a great benevolent and humanitarian act of S Harchand Singh Ji.

Jaijee Sahib was the living history of Sikhism from 1915 to 1984, in fact a living testimony of the achievements - and failures - of the Panth. He contributed very magnanimously to the Praja Mandal and Akali Dal but



never asked for any recognition and refused to occupy any office in the party. His own life is an epitome of the Sikh Panth, which is why the great Guru had ordained him to accomplish His Hukam. Guru ji had proclaimed the House of Patiala as His own but after 1920, the Sikh way of life was eclipsed in the House Patiala. The late Maharaja Bhupinder Singh indulged in naked power unchecked by moral values. Jaijee Sahib was destined to revive Sikhi in the House once more, and this happened when the marriage of his daughter Biba Mehtab Kaur (Mohinder Kaur) was solemnised with the then Yuvraj Yadavindra Singh in the year 1938. As ordained by the Guru, Sikhi blossomed once more in the House of Patiala.

Jaijee Sahib conceived and achieved citizens of one great community through the *Praja Mandal*, the main objectives of which were protection of human rights and civil liberties of people, setting up of the representative institutions in the princely States and amelioration of conditions of peasants. Some rulers of the states were intolerant of any criticism or opposition to their administration. Moreover, they enjoyed the full protection and support of the British authorities. *Praja Mandal* spearheaded the agitation against Maharaja Bhupinder Singh of Patiala. Jaijee Sahib had strengthened the movement by giving generous help of every sort. He conceived in Chural Kothi or blueprint of the new Khalsa Panth, upon whose foundation have since grown the Baba Nanak Educational Society. Chural Kothi evolved to become centre of the civilised world in Bangar.

1984 was the year of great holocaust. Operation *Blue Star* left an indelible shock on the sensitive mind of S Harchand Singh. This was followed by another great shock, the massacre of Sikhs after the assassination of Indira Gandhi on 31 October. It sapped the remaining vitality of this great and glorious Gursikh and he bade farewell to the world in 1984 at the age of 92. Although his mortal frame is no more but his legacy-spreading awareness of the Sikh way of life and the humanitarian works-have been carried on by his illustrious sons and daughters.

## The Legacy

S Harchand Singh Jaijee was blessed with five sons and three daughters. The eldest son, S Wazir Singh, was married to the daughter of that great martyr S Swa Singh Thikriwala. His second son, S Jasmer Singh, was a great social activist: Gurney College is being run by the Jaijee family in his memory. The third son, S. Gursharan Singh, retired DIG, and President of The Sikh Academy of Religion and Culture, Patiala has been helping in the rehabilitation of riots and terrorism effected families.

The fourth son, Lt Col Balbir Singh, “a hero of the Naga people”, won the eternal goodwill of the Naga people” and ultimate peace with the Government of India. The fifth son, S Indarjit Singh, was a great social reformer having started the Movement Against State Repression (MASR) after *Blue Star* and the holocaust of 1984. He has also founded the Baba Nanak Educational Society dedicated to education and rehabilitation of victims of farmer suicides in particular. Amongst its various activities are a Degree College providing vocational training to girls in various Gurdwaras and financial support to those wanting to complete their studies. At present there are more than 450 beneficiaries under its auspices.

The eldest daughter of Jaijee Sahib, the Raj Mata of Patiala, was married to Maharaja Adhiraj Yadavindra Singh of Patiala. Their son, Capt Amarinder Singh had earlier resigned from the Congress Party after *Blue Star*. As Chief Minister of the Punjab he kept the vital river waters of the Punjab from being diverted to neighbouring states by moving a writ petition in the Supreme Court.

The second daughter Biba Kanwaljit Kaur was married to Raja Rattan Amol Singh of Burian State. She has been helping pilgrims from the vicinity of Chural to visit Hazoor Sahib by providing them free passage and langar along their way.

The youngest daughter, Bibi Baljeet Kaur, is a famous social reformer, a great human rights activist and responsible for setting up a memorial to that greatest Sikh General, Baba Banda Singh Bahadur at Chhappar Chiri. She is one of the founder members of the *Institute of Sikh Studies* and was its Vice-President for many years.

## This was a Man

The life that is well spent is a long life. A legend of glory had already begun to form about him. Jaijee was a man of the people. They believed he was one of them and that he was for them. But in retirement he was far from forgotten. For the Panth continued to hail the man of heroic size, the last of the great Sikh statesmen, a giant among pygmies. In the words of Shakespeare “Whence comes such another?”

S Harchand Singh was one of the best, and most just of men. He acted as ultimate court of appeal on large Panthic questions and as an unquestioned adviser to Praja Manda and Akali leaders. The lines of Shakespeare very aptly apply to Sardar Harchand Singh Jaijee:

“His life was gentle, and the elements  
So mixed in him, that Nature might stand up  
And say to all the world, “This was a man!”

Sadhu Singh Deol





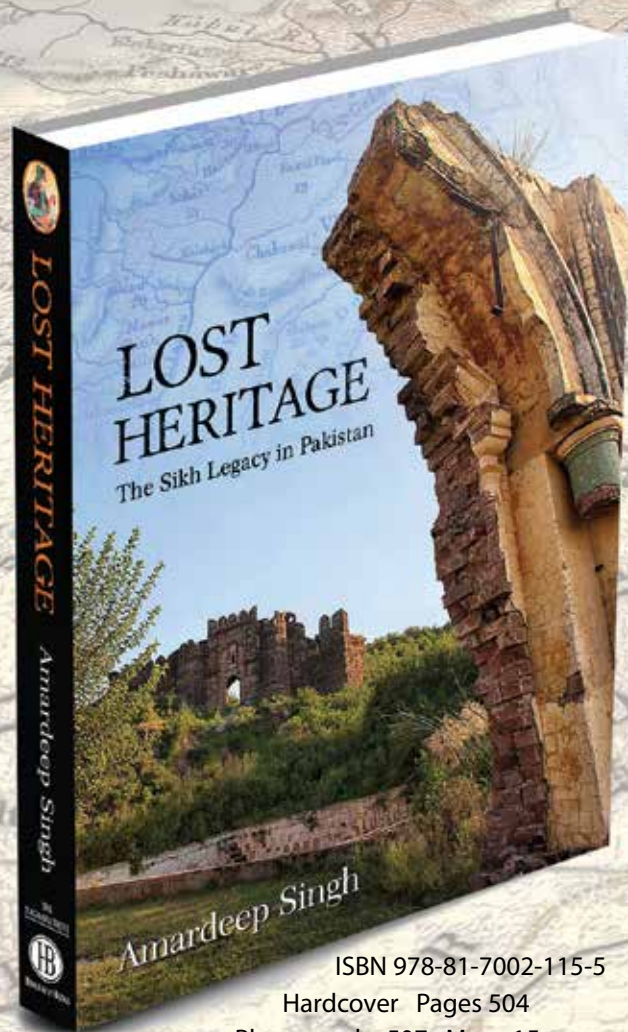
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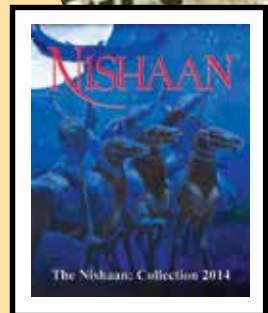
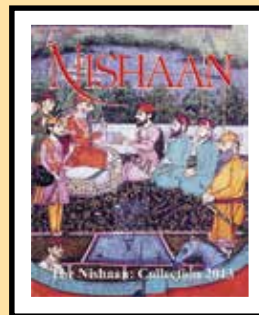
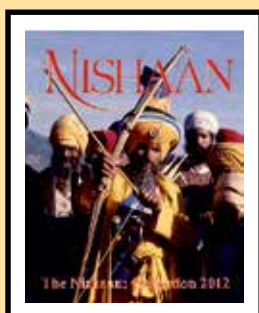
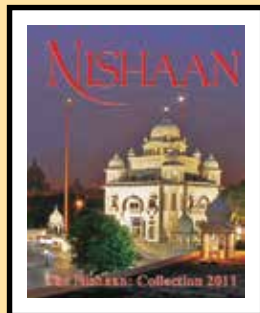
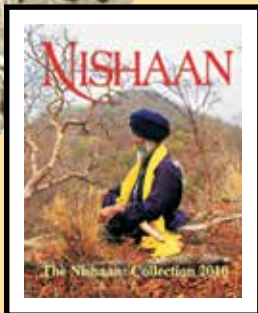
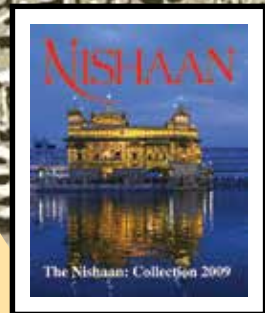
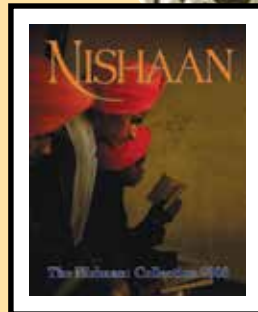
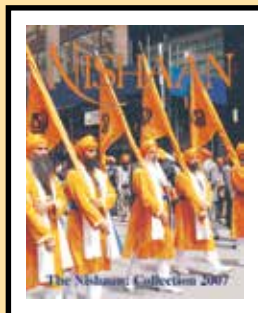
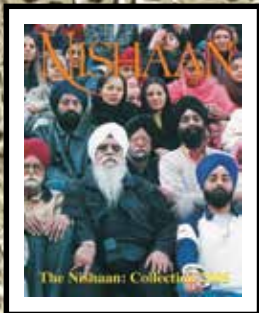
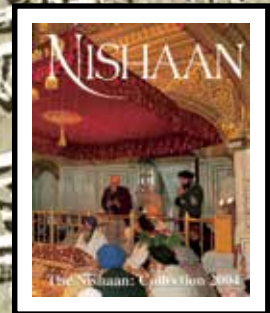
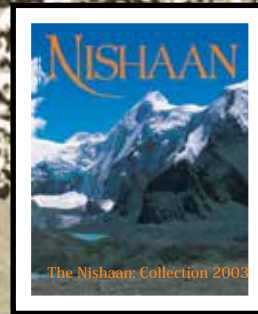
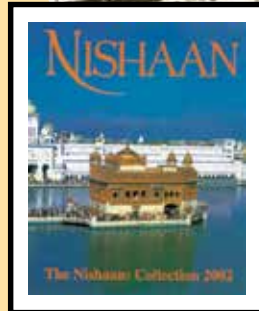
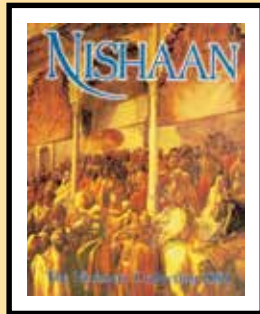
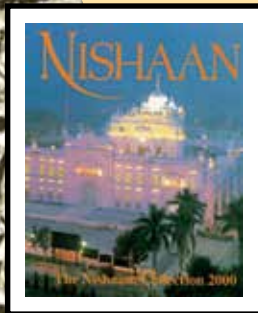
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