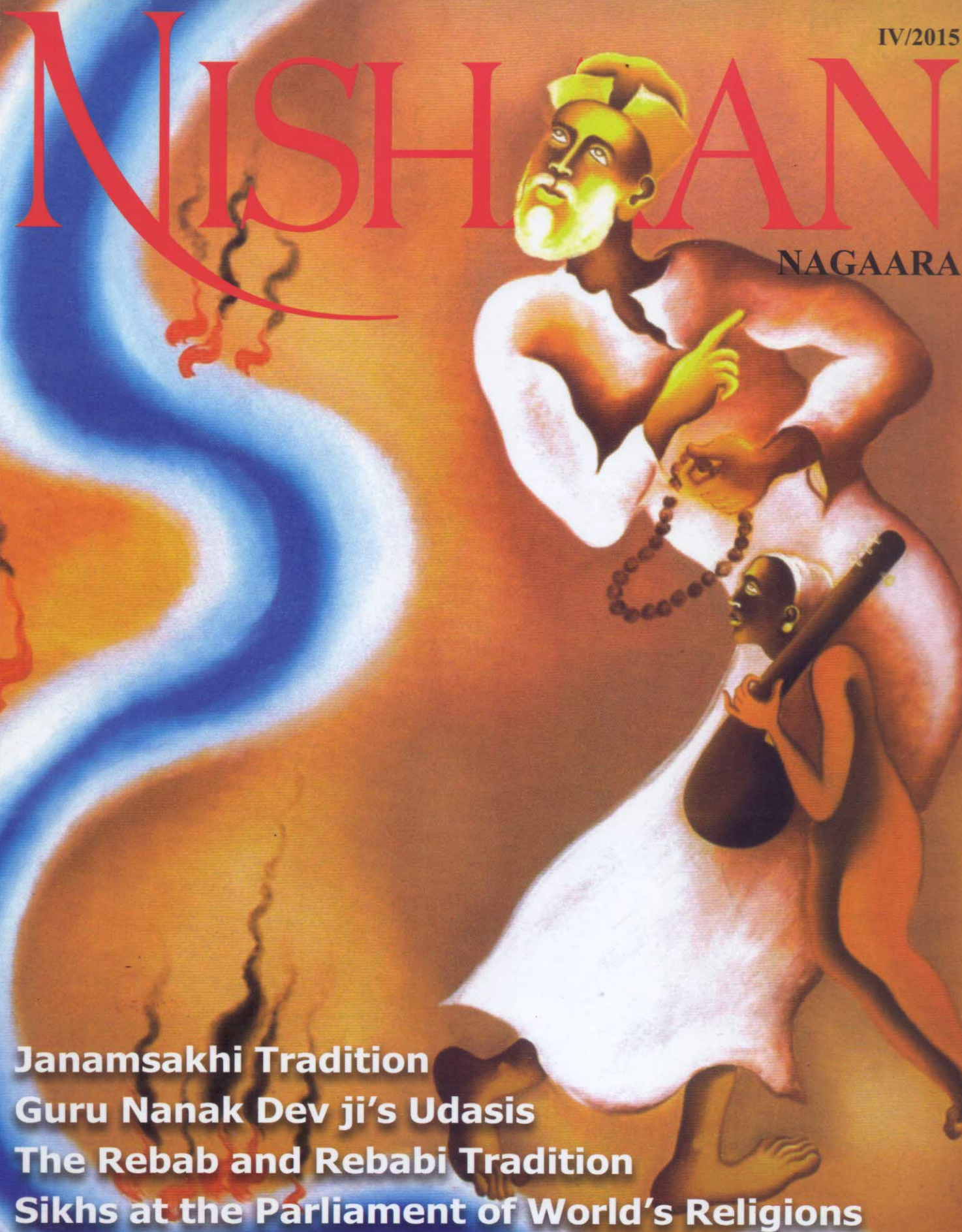


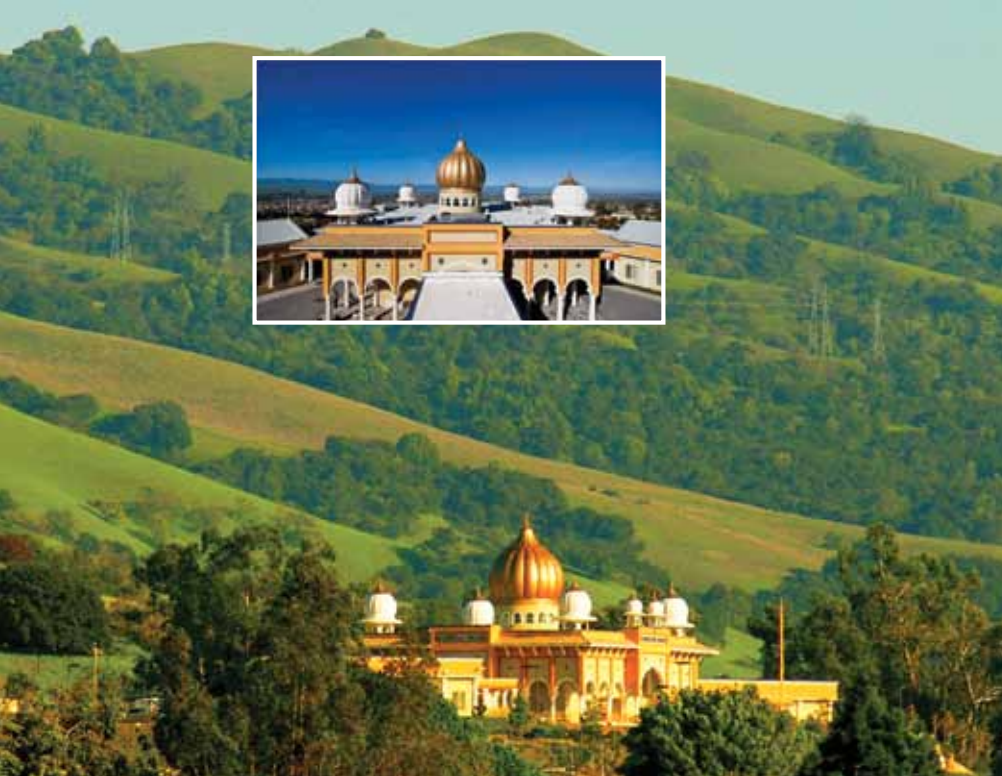
IV/2015

NISHAN

NAGAARA



**Janamsakhi Tradition
Guru Nanak Dev ji's Udasis
The Rebab and Rebabi Tradition
Sikhs at the Parliament of World's Religions**



The Third Annual Conference on the Sikh scripture, Guru Granth Sahib, jointly hosted by the Chardi Kalaa Foundation and the San Jose Gurdwara, took place on 13 September 2014 at San Jose in California, USA. One of the largest and arguably most beautiful gurdwaras in North America, the Gurdwara Sahib at San Jose was founded in San Jose, California, USA in 1985 by members of the then-rapidly growing Sikh community in the Santa Clara Valley

Contents

SPECIAL ISSUE

SIKH WARRIORS IN THE GREAT WAR

2 Editorial Sikh Warriors in the Great War



4 Neuve Chapelle : 100 years after



21 XIV Sikhs at Gallipoli



38 The Sikh Regiment



12 Gallantry of the 47th Sikhs



30 The Sharing of Faith



17 Preserving the Legacy

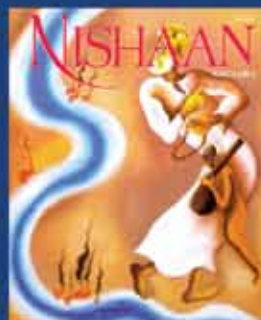


34 Deg Teg Fateh at Hampton Estate



53 Sikhs in World Armies

Also: 'Hurnam Singh'; 'The XLVII (DCO) Sikhs'; 'A Subaltern of the Sikhs'; 'Sikhs of the Frontier Force'; 'Sikhs' of the Pakistan Army'; Canadian Sikh in Army Command'; 'Of Berets and Turbans'; 'Sikhs also bleed red, white and blue'; 'Super Sikh'.



Cover: Oil on Canvas 2001;
Collection Navjeet and Rinku
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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

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JANAM SAKHI TRADITION: Fact, Fiction & Myth

What should one make of the Janam Sakhis in Sikh history, belief and practice?

For readers who are new to the term, these are some of the earliest accounts of Guru Nanak, the founder of the faith. They weave history, mythology and imaginative fiction so skillfully and intricately that any child would be totally fascinated, and a thinking adult perhaps equally mystified and baffled.

Literally meaning "life story", a Janam Sakhi originally reflected only the traditional narrative and anecdotal account in prose or verse of the life of Guru Nanak. The term now equally applies to accounts of subsequent Gurus as well.

None of these texts appear to be contemporaneous accounts written during the Guru's lifetime. Mostly, they were probably written and collated during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, or even later.

Janam Sakhis are in the genre of Sikh hagiographic literature. They comprise parables on the Guru's life, at times supplemented by interpretative comments. Their immediate purpose was to provide inspiring and readable accounts of the Guru written in the *norma loquendi* for the larger population. Ergo, their language is mostly Punjabi, the script almost always Gurmukhi which had been in vogue at least since Guru Angad, the Second Nanak, who systemised the language and its script.

These Janam Sakhis thus are the corpus of early Sikh narrative and exegesis meant for the lay Sikh. That remains their primary purpose; this is clear from the word "Sakhi," from its Sanskrit derivation it means "evidence or testimony," but in Punjabi points to a story or anecdote.

Consistent with this meaning and purpose, Janam Sakhis provide biographical details, not just of birth; this is one meaning of the word Janam, but also of its wider application - a biography.

Necessarily then, these accounts largely comprise anecdotes that provide testimonial evidence of the divine mission of the Guru. Some entries in Janam Sakhis present informative content in the form of meaningful discourse that the Guru might have held at a certain time with a noted scholar or opponent. And that becomes extremely significant.

For further exploration, I refer readers to the noted historian Kirpal Singh's 1969 seminal work on Janam Sakhis, and also to the entry by Hew McLeod in the The Encyclopaedia of Sikhism (1996), published by Punjabi University. Additional sources include Bhair Singh (1982 reprint) and Surinder Singh Kohli (1975).

There are some fantastical stories in the Janam Sakhis that defy all logic and commonsense. Yet they are a critical window to a certain time in history - the people and their culture. Given

that context, they remain a vitally important, though not always reliable, resource of Sikh history.

Current historians accept four such hagiographic accounts, written between 15th and 17th centuries. The most widely cited Janam Sakhi on the life and travels of Guru Nanak was presumably penned by Bala; parts of it unfailingly find a place in popular history books. The historian Karam Singh dismissed this work, and two U.S. based Sikh scholars, Gurdit Singh and Harpreet Singh forcefully argue that this Janamsakhi has little in common with Sikh doctrine but many more heterodox ideas expressed by the Handalis.

Tradition and folklore suggest that Bala, a Hindu, was one of the first few followers of Guru Nanak and, along with Mardana, accompanied the Guru on his extensive travels. However, historians now argue that Bala may not have existed. We have unimpeachable scriptural evidence that Guru Nanak held a series of scholarly exchanges and discussions with the Yogic scholars of the day (Guru Granth p. 938, Siddh Gosht). It seems that in that dialogue Bala may have been the name used by the Yogis for the young Nanak instead.

History is also clear that Mardana, a Muslim, certainly existed; a few of his writings are incorporated in the Guru Granth. However, credible interpreters of Gurbani disagree on whether these are composed by Mardana or these are words in which Guru Nanak addressed Mardana. Nevertheless, they are clear evidence of the close relationship between Guru Nanak and his companion Mardana.

Who, then, wrote what is popularly 'attributed to' Bala remains an open question. The widely cited 'Bala Janam Sakhi' exists but its author and the date of authorship remain a mystery.

Janam Sakhis are best seen as popular literature of that time, and sometimes these accounts may not hew to the truth that is derived from unimpeachable evidence. Nevertheless, these quasi-historical accounts, often richly laced with mythological and fictional references that sometimes run contrary to Sikh teachings have played a central role - and still do - in the daily lives of many Sikhs and in how Sikhism has been propagated for generations. Janam Sakhis played a critically cohesive role in the developing Sikh community. There is undeniable magic and mystery to them and the tussle with logic and reason continues unabated.

Let's take a little detour to explore corroborating ideas from a different tradition - Christianity. My thoughts went to the impact of Janam Sakhis while traipsing through Spain.

In Barcelona, I was caught up in the majesty of a Roman Catholic Church that has been a hundred years in the making and is still incomplete. This, the Sagrada Familia (Sacred Family) church, was commissioned in 1883. A religious mystic, the architect Gaudi

worked on it for 43 years, considered it his supreme achievement and, at times, stood at street corners, begging bowl in hand, to raise funds for it.

About seven years ago, the builders had raised about 24 million dollars; a paltry two million from donors, but 22 million from tourists. The building still remains a work in progress but I heard that if this level of funding continues, the structures should be completed by 2020. Many such deadlines have come and gone in the past.

This monumental cathedral presents tons of stonework and massive, larger than life sculptures. One façade, for instance, presents vignettes from the early life of Jesus - events surrounding his birth, gifts of the Magi, and so on.

The opposing face of the building, comprising 100 sculptures, depicts the last two days of Jesus, including crucifixion and rising from the dead. The saga concludes with a golden figure of Jesus, almost atop the church, on his way to heaven.

Clearly some events, such as the trial and crucifixion, are history. Other matters, like rising from the dead or the assumption, never historically verifiable, nevertheless continue to shape the Christian message even today.

To me, this powerful iconography and iconolatriy are the illustrative versions of these Janam Sakhis of Christianity.

All one has to do is to walk around the church to imbibe the basic story that has been fundamental to Christian belief for centuries.

Some matters are true beyond doubt; others are a tribute to human imagination and a longing of the heart. They remind me of T.S. Eliot who said:

*Think now
History has many cunning passages, contrived corridors
And issues, deceives with
Whispering ambitions,
Guides us with vanities. Think now*

Of course, similar hagiographic structures shaped or carved in metal, wood or stone, even if not so awesome in size, structure and complexity, exist in most, if not all, major faiths of mankind; I include Sikhi in this list. In mankind's epochal journey no religious tradition appears free of such depictions. These emerge from faith but many instances that comprise such rich religious lore also attract controversy.

For example at the church in Barcelona a handful of devout Roman Catholics, including some monks, stage monthly vigils to protest the visibility of genitalia in the sculptures of Jesus.

All hagiography is not history, but all history is narrative. History and hagiography are inseparably intertwined; they can be parsed and pulled apart, but not always and only with delicacy, sensitivity and a gentle touch. They may not be abruptly ripped apart without doing substantial damage to the tradition.

But I ask: Are we not all products of our own stories? Isn't all life engaged with inventing and telling stories? Not all stories are evidence-based, nor do they need to be. Many emerge from our dreams, hopes and despair.

Cultures tell stories through myth, through history, and through art, as much as they do through science and sometimes through neglect and silence.

These stories construct culture, art and history; they become

the glue that unites a people, holds us together and gives us a sense of self. They are the essential underpinnings of a society and a community. These stories inform, entertain and in many cases, continue to enlighten us. These stories of people and their lives become our collective heritage.

I ask you: Would we not be impoverished if our daily lives are sealed from our existential reality because the narratives do not always meet the intellectual rigour of our expectations? Won't we then diminish our connection with the past?

Many parables and myths of the past impact our lives every day at some level of awareness.

What culture and myth tell me is that religious reality needs to be accosted by the dual lenses of faith and reason; the joy of Sikhi demands both in our existence. Either lens alone is insufficient.

Scholars can dismiss the complex mixture of fact and fiction and often do, but this mixture has an impact more vibrant and longer lasting than either fact or fiction alone. Our sense of self (individual and collective) comes largely from an amalgamation of fact, fiction and myth. Myth plays a larger and more foundational role in shaping us than we like to admit. As Joseph Campbell said, "We need myth like we need oxygen to exist."

Pierre, a reader commenting on an earlier draft of this essay suggested that a counterpart for Sikh Janam Sakhis would be the "Christian myths" authored by C.S. Lewis or J.R.R. Tolkien. Their works are "mythopoeic" - a genre that creates fictional mythology in literature and film. Tolkien noted that he felt less like an author and more as a "channel." Today their work is celebrated as excellent literature, even when it seems fantastical.

Similar mythic literature is found in Sikhi. And, I need not catalogue the stupendously rich Indian Hindu mythology. Clearly, I doubt any religion is totally devoid of such literature and its creative leaps.

I have the greatest respect for Jesus Christ and Christianity, the movement that he spawned, but if I were a historian of Christianity, I would likely not include "virgin birth" and the matter of "bodily and spiritual ascension to heaven, by both Jesus and his mother Mary" as primary evidentiary material. Yet, they will remain matters of dogma and faith.

Furthermore, in the Indian tradition, linear history has never been much valued. In the accounting of a saintly life, it is almost a requirement that the facts of his or her life be inseparably leavened, intertwined and mixed with mythology and magical markers. It then becomes well nigh impossible to separate the wheat from the chaff, even in the history of two-bit kings and satraps. These are cultural traps in studying India that are the nightmares of historians.

Sikh Janam Sakhis, too, contain material that clearly falls into such a questionable category. Such imaginative literature is an obviously human need and activity. But Janam Sakhis absolutely do not have a canonical status in Sikhism; ergo they should not create any theological issues in Sikh belief or practice.

In this issue of *Nishaan* many scholars will skate over the thin ice of history and faith. Enjoy the excitement of the trek.

Says the Guru Granth: *Baabania(n) kahaania(n) put(h) sapout(h) karainn* - it tells us that, through reflection on and the collective wisdom of our tradition, we transform and ennoble ourselves [p 951].

Kartarpur :

The corridor to peace in South Asia



One can divide a piece of land but cannot divide a belief. This was my first impression when I reached Kartarpur, that historic and sacred place, located just three kilometres away from the India-Pakistan border near the city of Narowal, in Pakistan's side of the Punjab.

Kartarpur is the city of Baba Guru Nanak ji, founder of the Sikh faith, equally respected by Muslims and Hindus. But why did I decide to visit Kartarpur? This was what I asked myself many times even during the journey. But when I reached Kartarpur, I had the answer!

My journey had started from Lahore and it was one of the most wonderful journeys of my life. It offered some beautiful natural views, both sides of the road adorned with lush green fields. It was a single lane road and there wasn't much traffic during early morning hours, so the journey was quite relaxing. Finally, I reached Narowal in some two and half hours. The road from Narowal to Shakargarh sub-district, where Darbar Kartarpur Sahib is located, is a newly-built double-laned road so I reached there in half an hour.

Gurdwara Darbar Sahib Kartapur is about 100 km

from Lahore and 180 km, from Nankana Sahib, going via Lahore. Before the Partition of 1947, this was part of district Gurdaspur but later became part of District Sialkot. But then Sialkot itself was bifurcated and Narowal carved out as a district, also called Dera Baba Nanak. There is a nearby railway connection which is named 'Darbar Sahib Kartarpur' on the Lahore-Chak Amru line. On the Indian side, it is opposite Village & Post Office, Police Station Dera Baba Nanak, Tehsil Batala, Distt. Gurdaspur. Dera Baba Nanak is 54 kilometres from Amritsar, 35 km from Batala and 39 km from Gurdaspur in India.

The Gurdwara Sahib is situated close to a small village called Kothay Pind on western bank of the River Ravi. The original abode established by Guru Nanak was washed in floods and the present gurdwara was originally built at a cost of Rs.1,35,600, from funds donated by Bhupindar Singh, the Maharaja of Patiala and repaired by the government of Pakistan in 1995 at an expenditure of millions of rupees. It is a spacious and beautiful building.

From this gurdwara at Kartarpur can be seen another gurdwara, located across the border in the historical town of Dera Baba Nanak in India's Punjab.

From the main road to the village where this gurdwara is located, upon turning towards Gurdwara Kartarpur Sahib, one has ethereal experiences. The beautiful sight of green fields welcomes one, with village kids running around, the bullock-carts moving slowly along the road. Mud houses, tube-wells drawing water to irrigate fields and then the awesome white structure of the gurdwara itself amidst green fields and under a blue sky. This was the sight I shall never forget. I felt like a dove is sitting among the fields or a 'father' is standing tall in the middle looking for his lost and estranged sons.

Unlike other Sikh holy places in Pakistan, this gurdwara is unique, perhaps because of its scenic location. Kartarpur is the historical place where Baba Guru Nanak Ji departed from this world on 23rd Assu, Samvat 1596 (22 September 1529 AD).





The history of Kartarpur is very fascinating. According to Sikh historians, in the year 1520, the Mughal emperor Babar invaded India. His troops slaughtered thousands of innocent civilians. Women and children were made captives and all their property looted at Amiabad. Guru Nanak Sahib strongly challenged this act of barbarity and was arrested but released shortly after Babar realised his highhandedness. All the prisoners were also released.

Guru Nanak Sahib settled down at the place which is now Kartarpur, founded by him in 1522 and spent

the rest of his life there (1522-1539). There was daily kirtan and langar (free food for the poor). Knowing that the end was drawing near, Guru Nanak Sahib, after testing his two sons and some followers, installed Bhai Lehna Ji (Guru Angad Dev ji) as the Second Nanak in 1539, and after a few days passed onto Sachkhand on 22 September 1539.

When Guru Nanak passed away, both Hindus and Muslims claimed him and disagreed on how to perform the last rites. A samadh (Hindu tradition) lies in the gurdwara and a grave (according to Muslim tradition) is on the premises, reflecting his truly secular entity.

When the passing of Guru Nanak Dev was imminent, in life as in death, a dispute is said to have arisen, but Nanak brokered a compromise by suggesting that each group place a garland of flowers beside his body, and those whose garland remained fresh after three days could dispose of his body according to their tradition. It is said that the next morning, upon raising the cloth under which the Guru's body lay, only the flowers were found. The Hindus cremated their flowers whereas the Muslims buried theirs.

Guru Nanak rejected division of society on the lines of religion and insisted that both Muslims and Hindus observe true values of their respective faiths and that leading truthful life was the true religion. Muslims treated him like a 'murshad' and the Hindus referred him as the Guru.

Sikhs believe that since Guru Nanak rejected all divisions on the lines of religions, Kartarpur cannot be divided. One cannot keep it in a sectarian way. This aspect was demonstrated in 1947 when Sir Cecil Radcliffe drew the boundary-line between India and Pakistan. On 3 June 1947, the entire district of Gurdaspur was given to Pakistan, but this had to be amended. The District of Gurdaspur was bifurcated and a line bisected Kartarpur. Hence two of the gurdwaras are on Pakistan's side with one remaining in India.

That plan may have been a compromise but Kartarpur thereafter remained abandoned for 56 years with plants and wild shrubs growing all around the Gurdwara building, symbolic of the sad political animosity between the two countries.





Sometime during 1998, both the Indian and Pakistani governments reached an agreement to build a corridor from Dera Baba Nanak to Kartarpur Sahib, some 4 kilometres away, so as to enable Sikh pilgrims to visit Gurdwara Kartarpur Sahib in Pakistan without visa or passport. Sadly, there has been no progress in that regard and both officialdoms are to be blamed for this. Various organisations have taken up the issue for construction of the corridor to peace in South Asia.

Sikh devotees regularly gather on the Indian side of the border fence and recite prayers while looking towards Gurdwara Kartarpur Sahib in Pakistan. India's Border Security Force has specially constructed 'Darshan Sthal' providing binoculars to visiting devotees for a clear view of the gurdwara.

It is high time that Kartarpur Dera Sahib Gurdwara provide the much-needed balm to bring peace in the region. As many say, Kartarpur Dera Sahib can become the corridor for peace in the sub-continent.

Sixty nine years have passed since the Partition of 1947, and ho India and Pakistan are moving one step at a time toward lasting peace. We need to move further closer and should welcome each other with open arms. It is time to make one's voice heard since peace alone can end hatred, which has been fostered over the years. This is the cause we all should passionately advocate.

As Punjabi poet Surjit Patar has said:

*"Kal Waris Shah nu wandeya si Ajj Shiv Kumar di waari hai
Oh zakham tuhanu bhull vi gaye Je navean di hore tiyari hai"*

(Yesterday we divided Waris Shah, today it is the turn of Shiv Kumar Batalvi, have you forgotten the old wounds that you are looking for more, anew?)

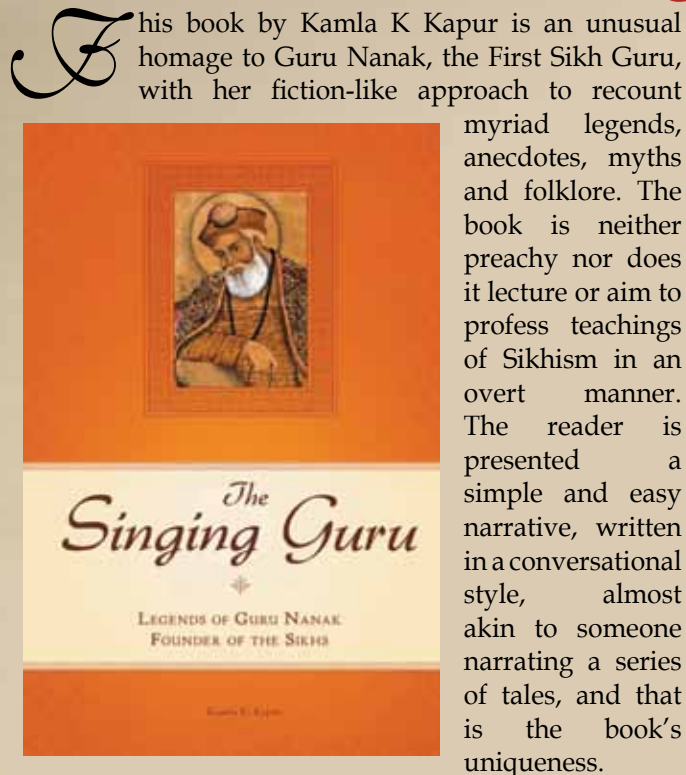
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“Bani Aayee Hai, Rebab Chhaid”

Reviewing Kamla Kapur's Book

The Singing Guru:



This book by Kamla K Kapur is an unusual homage to Guru Nanak, the First Sikh Guru, with her fiction-like approach to recount myriad legends, anecdotes, myths and folklore. The book is neither preachy nor does it lecture or aim to profess teachings of Sikhism in an overt manner. The reader is presented a simple and easy narrative, written in a conversational style, almost akin to someone narrating a series of tales, and that is the book's uniqueness.

From her Preface, one understands how teachings of the Guru Granth Sahib have enabled the author to overcome her periods of difficulty and emotional turmoil in life's arduous journey. What Kamla K Kapur has done with the book is an interesting experiment, enabling the reader to recount instances and teachings of Guru Nanak Dev ji, through the eyes of his close aide and companion Mardana, the rabab player.

Using Mardana's voice as that of the narrator, Kamla recounts important lessons in life, on spiritualism and the belief in a higher power, the Almighty who has transcended religion, class, creed and sex. The accounts narrated are simple, elegant and awe-inspiring and yet, the power or the latent message underlined within lingers on long after reading the book.

The book delivers messages for all mankind in the form of short couplets and stanzas taken from Guru Nanak's teachings, around which tales from the janamsakhis of Guru Nanak and his Muslim companion and rabab player Mardana are intrinsically woven. The little couplets and stories are so potent that they

seemingly have an answer to ever difficult predicament that life poses.

For instance, during one of his journeys with Guru Nanak Dev ji, when faced with imminent death at the hand of ferocious cannibals, Mardana reminisces

God the Arch Writer, wrote one word with his ever-flowing pen,

The world came to be, and millions of rivers began to flow;

As He writes, so it comes to be! He writes the drama of our lives,

Then watches with joy. Not only watches but participates in it!

Indeed, the Supreme Power above has pre-ordained life's ups and downs and all a human can do is to surrender and go with the flow.

On the salutation *Wah-hay-guru*, Nanak propounds thus: "*Wah*, the exclamation of wonder, amazement, and awe, is the only adequate expression in the face of the incomprehensible and ever-mysterious and miraculous workings of the Guru".

To this, Mardana asks, "Who is the Guru?"

Guru is the guide of Guides who whispers in our souls when all our ways are lost, and we find ourselves in the darkness with not a star to show us the way. The Guru is the light within us, Mardana, our highest self. Great, great, great is the Guru, without whom we would be brutes.

At another point, when Mardana describes dangerous dimensions in a forest inhabited by robbers and dreaded by resident villagers, amidst 'strange frightening sounds, Nanak urges him, "...Banee aayee hai, Rabab chhaid..." and sings:

Jeeo darat hai apana

Kai son karee pukaar?

(I am frightened. Whom shall I call out to in my fear?)

Mardana narrates: "The primal humanity of the cry struck a deep chord within me. I joined in with a quaky voice and sang along with him."

Baba's next line answered the question,

Dukh visarjan saiviyai, sadaa, sadaa datar.

(Remember and serve Him who dispels fear and pain and is forever and ever merciful. Your name, Beloved, carries me across).

Mardana: "I felt like a sinking stone in a sea of fear and reached out for the help Baba's words offered. His notes, his music, and his deep, resonant voice were like a boat; I climbed aboard onto safety. Soon the turmoil in my soul ceased with the rhythmic breathing the song demanded."

On another occasion, rocked by thunder and lightning on a ship to Sri Lanka, Baba asked Mardana to play the rabab and Mardana states, 'My fingers trembled upon the strings, but when thunder and lightning revealed Baba's face momentarily, he was calm, serene and radiant, despite the impending danger. His eyes shut, he sang:

*Jap tap ke bandh bairula jit langai vahaila
Na sarvar naan oochalai aisa panth suhaila.*

(Embark on the raft of meditation and self-discipline, and there will be no ocean, no fierce storm or raging waves; your path will always be easy and pleasant.)

Such insightful lines with deep resonance abound in this gem of a book that very deftly deploys Mardana's voice as that of doubt, Maya, greed, attachment to worldly pleasures and other human greeds and desires whilst Guru Nanak Dev ji's words of wisdom echo that of an evolved being, who has adopted meditation as a way of life and seeks redemption at the hands of the Almighty. In the series of simple stories and engaging narrative, Kamla Kapur reaves readers into the magic of these profound tales, holding a treasure trove of knowledge and teachings between the lines.

At one point in the book, when Mardana questions Guru Nanak, "Baba, what or who is a Sikh?"

"A Sikh is a devotee and disciple of God, a student who is always eager and passionate to learn how to grow into his full potential as a true and conscious human being."

"And how can I become a Sikh?"

"By keeping your vessel upright," Baba said, taking his *lota* from his bag, clearing the space before him, and standing the *lota* upside down upon the ground. "Nothing can be contained in a vessel turned upside down. But if you straighten it," he said, doing so, "ambrosia will fall into it."

"How does one keep one's vessel upright?"

"With humility. When we are humble, when we give all our possessions and ourselves to our Maker, knowing

that all is His anyway, then He himself keeps our vessel upright."

For those who find it hard to strike the right balance between pursuing worldly desires and a spiritual path, Guru Nanak Dev ji explains: "One who loves the Lord obtains the fruit of that love; all his hunger is satisfied. To the gurmukh, everything is sacred and pure – food, drink, wealth, property and money. He is a happy man, fully at home with all aspects of life, tasting all the pleasures, knowing that God Himself is the giver of them, that God enjoys Himself through the gurmukh's joy in life. God is a yogi, an ascetic, and a bhogi, an enjoyer. Among pleasure seekers, he is a pleasure seeker; among the ascetics, he is an ascetic. The gurmukh enjoys it all, but is not attached to any of it. He doesn't eat the fly together with the sweets."

His subsequent stay in Sultanpur Guru Nanak attains enlightenment :

In the words of Mardana: 'In the thirteenth year of his employment at Sultanpur, something happened to Baba. I had spent enough time with him to know that something potentially unusual was brewing. I couldn't put my finger on it. After the tairra episode there was a restlessness in him, a tejas, a brilliant, radiant fire. He had a powerful, haunted look, as if he'd heard a call or a summons from somewhere. It was as if the measured, usual, ordinary life he had been leading in the world of business and accounting couldn't contain him.

I was concerned. I went to Bebe Nanaki, who had noticed it too. She sat silently with me for a while and then said,

"We have to let him be, Mardana. He is not ours. We cannot understand him. I just know he will be safe, no matter what."

I kept a close watch on Nanak. I went with him wherever he went, like a shadow. My life was intimately tied with Baba's, and I didn't want our peaceful, predictable, and safe domestic life disturbed. One morning we went to the Beini River as usual. Baba bathed in it every morning while it was still dark outside, and I accompanied him. A dark storm with thunder, lightning, and pelting rain was raging. My thoughts were straying here and there, mainly to my bed and something warm to drink, and when I looked again I noticed Baba hadn't surfaced. I thought perhaps he had gone to the other shore, which he sometimes did in order to meditate in the cremation ground. I didn't want to swim to the other shore, so I just kept hoping Baba would return soon. But when some time passed and he didn't, I had no choice but to get into the river and go to the cremation ground.

Some fires were still smoldering, but there was no Baba. I went farther, but I still could not find Baba. Eventually I swam back and ran up and down the bank, both concerned and angry with Baba for being so careless and putting me through such agitation and discomfort. When I still couldn't find him, I began to fear the worst.

Leaving his clothes there in a heap in case he returned and needed them, I ran to his home and told Bibi Sulakhni and the boys what had happened. Bibi started to scold me for not taking care of her husband—as if I were to blame—and began crying. Then we went over to Bebe Nanaki's. By this time we were all getting very worried, and the news had spread. We returned to the shore. Baba's clothes and shoes were still there, but no Baba. Baba's wife, Sulakhni, began to beat her breast and weep. The townspeople gathered, and even Daulatan, after hearing of Baba's disappearance, came on his horse. He ordered his men to dive in and search the river for miles upstream and down, but by midday, everyone except Bebe Nanaki had given up hope. She had a distant expression on her face as she looked at the river and said, "He is well. He is in the Beloved's embrace." Such was the power and enigma of Guru Nanak Dev, the first Sikh!

On the fourth evening after Baba's disappearance, while Daulatan Masi was at the height of her frenzy, a child came running toward our home yelling, "Nanak is alive! Nanak is alive!" Everyone ran out and the child led them to the centre of the marketplace.

At first I thought the sun had risen and lit up the square...then realised that the light was actually coming from Nanak. For a long time my eyes couldn't focus on him. He was luminous and translucent, as if the borders of his body were barely there. I saw him fade and come together, fade and come together. His eyes too, were bright, so bright that trying to look into them was like trying to look into the sun. Something profound had happened to him. Everybody who saw him was in awe, struck silent by his radiant presence. For an instant it felt like we were all under the spell of eternity."

Bebe Nanaki fell at his feet and kissed them, a stream of tears running down her cheeks; Daulatan Masi did the same, clinging and not letting him move. All of us



crowded around him after a while, asking him what had happened, but Baba, still in the glow of whatever he had experienced, didn't say a word. He just went home and lay down on the bed. After some time, even Daulat Khan came to his house and asked Nanak what had happened, but Nanak didn't say anything to him either. He was in a cocoon, impervious to the outside, like the caterpillar before it becomes a butterfly, still and silent in the womb of the death that leads to rebirth.

When days went by without Nanak saying a word, rumours started to fly. However, his adoring disciples believed that he had gone into the embrace of the Beloved, who had given him the ambrosia of His name to drink.

Several days later he uttered his first words, words that the river had whispered to him: 'There is no Hindu; there is no Muslim....'

It was the message of the river. I swear I heard its liquid and rolling sound as Baba spoke those words. Baba had become a mighty river, certain in its direction toward the ocean of God's heart, the river that is always flowing forward and that is already merged with the sea. Source and goal became the same: no distinctions, divisions or discriminations between this and that, here and there, now and the, Hindu and Muslim. We are all One.

This work is truly blessed and a must read for all those who wish to gauge the meaning and thoughts behind the messages of the great spiritual guru, Guru Nanak, the first Sikh!

The Founding of Kartarpur Sahib



Towards end of the book, when Guru Nanak Dev ji and Mardana, along with some 'goats-turned-men' arrived at a vast expanse of land flanking the wide River Ravi, "they set up camp by a ramshackle, abandoned hut with a partial roof. Baba's followers put a thatch on it and a few others cleared a spot by the roots of the large, spreading banyan tree beneath which Baba often sat, singing and discoursing. Baba's erstwhile goat followers, who had gone to visit their families, returned with wives and children, mothers and fathers, cattle, bulls, buffalo and dogs, and before they knew it, a little hutment had sprung around Baba and Mardana."

Now, the landlord of this land known as Karoria was much displeased at this development and asked his trusted advisor Amir Shah to evict those who had occupied his land. Much to his dismay, Karoria soon found even Amir mesmerised by bani of Guru Nanak and Mardana, and told Karoria, "I have done nothing but accumulate wealth in your service, *hazoor*, but now my soul has heard a call it cannot refuse. Something wonderful has happened on the edges of your land. Infinity has opened up. Give up your tiny empire to live in the immensity of the universe! Do not feel threatened. Open wide your arms and embrace it! Such an opportunity will not come again."

Eventually Karoria did rescind from his rigid stance and literally fell at Guru Nanak's feet. 'Karoria was humbled as the boundaries of his soul expanded. He had a vision of what his life could be in service to God and others, so he stayed at the dera for several weeks, shared meals with strangers, even poor and low-caste people, and listened to Baba's music and discourses. Karoria, full of new life, enthusiastically began to plan a city in the area, proportioning his land generously, giving orders, and laying the foundations of a temple, which Baba called gurdwara, the threshold of the Guru. Eagerly he ran to Baba and said, "We shall name this new city Nanakpur!"

Baba said, "But it is not mine. It belongs to the Creator who creates, gives, and rakes away, to the One who gave it to you and now to my fellow Sikhs. Let us name this place Kartarpur, City of the Creator."

The narrative continues:

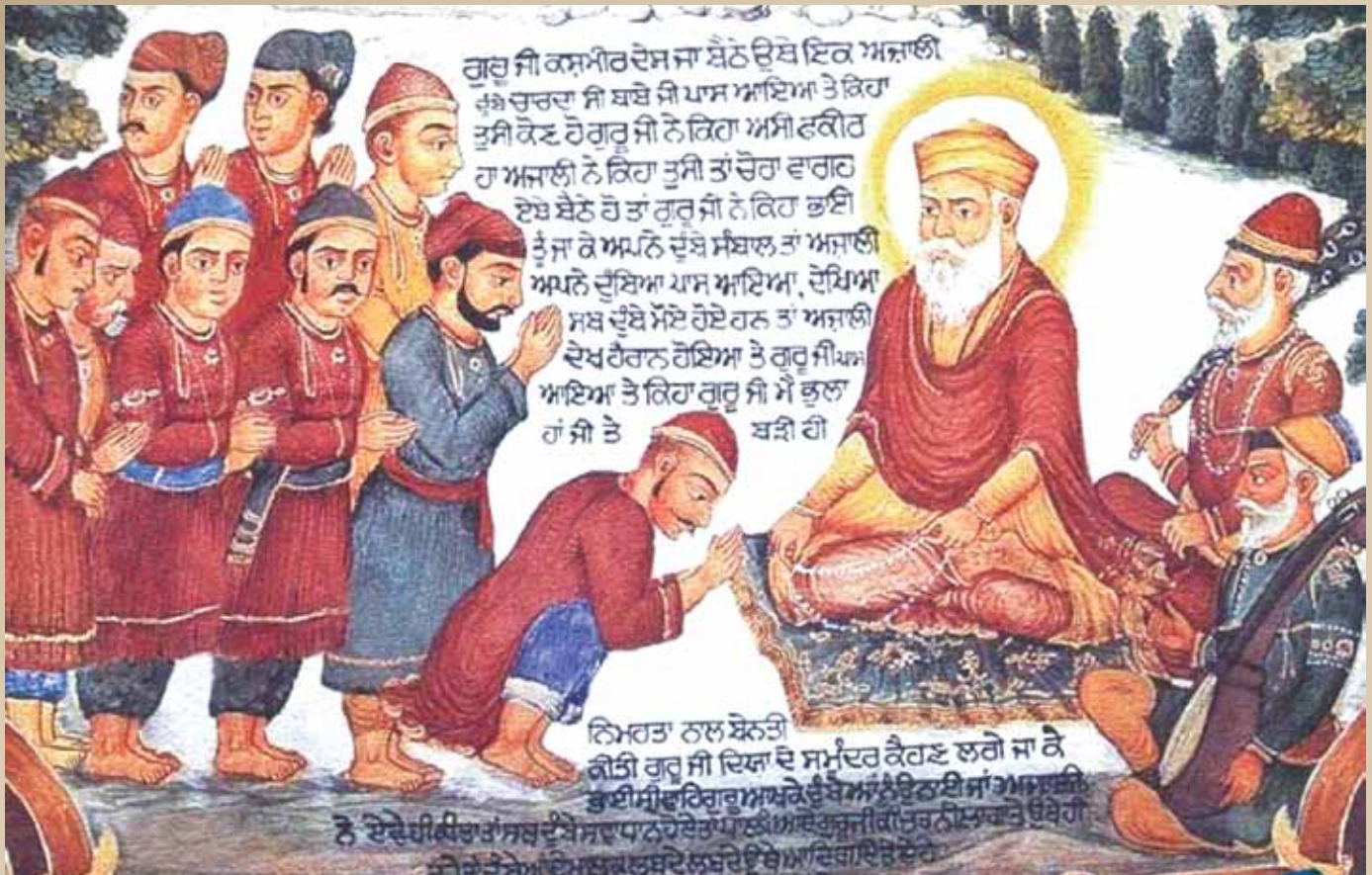
Baba's devotees, who now called themselves Sikhs, cleared land, built walls and houses of stone, fashioned

plows and shares, prepared the soil, and planted vegetables, potatoes, corn, wheat, pulses, beans, and herbs; they built irrigation channels from the River Ravi, dug wells, and installed Persian wheels. They worked with zeal, love, and devotion, for after much suffering and struggle, a clear direction was revealed to them, a direction that gave energy to their bodies and peace and joy to their minds and hearts. Baba, too, took off his traveling chola, dressed in ordinary farmer's clothes, and worked robustly, digging, plowing, and weeding with the others.

Baba wanted Kartarpur to be communal property where everyone had his or her residence, but Mardana changed all that. One day while Baba was surveying the land, Mardana arrived with the rabab on his shoulder and said to him, "Baba, I have always been obedient to you when you said '*Mardana rabab chhaid, bani aee hai.*' Now, I want you to play the rabab while I sing *bani aee hai.*" Baba smiled, took the rabab from him, and moved to sit under a nearby *kikar* tree. Mardana started with the *alaap* of Raag Dhanasri. Baba closed his eyes and accompanied him, knowing full well what was coming. Mardana shut his eyes too and communed with God in a sweet, humble, unabashed heart-to-heart way as he sang Saint Dhanna's shabad...

At Kartarpur, everyone including Baba not only had their own portion of land, but also worked on a large tract of land held in common. The men and women laboured in their own fields and devoted time to the common land, growing grain, lentils, and vegetables, which provided food to the common kitchen, called the *langar*, from which any visitor, from any religion or caste, could partake. People from other villages and towns donated giant skillets, pots, pans, and woks in which abundant food and *halwa* prepared from pure ghee, wheat flour, and sugar. The *halwa*, to be called *kadaa parshad*, was always available to those who came to the temple. Owners of kilns donated bricks and mortar with which small individual homes, communal buildings, and a temple were built. Word spread. More people thronged, bringing food and seeds, saplings and fruit trees, bulls and cattle. When the foundations of the city were laid, all Baba's acquaintances and devotees came from far and wide to dig and carry...Before they knew it, organically, easily, spontaneously, in *sahaja*, like a flower, Kartarpur began to grow, bloom, and flourish."

The Universal message of Guru Nanak



Kamla K Kapur elucidates on the process of her writing the book and her inspiration with these words: "Guru Nanak's spiritual fire sparked the world's youngest religion, Sikhism, which continued through nine succeeding incarnate gurus and established itself for all time with the compilation of the Eleventh Guru, the holy Guru Granth Sahib, revered as a Living Guru whose spirit is embodied in the Word.

In his youth, Nanak was a wandering poet and minstrel who traveled to the far corners of India and beyond, from the Middle East and Tibet, to Sri Lanka. At a time when a man was distinguished by his garb, Guru Nanak dressed theatrically, combining elements from Islamic and Hindu attire with something of his own, to challenge the preconceived notions of those he met along the way. He sang ecstatically of and to the Beloved Being, the One to whom, Nanak believes, all beings and inanimate creations in the material world sing. Nanak's 974 extant songs, contained in the Guru Granth Sahib, evidence Nanak's vision and experience of the nonsectarian Being, Akal Purakh, the Timeless One beyond gender. It is a

vision that illumines the miracle of our presence on this planet and forces a reevaluation of our humdrum lives. Nanak's is an inspired marveling that conjures the Other, who is also ourselves, the One subject and object of our highest and most intense longings."

Many other aspects of his multidimensional personality complemented Nanak's mystical nature. He was a social critic, revolutionary, and iconoclast who reunited mankind with the forces of nature. He said of himself that he had no more caste or race than wind or fire; he blasted through the petty, parochial, limited, superstitious, and encrusted version of God, cut through the delusions and ignorance that separate humans from each other, saw through the skin of appearance to the light that informs every breathing thing, shattered the prescriptions and constrictions of rituals and idolatry, and sought at the source the transcendent and immanent energy infused through the micro- and macrocosm. Nanak's is a personal, direct, and unmediated Way that places no barriers between the lover and the Beloved. In his songs, Nanak rends the perceptual veils that blind us to



the truth that the Lord of the cosmos and the human heart are one. This oneness transcends all the stratifications of society.

None of these abstract descriptions can encompass Guru Nanak's totality. He inhabited all of himself. In addition to being a sage and guru, he was also a wanderer, poet, singer, adventurer, son, husband, father, and brother. Later in his life, when he settled down in a city he established – Kartarpur, the City of the Creator – he tilled the fields, sowed seeds, and harvested crops. He used these experiences to weave metaphors of cultivation into many of his songs. In Kartarpur he established the

community that became the first followers of the religion labelled Sikhism, a community that welcomed people from all walks of life that ate together in a common kitchen, and worshipped the Essential God, not its fragmented images.

Nanak's message was clear: God had to be found within life through engagement, not withdrawal. A human has to play, and play well, the many roles that life demands. He believed fervently that Karta Purakh, the Creator and Experiencer, was similarly engaged in the drama of existence. Nanak refused nothing of life, but affirmed all of it: the mundane and the spiritual, the practical and philosophic, the human and divine. He was wedded to God in ecstasy and the quotidian, at once earthbound and ecstatic. For him, the secular and the holy are on the same continuum. Soul and body, God and wife, song and plowing, contemplation and society, meditation and food – he lived a life of full relatedness on every level.

However, Guru Nanak never tires of reminding us that our engagement with all aspects of life has its essential counterpart in detachment; that worldliness and business without personal discipline and a turning to love and adoration of the One will doom a soul to torment.'

The Singing Guru is an enabling book, encouraging people of all faiths and backgrounds to strike a balance between materialism and spirituality.

Monica Arora

"This is Not the Mardana I Know"

In her review, Inni Kaur is clearly troubled by Kamla Kapur's rendering:

Breath tightens.

Tears flow.

Heart aches.

Body quivers.

I feel violated at multiple levels.

What are they writing about my Mardana?

Don't they know that this is the man Patshah chose to walk with him?

The Singing Guru, is a tantalising read. I am sure the world will embrace it, for the writing of Kamla Kapur is exquisite.

Her command of the English language is to be coveted.

But, this is not the Mardana I know.

Fifty-four pages of the book is all that I can handle.

The content is just too painful for a lover, a dreamer like me.

I look at the bibliography. It reveals that chapters 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 19, 21 are an invention of the author. Fact and fiction overlapping is jarring. Far too many liberties have been taken by the author.

I know not what to say.

I know not what to do.

I wonder, am I making too much out of this?

And then...

The words of Bhai Mardana enter my consciousness:

"Consume: wisdom (molasses), glory (bread), and reverence (meat).

Nanak: this is the eternal meal; eternal identification is the support.2. – [GGS: Ang 553]"

I feel cradled.

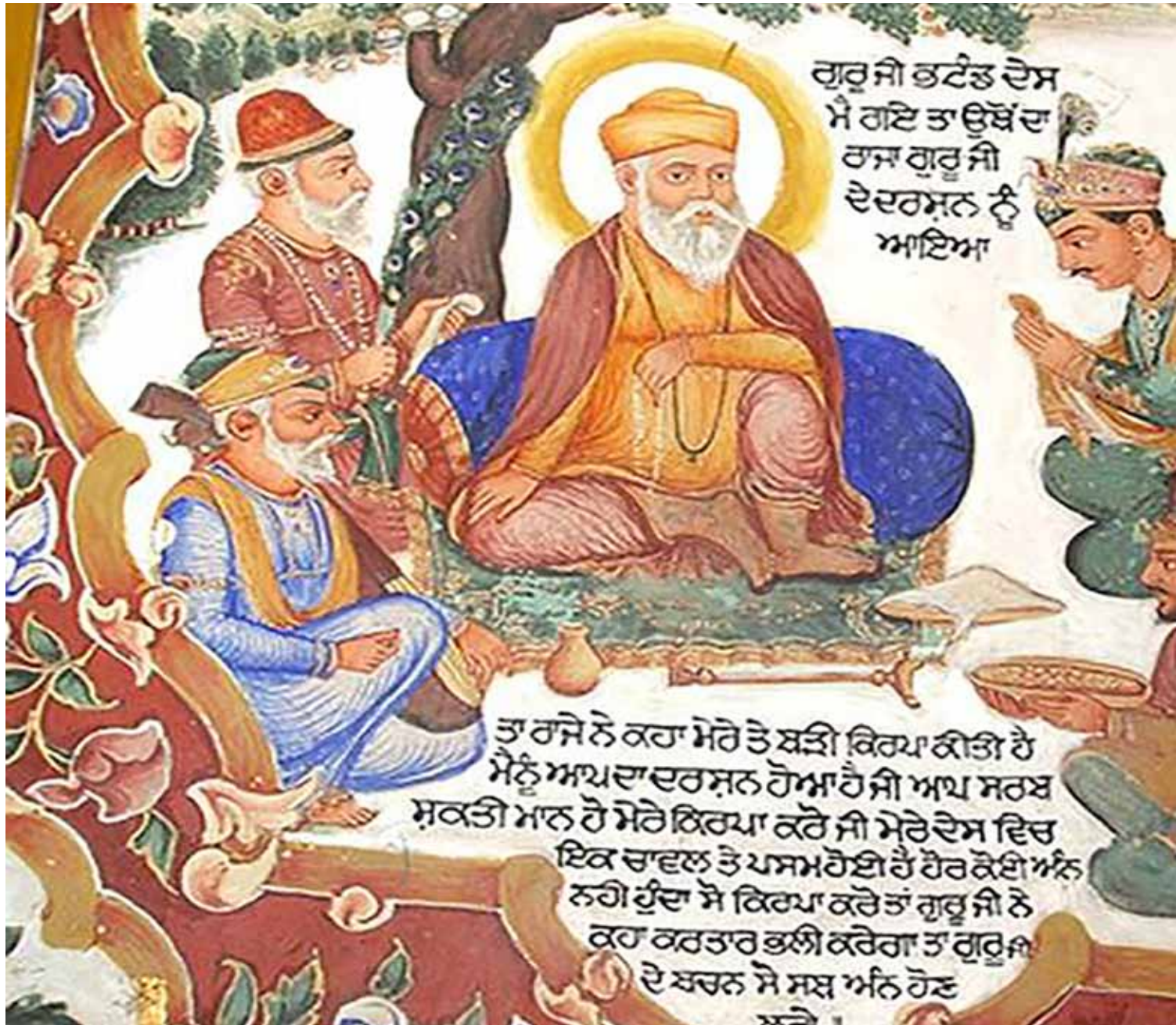
Let the world write what they want.

For me, he is the one that my Patshah chose to walk with him.

I rest...

Inni Kaur serves as the Chair on SikhRI's Board of Directors. She is also the author of Journey with the Gurus, Sakhi-Time with Nani ji and Thank You, Waheguru.

Janamsakhis: The Life and Times of Guru Nanak Dev



In his book 'Janamsakhi Tradition: An Analytical Study' Dr Kirpal Singh explains the essence of Janamsakhi literature, the journeys undertaken to complete research for the manuscript. In the following extracts reproduced from the book, some incidents and events pertaining to Guru Nanak Dev ji's udasis and his teachings as well as other important occasions related to his life and beliefs and the spread of Sikhism are highlighted

Genesis of the *Janamsakhi* Tradition

The *Janamsakhi* tradition had its origin with attempts to compile popular anecdotes connected with the life of Guru Nanak (1469-1539), the founder of Sikhism. These collections were compiled during the 17-19th centuries in Punjabi language (Gurmukhi script). It is not fair to compare



a *Janamsakhi* with biography as a literary genre which is of recent origin wherein attempts are made to portray the important events and influences that shaped the

life of an individual from his birth to the last day of his life and also endeavours to assess his/her works and contribution to human life. The *Janamsakhis* cannot be categorised as earliest attempts at preparing biographical accounts of the life of Guru Nanak either. They fall in a different category as regards its form and content because they seek to present the life of the Guru in the form of Platonian dialogues highlighting his teachings through the medium of anecdotes delineating his spiritual greatness.

Alfred Lyall states that the first impulse which brought forth the stories of great men was based on the element of amazement at their marvellous deeds. At that point of time mankind had not developed the critical faculty of discriminating between fact and fiction, as well as right or wrong. People usually accepted as true and authentic whatever was related to them about the deeds of gods or heroes. As such "the hazy atmosphere, marvellous and miraculous obscures the early origin of race and religion clouds the beginning of history." However, this state of affairs did not last long. The concept of authentic history began to emerge slowly out of the sea of fables and gradually things which appeared natural and acceptable to elder generation became incredible or improbable. The awe and amazement phenomenon was superseded by a taste for an accurate thought and empirical evidence. However "historian's point of view is one of the mankind's more recent acquisitions."

It is however certain that legends about the great savants and heroes of the past form the earliest source of information. A man who made his mark in a generation and who outdistanced the rest in bravery, piety or some peculiar powers of mind or body became the source and subject of legend among the unlettered. These legends rescued and transmitted to posterity were what could come down to us out of the flood of deep oblivion. Thus, however exaggerated or complicated a legend might be, it was surely based on a kernel of truth. At times that kernel even might seem to be insignificant. To us, sometimes the attending circumstances make the situation look complicated. This can be explained by an example from Indian history. In a part of Rajputana, the *Minas* (an aboriginal tribe) used to worship the pig. When they took a turn towards Islam, they changed their pig into a saint called Father Adam and worshipped the animal as such. When the Brahmins came to have influence over them, the pig became identified with the famous Boar, an incarnation of *Vishnu* and was named *Varaha*. This led to the development of symbolism. The animal fables of *Aesop* and the *Panchtantra* stories are landmarks in the symbolic literature. During the medieval period, religion being a dominant force

brought a new type of symbolism to indicate the spiritual progress of an individual. *Muntkul Tahir* and *Gita Govinda* can be quoted as fine specimens of this type of literature during the 12th and 13th centuries. Therefore while studying any piece of religious literature and for that matter the *Janamsakhis*, one has to keep in mind the state of contemporary religious literature and its stage of development.

The tradition about Guru Nanak got current when he was still alive. The contemporaries began to talk about his itineraries, his visits to Mecca, Madina and Baghdad, his discourses with the *Pirs* of Uch and *Makhdunes* of Multan, his religious debates with *Gorakhpantis* and *Pandits* (Hindu wise men) of Kurukshetra and Kashi. With all this, began a process that brought into being, what we now describe as continuing tradition of Guru Nanak.

The Muslims came to India through the north-west and therefore Punjab was the first to bear the brunt of Muslim domination. Guru Nanak himself described the Muslim domination in his *Asa di Var*:

In this age people wear blue and is established the rule of Turks and Pathans.

Each of the four Vedas have expressed some truth.

Those studying and expounding them realise what is appropriate action from what is inappropriate

Whoever by practice of love and devotion takes a humble appellation, Saith Nanak, liberation obtains. -Guru Granth Sahib, p. 470

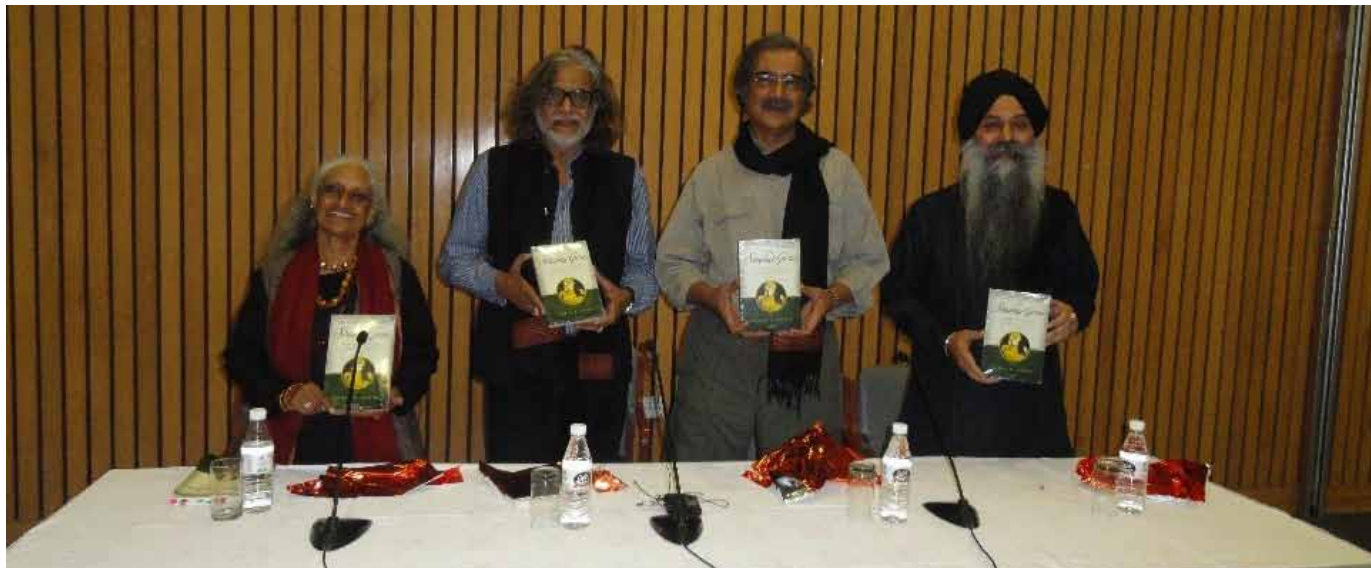
As a result, the tradition of Guru Nanak got influenced by Islamic domination. The miracles of Prophet Jesus are found even in the Holy *Quran*, a fact that makes us believe that miracles remain an essential attribute of a religious *leader-Nabi* or *Auliya*. That is why, we come across the accounts of Muslim *Pirs* and saints replete with portrayal of miracles in the *Janamsakhis*. Among the most widely known books of Guru Nanak's times, were *Kashaful-Mahjub* and *Tazkara-i-Auliya*. The writer of *Kashaful-Mahjub* was Abu-ul-Hasan Hajwari (1009-1072 A.D.), also known as Data Ganj Baksh. He settled in Lahore and authored this book. It contains many miracles. At one place, he wrote that a saint named Abdullah was sleeping in the garden under a tree and a snake was fanning him by waiving a branch of a bush at him. Similarly, *Tazkara-i-Auliya* also contains innumerable miracles. The writer of the book is Farid-ud-Din Attar (1119-1230 AD) whose real name was Shaikh Ibrahim. This book has now been published in Lahore wherein we come across many miracles of

different kinds. It contains a story of an old lady named Rabaya. She makes an earnest prayer that she being very weak and old could not walk to the holy Ka'ba. In response to her prayers, Ka'ba moved towards her in a far off forest. When prophet Ibrahim went to Ka'ba, he found that it was not there. There was a time when miracles were taken to be outward signs of prophethood or a spiritually elevated person. In the *Quran*, some miracles of Moses are inscribed that led the Muslims to believe that a miracle on physical plane is an essential part of an elevated soul. Therefore the accounts of the supernatural or miracles have found their way into the *Janamsakhis* under the influence of Islamic religious literature. Besides, the miracles of the supernatural constituted the main features of medieval religious literature. Apart from the Islamic literature, we come across miracles in the Vaishnava literature as well. How Prahlad was saved from fire and miracles of the like can be cited as examples. Bhai Gurdas has significantly described the miracles of *rogis* and *Sidhas* in his first *var*:

The Jogis changed their bodies into those of lions, leopards, etc. Someone wore wings and began to fly in the blue sky like a bird, Someone became a cobra making hissing sounds,

While some other went mad and rained fire. Bhangar Nath snatched stars from the heaven. Some others flew and floated on water.

At the launch of Kamla K Kapur's 'The Singing Guru: Legends and Adventures of Guru Nanak': India International Centre, New Delhi, 30 October 2015



At the book's release (l-r): Kamla Kapur, the author; Muzaffar Ali, acclaimed writer, director and designer; Mike Pandey, documentary filmmaker and Bhai Baldeep Singh



Kamla Kapur with a copy of her book released that day



Bhai Baldeep Singh speaking on the occasion



Kamla Kapur and Muzaffar Ali examine the exquisite rebab, which has been authentically replicated from the instrument played by Bhai Mardana. Muzaffar Ali's lineage can be traced to the Sufi saint Baba Farid

The Life and Time of Bhai Mardana

Bhai Mardana (1459-1534), Guru Nanak's longtime Muslim, who also accompanied him throughout those extensive Udassis (journeys) across the country and abroad, was born as the son of a Mirasi couple, Badra and Lakkho, of Talvandi Rai Bhoe, now Nankana Sahib in Sheikhpura district of

childhood days and as one who sang to him songs from Kabir, Trilochan, Ravidas, Dhanna and Bern. According to Ratan Singh Bhangu, *Prachin Panth Prakash*, Guru Nanak when still a small boy, gave Mardana a string instrument improvised from reeds to play on while he sang the hymns.



present Pakistan. The Mirasan were a caste of hereditary minstrels and genealogists. Guru Nanak and Mardana were both born and raised in the same village. The Miharban Janam Sakhi describes the latter, who was ten years senior in age, as the Guru's companion since his

It is said that Lakho had six children who had died during birth, and she named this seventh child as 'Marjana' (the one who dies), but Guru Nanak started calling him 'Mardana', meaning 'Marda - Na' (the one who wouldn't die), which is the basis of his unusual name.

As Guru Nanak was employed to take charge of the granaries and stores of the Nawab of Sultanpur Lodhi, the stories of his generosity and hospitality spread far and wide. Mardana, already a married man and father of two sons and a daughter, wanted to visit Sultanpur and seek employment but was charged by Guru Nanak's father Mehta Kalu, to bring news of his son. Mardana went to Sultanpur and was never to part company with Guru Nanak again. His occupation was playing the rabab or rebeck as Guru Nanak recited hymns on God's glory.

When Guru Nanak prepared to go forth into the world to preach his message, he invited Mardana to accompany him. Mardana initially hesitated for he did not wish to leave his family until his daughter had been married off for this he did not have sufficient means. One of Guru Nanak's disciples, Bhai Bhagirath, arranged the wherewithall and Mardana was able to give away his daughter in marriage, and then was ready to accompany Guru Nanak on his travels. It can be said that Mardana was a most fortunate soul who benefited the heavenly presence of Guru Nanak, who according to the Bhattis (GGS) had 'darshan' of the Almighty.

Anecdotes and tales of intrigue, humour, spirituality and the spread of Sikhism abound in biographies of the first Sikh Guru, Guru Nanak Dev ji and his aide and companions, Mardana. As per that from the *Puratan Janam Sakhi*, Guru Nanak and Mardana had not travelled very far from Sultanpur when the latter complained that he felt hungry and needed something to eat immediately. The Guru pointed to the village they had passed and said that if he went there, he would be well entertained by Khatri of the Uppal caste who lived in that village. Mardana went in that direction and upon arriving in the village, found everyone more than hospitable. He was sumptuously fed and given ample alms. As he saw him return loaded with a bundle, Guru Nanak, as per the Janamsakhis, started laughing. Mardana realised the oddity of what he had done and did not know how to get rid of what he had collected. He threw the bundle away when the Guru pointed out to him that those articles would be more of a burden on him.

It is written in the Janamsakhis that after considerable



search for the 'right sounding' Rebab, which could not be found anywhere, Guru Nanak sent Mardana to the house of Bhai Firanda of Bhairawal (Kapurthala). Bhai Firanda was an accomplished musician and was a carpenter by trade. He presented a special Rebab to Guru Nanak, which sounded like *Tu hi Nirankar, tu hi Nirankar* (a divine melody in awe of the Almighty). Guru ji was very much pleased with Bhai Firanda and bestowed upon him boundless blessings.

Guru Nanak started on His divine journeys in 1497 AD, and along with Mardana, His first stop was at **Bhai Lalo's humble house at Saidpur** (now Emnabad in Pakistan). Here Guru ji meditated for nearly a year, bearing the pain of stones, sand and thorns upon which he sat.

There are a number of very interesting 'Sakhis' (stories) connected with Bhai Mardana, who was with Guru Nanak in his four divine journeys, which are depicted in paintings.

The Janamsakhis contain many anecdotes picturing Mardana in despair from agonising hunger or impending fear and Guru Nanak, or Nature, coming to provide him succor, somewhat miraculously. Once the two were passing through a remote wilderness when suddenly a violent storm overtook them. So severe was the tempest that the trees of the jungle began to flay about. Mardana, trembling with fear, thus spoke to the Guru, "True sovereign, thou hast brought me to my death in this forest. I shall not here get a shroud nor a grave." The

Guru asked him to remain calm, but Mardana moaned, "I have not faced a calamity like this in my life. What is going to befall my poor soul today?" Then fire broke out engulfing the forest in a smoke. Mardana covered his face and laid himself down on the ground saying, "Farewell, life." Soon, thick clouds gathered overhead and it started pouring torrentially. "Raise thy head, Mardana," spoke the Guru, "and take thy rebeck." Mardana tuned the strings and Guru Nanak sang: "If the fear of God is in the heart, all other fear is dispelled..."

According to *Puratan Janam Sakhi*, Mardana and the Master were once taken prisoner by the Mughals at Saidpur. The Guru was given a load to carry on his head and Mardana to lead a horse holding its rein. Mir Khan, the Mughal commander, saw that the Guru's bundle was floating a cubit above his head and Mardana's horse was following him without the reins. He reported the miracle to Sultan Babar, who remarked, "Had there been such faqirs here, the town should not have been struck."

There is some dispute among historians regarding the place where Mardana passed away but it is believed that in 1534, he fell ill and died in Baghdad on the return journey (udasis) from the east. With a heavy heart Guru ji performed the obsequies of Mardana with his own hands. A humble monument was erected in memory of Mardana.

Within an enclosure on a wall an inscription in mixed Turkish and Arabic marks the site. Mardana was called Murad by the residents of Baghdad and being older than Nanak by ten years was considered as Guru. Consequently the inscription which was put up after Guru Nanak's departure has: "Guru Murad died. Baba Nanak faqir helped in constructing this building, which is an act of grace from a virtuous follower, 927 AH." Mardana appears to have died in December 1534 at the age of 75. The monument lies near a graveyard, 2.5 kilometres away from the railway station. Upon the Guru's return to Punjab, Guru ji informed and consoled Mardana's son Shahzada, and other members of his family and asked them not to weep for Bhai ji as he had returned to his heavenly home.

Still, there are different versions of this. In the *Paira Mokha Janamsakhi*, it is written that Mardana passed on in Afghanistan, during Guru Nanak's fourth journey. He was cremated near the River Kuram in the City of Khurram, another version is that he came back with Guru Nanak and died in 1538/1539 AD) at Kartarpur, eight days after Guru Nanak's passing.

Mardana was not just a musician but also a spiritually elevated soul. Three of his hymns are included in the



Guru Nanak with Mardana at the house of Bhai Lalo

Adi Granth under Raag Bihagra. These hymns denounce drink that engenders evil passions and upholds meditation of the Divine Name that creates a spiritual inebriation.

Bhai Mardana had two sons, Rajada and Shajada. Shajada stayed at Talwandi, but Rajada came to Kartarpur. Sajada used to sing at the Darbar of Guru Angad. There were two sons of Sajada, Banoo and Saloo, who were the Darbari Ragis of Guru Amardas and Guru Ramdas. Their son Balwand and his son Sata were the Ragis who sang in the Darbar of Guru Arjan.

Mardana was a poet of some merit. One of his salok appears in Guru Granth Sahib in *Bihdgare ki Var* along with two others of Guru Nanak's addressed to Mardana. He is convinced that an evil body may be cleansed of sin in sangat (GG, 553).

Mardana is the only Sikh disciple who was permitted to use Guru Nanak's name in his hymns. Guru Angad called himself Nanak the second while Mardana called himself Mardana Nanak 1. There are three hymns of Mardana in the Guru Granth Sahib. One hymn of Var Bihagra is on page 553 :

.....Salok Mardana 1

In the vat of the body, Egoism is the wine.

Desire and low cravings are its companions.

The cup of ambition is abrim with falsehood, and the god of death is the cup bearer;

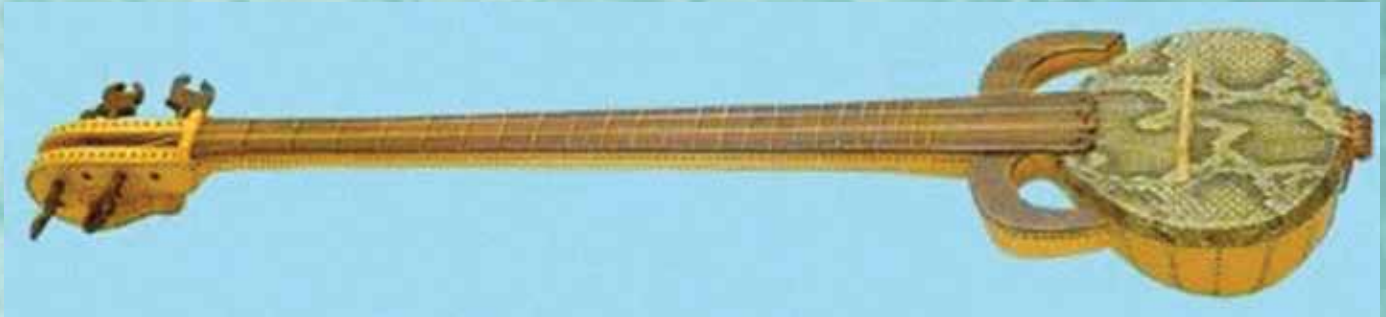
By drinking this wine O Nanak, one gathers multiple sins.

Make knowledge your yeast, the praise of God the bread you eat and the fear of God your meat.

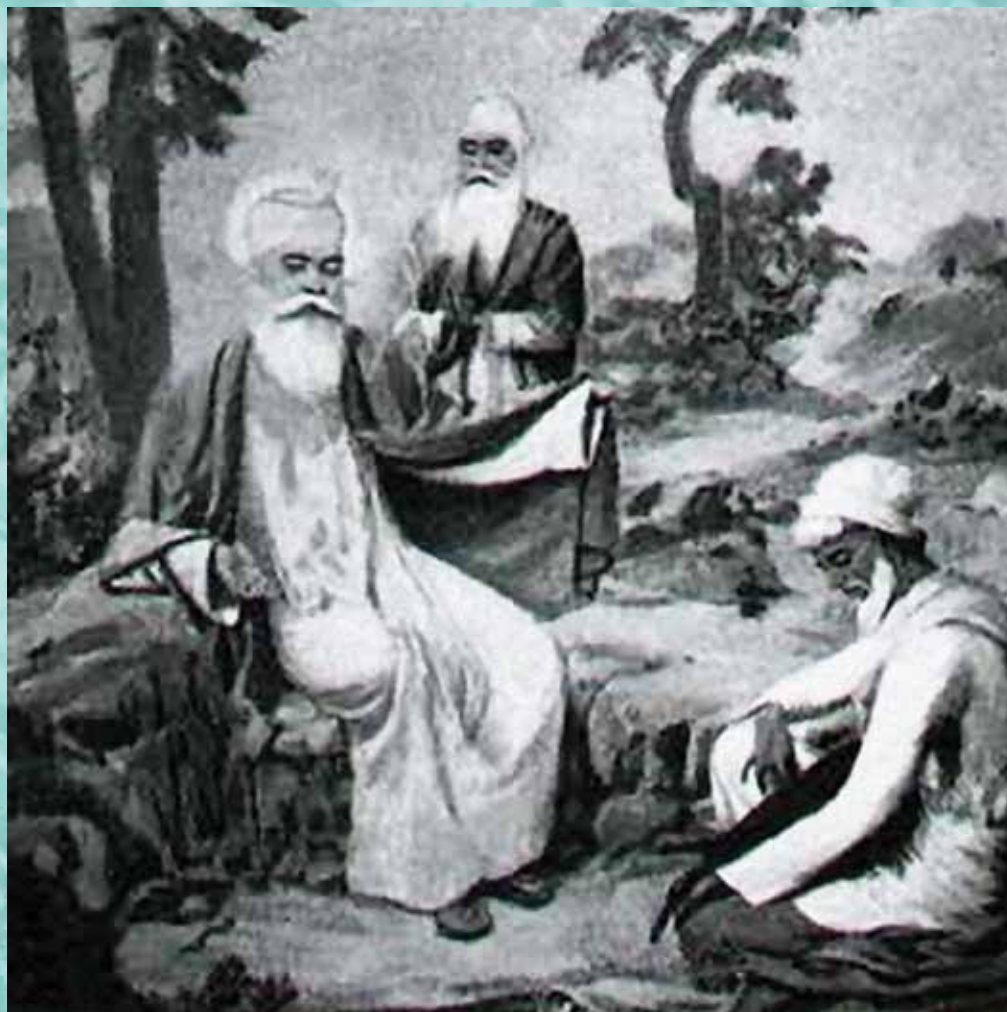
This O Nanak, is the true spiritual food. Make divine Name your sustenance.

From: http://www.sikhiwiki.org/index.php/Bhai_Mardana

The Rebab and Rebabi Tradition



A Rebab from central Asia



Mardana at the lotus feet of Guru Nanak (by artist Sobha Singh)

Guru Nanak Dev ji established the 'Rebabi' tradition in Sikhism. Bhai Mardana, the lifelong companion of the Guru belonged to a cline of Bards known in those days as Mirasis and commanded very high respect in all communities throughout Northern India. A 'Mirasi' was supposed to be the custodian of 'Miras' i.e. The Heritage. They would orally recite long poems about the ancestral heritage of a particular family at the time of birth, marriage and death and indeed on all occasions of celebrations both locally and widespread. The cultural degeneration of Indians, especially Punjabi heritage, defamed the title 'Mirasi' and reduced its connotation as to being a "beggar poet."

The Rebab (Rebec) is a word of Arabic origin and in Baghdad, there is an interesting story about Rebab, written in 'Tarikh-ul-



travels with earnest devotion.

Guru Nanak Dev renovated the Arab/Iranian string instrument Rebab and inspired Bhai Mardana to master it and sing the hymns of divine grace, which is how the celebrated 'Rebabi' tradition came into being. There are 22 Vars in the scriptures to be sung on the specific tunes by the 'Rebabis'. As an example, the Asa Di Var is to be sung in Raag Bhairvi on 'Tunde Asraje ki Dhuni'.

Miniature Painting by the Sikh School of Art - early 19th century of Guru Nanak with Bhai Mardana

During times of the 6th Master, the Rebab music was supplemented by 'Dhadi' singing of chivalrous Vars and

the 10th Master, Guru Gobind Singh combined the folk of Dhadi with the classical tradition of Rebabi and patronised a new school of Sikh Holy Music.

At Sri Anandpur Sahib, a 'Muhalla (colony) of Rababis' soon came into being. Bhai Nand Lal Goya (the great Persian poet and musician) was the head of this school and the famous Rebabi Daulat Ali was there to assist him. The Master sent Bhai Nand Lal Goya and all the Rebabis to Multan to establish a Rebabi School there. After the city of Anandpur Sahib was besieged and destroyed, it is said that Daulat Ali, known as Daulti Rebabi continued reciting the Sikh Holy Music.

Hukma' and 'Mashahir-e-Alam': Some thousand years ago, a 'Hakim' of Bukhna, Abu Nasir Farsi, who was an accomplished singer and instrumentalist, played an instrument in a social gathering of a rich 'Amir'. The gathering initially laughed, then cried and then were stimulated with the sound of the instrument. This was the Rebab, which completely overwhelmed the audience with its captivating sound.

Bhai Kahn Singh Nabha writes in his 'Mahan Kosh' that the Rebab was previously known as 'Narad Veena' or 'Ravan Veena', being the favourite instrument of the sage Narad and Goddess Saraswati. Despite its divine background, Guru Nanak and the Sufi fakirs enabled the instrument to reach the greater public.

From his childhood, Bhai Mardana was the first person who started playing divine *gurbani* music with the Rebab, and accompanied Guru Nanak on all his

(Article courtesy Sikh Heritage Museum U.K. ref: Iqbal Namah (Persian) by Raja Ram Tota of Kashmir, the Royal scribe of Sher-e-Punjab Maharaja Ranjit Singh).

Rababis of yore

The blessed Rababi Mardana

Guru Nanak Dev invited his childhood friend Bhai Mardana to Sultanpur Lodhi (Kapurthala). Since his old Rabab was in poor shape, Guru Nanak asked him to get the needed money from Bebe Nanki and buy a new Rabab suitable for the forthcoming sojourns (Udasis).

He got seven rupees from Bebe Nanki and went to Kapurthala, which was the centre of musical instrument making those days, where he met a Rabab Maker 'Bhai Firanda'. He offered him seven rupees and asked for the best Rabab. Bhai Firanda asked about his whereabouts and credentials. He mentioned Baba Nanak, who was well known. Bhai Firanda handed over the Rabab to Bhai Mardana and returning his seven rupees, requested an audience with Baba Nanak for His blessings, which Mardana agreed. Back in Sultanpur Lodhi, Bhai Mardana then returned the seven rupees to Bebe Nanki ji and introduced Bhai Firanda at the Modi Khana to Guru Nanak. It was a great spiritual meeting when a kirtan session took place at the Modi Khana, workplace of the Guru. It was Bhai Firanda's Rabab, which then travelled in ten directions in Asia. Bhai Firanda the carpenter and Bhai Lalo, again a carpenter stand as 'Pillars of Sainthood' in the Sikh History.

The 19th century Rababis of Nabha

The Sikh State of Nabha was well known and famous for its Rababi musicians. During the 19th century Maharaja Hira Singh appointed Munshi Faiz Bakhsh as head of Rababi School and this was perhaps the first time when a systematic musical education came into being. All Ragis who perform Keertan were called Rababis, Bhai Munsha Singh Rababi of Nabha was a well-known exponent of this performing art. His disciples echoed the genius far and wide during the 19th century.

The Sikh states of Nabha and Patiala were traditional rivals. Patiala produced 'Gharana' classical music while Nabha concentrated on most popular folk tradition including Rababis, Ragis and Dhadis. Unfortunately music historians have not honestly acknowledged place of the Nabha School of Rababis. Bhai Kahn Singh Nabha, great author of the Sikh encyclopaedia regretted such state of affairs. He was the one who added a Droning string to the Rabab, which served the purpose of the base tone. His dedication to music was profoundly



patronised by the great Maharaja Ripudaman Singh who himself was a great Rababi instrumentalist.

There was another family of rababis in Nabha known as 'Barkat Ali Group', who had migrated to Malerkotla during the late 19th century. The famous Rehmat Qawall descends from that family, being a great Rababi as well as one who founded the school of music for posterity. The Muslim State of Malerkotla is the only Muslim-majority area, which remained so in East Punjab at the time of Partition in 1947. The Begum of Malerkotla herself was a great Rababi instrumentalist.

Nabha is famous for not only its Rababi Gharana but for manufacturing of string instruments. Near the Lahori Gate in the city of Nabha there are several string musical instrument shops, but chroniclers have neglected this musical city. We need a systematic and serious study of the most neglected Rababis. Bhai Chand Rababi was a great exponent of this musical tradition. Although there is a very little recording of his performing the rabab music, yet his memories are enshrined in the hearts of his dedicated listeners.

The 19th Century Rababis of Kapurthala

As the name of this medieval town suggests, chief of a Khatri clan known as 'Kapurs' founded this small state, geographically situated in the Bist Doab area of 'Pantopotamia'. As recorded by an historian of Alexander the Great, his soldiers appreciated the natural beauty and social aspect of this area, which was along



A rababi of Nabha

the eastern banks of the River Beas, but were now fed up with fighting for years. Overpowering homesickness forced them to confront Alexander to abandon his war plans to conquer India. According to legend, a saint from that area helped the demoralised warriors in persuading Alexander thus.

Kapurthala was part of the Lahore Durbar during first half of the 19th century and a descriptive account is available about the arts and music of that period, as recorded in two Persian manuscripts: Ahmed Shah Batalvi's 'History of Punjab' and Ganesh Das Badehra's 'Char Bagh-i-Punjab'. Along with Iqbal Namah by Raja Ram Tota of Kashmir, these are under care of Punjab Heritage Museum, UK, Coventry, based on which, research has been undertaken. There were three centres disseminating vocal and instrumental music in Kapurthala State, and one was at Sultanpur Lodhi being close to 'Thatta Tibba' village, Phagwara was the second and Bhunga was the third Art Centre of Kapurthala. It must be recorded that the celebrated Sham Chorasi Musical Gharana is the result of the Bhunga Art Centre, while the Rababis of Phagwara have given us great child vocalist, Master Madan.

Karamat Shah, Suhbat Ali, Kurban Hussain and Rajab Ali have been recorded as the arch-masters of Kapurthala Rababi School. Karamat Ali and Himmat Khan went to Bhunga and performed at the famous art centre 'Ram Titwali', which was summer resort of the Maharajas.

The Rababis of Sultanpur Lodhi were indeed magnificent. Their disciples were settled in the nearby village 'Thatta Tibba'. Centuries later, the great Ragis Bhai Avtar Singh and Gurcharan Singh came from this

place. The Sultanpur Lodhi School of Rababi Gharana flourished rapidly. Bebe Nanki and Bhai Jai Ram were fond of celestial music and so was Nawab Daulat Khan Lodhi. The Rabab musical activity spread far and wide and decidedly this was Golden Era of Rabab Music.

There are others connected to the Rababi traditions, including Rajab Ali Rababi of Kapurthala, Qurban Hussain of Sultanpur Lodhi and Damoder Baig of 'Thatta Tibba'. All these arch-masters were instrumental in evolving the form and substance of the Rababi Gharana and their transcendental music echoes far and wide in the sub-continent even today.

Then there are the Rababis of Jullundur. Rehma Qawal hails from the family of Abdulla Rababi of the 19th century, the same family training the filmi singer KL Saigal before he joined a theatrical company in Calcutta. The well reputed musical festival of Northern India 'Harwallabh' was started by Rababis in the 19th century. Prof Piara Singh, the master instrumentalist of Rabab and Taar Shehnai (Ustad of S. Baljit Singh Namdhari) also hailed from the same school of music.

Another small town Bhunga (near Kapurthala) has produced a number of great Rababis. The only surviving gharana now is that of 'Sham Chaurasi' (Nazakat Ali and Salamat Ali hail from this Gharana). Bhai Chand who performed Keertan at the Golden Temple for a long time hailed from the Kapurthala School. Brahm Giani Sham Singh was a great Rababi and Saranda player of that period. He came from Sultanpur Lodhi (Kapurthala) and settled in Amritsar where he started a school of his own style of music.

Further research has the tradition of Rababi Music but started from Kapurthala by a great historical figure S Jassa Singh Ahluwalia, who defeated Nawab Bhatti and established the present Sikh State of Kapurthala. Earlier he founded the village of 'Ahluwal' in the Lahore District, whence the surname 'Ahluwalia' came into being. A well-known scholar Zaigham, hails from the same village. It will be interesting to note that S Jassa Singh Ahluwalia was a great Rabab instrumentalist and 'Kirtan Kaar', patronised the Kapurthala Rababi Gharana as well.

A great admirer and supporter of art and music, Maharaja Ranjit Singh patronised the performing arts including the Rababi Gharana of 'Doaba' and established a great centre of all. Here artists of all sorts including Rababis and kirtanias and mural painters, studied at the expense of the State.

From: <http://www.sikh-heritage.co.uk/arts/rebabiMardana/RebabiMardana.htm>

Restoring the Kali Bein



“The Miracle Man”: Baba Balbir Singh Seechewal

One of the most renowned environmentalists of our times, the man who has been actively creating awareness among people regarding environment protection, the miraculous efforts of Balbir Singh Seechewal, fondly referred to as the ‘Eco Baba’ have made the sacred Kali Bein river resplendent again.

The 160 km long Kali Bein river is a tributary of the Beas in Doaba region of the Punjab that was filled with waste material and virtually reduced to a small drain a decade back. The river water had dried up in several places only to which neighbouring farms were facing water problems as water was scarce.

Sixteen years ago Baba Balbir Singh Seechewal decided to clean the Kali Bein riverbed close to his village. His awesome crusade was inspiring enough to turn this one-man army into a large force of volunteers and soon, the epic mission began. At the time, Baba did not think that his work would spread so far that he would lead a movement, which would give life to a 160-km stretch along the Kali Bein River, in Punjab... the state that had ushered India’s food revolution.





Talking about his attachment with the river, he reverentially recalls that Guru Nanak had attained enlightenment after bathing in the Kali Bein, hence the river is of great inspiration particularly to the Sikhs. The river is also a lifeline for tens of thousands of farmers.

The Baba also believed that rivers clean themselves, naturally. "Around 50 years ago all our rivers were clean.

The problem started when humans started polluting them. Industrialisation, the use of fertilisers, the dumping of tonnes of sewage etc. has harmed rivers and turned them toxic, also polluting the groundwater," he said. Over the last 16 years, he has educated thousands of people in the villages of the Punjab, on how to treat water and keep rivers clean.





The Kali Bein was first cleared of water hyacinth and silt, the banks beautified, trees planted along the banks and clear paths made. Sewage was diverted elsewhere and villagers were educated on the importance of clean water with all the work done in the most natural way as possible. It took more than a decade for the 'Eco Baba' along with his followers to clean the river, restore water and fill the dried patches. He took help from the Punjab government to build a low-cost underground sewerage system model that collects sewage water from ponds and treats it in a natural way so it can be used for agriculture and irrigation purposes. In addition, he has put efforts in making the river banks attractive by planting trees, creating bathing ghats, making roads and inspiring several artworks.

And as the riverbed cleared, natural springs sprouted again and the river started filling up. After more than six years of hard work, the water finally became fit enough for use. The news of the river clean-up spread around the world and *Time* magazine featured Balbir Singh as

one of the 'Heroes of Environment', in 2008. His efforts are used as a case study worldwide. Former President Dr Abdul Kalam visited the site twice, hailing his work as one of the country's finest achievements. Now the vast Ganges too is being cleaned in a similar manner and Baba wishes that not only the Ganga, but all rivers in India, and wherever possible in the world, should be cleaned in the same fashion.

Balbir Singh Seechewal quotes a shlok from the Guru Granth Sahib which emphasises the importance of water: "*Pavan guru, paani pitah, mata dharti manatu* (wind is our guru/teacher, water is father and the Earth, the mother)." Balbir Singh urges future generations to understand the importance of nature and respect the environment. He adds, "*Pani hee jeevan hain* (water is the life)." And adds that if there's no water there's nothing left for mankind. Besides giving life to a dying river, Balbir Singh has recently opened a school for children from economically weaker backgrounds, who come to the Punjab from Uttar Pradesh and Nepal.

With restoration of its water flow, thousands of hectares of land have been reclaimed from water-logging in Tehsil Dasuya of Hoshiarpur District, saved from desertification in Kapurthala district and from floods in the Mand area, confluence of the Beas and Satluj rivers. Seechewal, along with his team, also made sure that the people around the area were made aware of the ill effects of dumping waste in the river.

He has also been involved in setting up schools, technical centres and degree colleges, and also works toward eradicating poverty, ignorance, superstition and atrocities against women. A crusader for environment, Sant Seechewal has established plant nurseries at Seechewal and Sultanpur Lodhi where one lakh plants are distributed annually free of cost among the people as prasad of the Guru.

Extracted from 'The Asian Age' and 'The Inquisitr News'



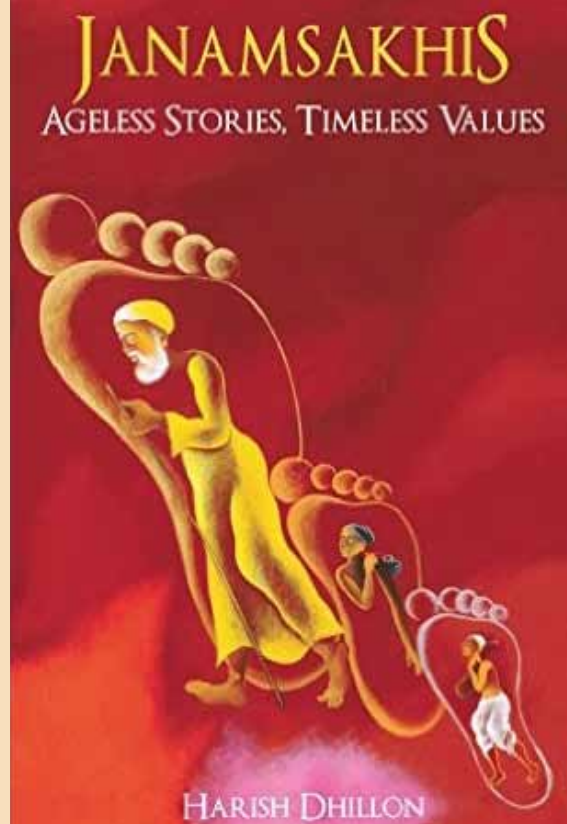
A Review

Dr Harish Dhillon has chronologically recorded the stories that claim to reveal the life and times of the First Master and founder of Sikhism, Guru Nanak Dev. The author of '*Janamsakhis : Ageless Stories, Timeless Values*', has chosen twenty of the most inspiring and interesting stories from these. The earliest known Janamsakhi dates back to 1658, nearly 120 years after the passing away of Guru Nanak in 1539. Despite the fact that none of the Janamsakhis can claim to be the most authentic or authoritative versions as over the years owing to each chronicler of Guru Nanak's life having added and altered the narrative in order to resonate the echoes of the era when they were reproduced, the Janamsakhis are a treasure trove of teachings and learnings for all mankind.

So as to decipher the basic tenets of Sikhism through the perspective of Guru Nanak's life, his journeys or udasis and his message of universal brotherhood, equality and love that he spread vigorously through his interactions with his followers, these Stories are of immense value and offer a holistic outlook on the Sikh faith and its followers. The use of contemporary and simple narrative is deliberate to appeal to young and old alike and make the life of Guru Nanak more accessible and easily understandable to anyone who has an interest in religious work, history or simply in learning about the First Guru.

As Dr Harish Dhillon has explained, the Sakhis (which literally means stories) do not form any part of formal Sikh religious texts, largely because many of them are apocryphal. They were written long after the events took place and based as they were on oral history, the originals were coloured with the hues of personal interpretations of the person who wrote them. It may well be interpreted that "the purpose of the Janamsakhis was perhaps not to record history or to provide an exegesis of Guru Nanak's bani" as explained by Dr Kirpal Singh, whose book '*Janamsakhi Tradition: An Analytical Study*' the author refers to occasionally (see excerpts in this Issue). The purpose (of Janamsakhis) was simply to reveal to the readers the wonderful personality of Guru Nanak and to provide information, in simple terms, of the unique and enlightened faith that he preached.

It is even more important for people to get acquainted with the myriad tales propounded in the Janamsakhis because, as the author Dr Harish Dhillon explains, "Guru Nanak was a man with his feet firmly rooted on the ground, a householder in every sense of the word,



who, in a world fouled by hatred and violence, brought a message of peace and harmony to followers of the mutually hostile religions of Islam and Hinduism... Guru Nanak was impelled by a strong sense of social justice and equality...He was, in his own gentle but clear manner, a crusader against corruption and social inequality. Guru Nanak always took the side of the poor, the marginalised and the exploited. All men and women were equal, irrespective of caste, creed, wealth, social standing and gender. He taught that the basics of a good life were: honest earning through one's labour; concern and compassion for the less fortunate; selfless service to the community; and the constant renewal of faith in God through prayer. In spite of all contradictions and conflicts of the time, there is no doubt of the essential veracity of the picture of Guru Nanak that emerges from the Janamsakhis."

Accordingly, the author has retold some stories of the Janamsakhis but has also used his imagination to build up details of backgrounds, settings, incidents and sometimes, even characters that transport readers into those times of Guru Nanak and the stark simplicity of life that prevailed.

The book has added significance for the *Nishaan* journal as its Editorial Director Bhayee Sikander Singh has given his valuable advice and useful material to Dr Harsh Dhillon, including the original *azaan* for the chapter on 'Music and Worship', which is reproduced for readers of the *Nishaan*.

Monica Arora

Music and Worship: the Azaan



From Mecca, Nanak and Mardana went on to the holy city of Medina. After spending a few days there they travelled towards the north-east across the Arabian Desert till they reached Baghdad on the banks of the river Tigris.

The city of Baghdad, as we know it today, was founded in AD 769 on the site of an older city of the same name by Caliph Al-Mansur. It was designed to be the new capital of the Caliphate Empire. The caliph had chosen the site well, having a mild, temperate climate and, topographically, offering easy possibilities of defence. It had proximity to water as it was built on the banks of the river Tigris and had access to the river Euphrates through a system of canals and bridges. But, most importantly, it was built on the Khurasan route, which was the meeting point of the caravans from the

four cardinal directions and thus had easy access to every trading possibility. It was also an important stop for those making the sacred pilgrimage of Haj to the holy city of Mecca. It was no wonder that soon after it was established, Baghdad became the focal point of the Islamic Golden Age. Because of its many attractions, more and more people chose to settle here and it soon became a hub for the pursuit of both knowledge and culture. The location of Baghdad was ideal for the production of paper and this, in turn, led to an ever-increasing production of books, which resulted in the mushrooming of bookstores and libraries. Schools for every conceivable discipline flourished and Baghdad became the centre of learning of the Islamic world. It is claimed that, in its heyday, Baghdad eclipsed even Ctesiphon, capital of the Persian Empire in its glory.

Sadly, it lost its pre-eminence with shifting of the capital to Samara. It suffered further when Halagu Khan, the Mongol chieftain, sacked it in 1258. Though it had lost its position of pre-eminence in the Islamic world, yet it continued to boast of at least a dozen famous schools of Islamic studies.

It was to this Baghdad that Guru Nanak came. He set up camp in a tomb on the outskirts of the city. It was a simple, modest-sized one: built of undressed stone, set in the centre of a fair-sized courtyard, which, in turn, was enclosed by a stone wall with arched alcoves set in it. It was obviously the tomb of an important person, someone who either had power and position while he lived or someone who had been highly respected. There were no attendants in residence and yet there was no air of neglect about the building. The premises were clean and wore an air of having been freshly swept, and over the grave, there were remnants of the Thursday evening prayers — little oil lamps and a fresh chaddar covering the grave. Obviously, someone still cared enough for the departed soul to offer prayers in his memory. Nanak felt a kinship with the air of calm and serenity that pervaded the structure and was happy with his choice of the camping site.

That evening, in the quiet, peaceful atmosphere of the tomb, Nanak decided to conduct his prayer meeting.

When Mardana tuned his rabaab and struck up the accompaniment to his master's singing, two little heads appeared on top of the boundary wall and two sets of curious eyes peered down at the strangers. Two young boys playing outside the tomb had heard the strange and unusual sound of prayers in another language and then of the singing, and intrigued by them, had climbed onto the wall to investigate.

Once the prayers were over Nanak beckoned them to come and receive prasad. After an initial hesitation, the boys came into the courtyard. The ease with which they came, it was obvious that they were familiar with the place. The elder of the two looked up into Nanak's face and asked: "Who are you?" "We are travellers from Hindustan. We had come to visit the holy cities of Mecca and Medina and are now on our way home, replied Nanak.

The boys were quiet for a while and then it was the turn of the younger one to ask a question: "What was it that you were singing?"

'We were singing a song in praise of the Supreme Being. Singing is an essential part of our worship,' explained Nanak. The boys looked at each other and then the older one said: "You must forgive us if we find your form of worship strange. Music does not form a part of our worship."

The boys lingered on a while longer, intrigued by the strangers. Then, as the evening shadows lengthened and darkness began to gather, Nanak smiled at the two boys and said: "It's getting late. You better go home or else your parents will begin to worry about you."

The boys told a few of their friends about the strangers who had camped in the tomb and about their strange form of worship. On the second evening, a fairly large group had gathered in the tomb to listen to this strange man and his strange form of worship. When Nanak burst into a song, there was a moment of confused stillness. Some were touched by the beauty of the song; some did not know what to make of this strange form of worship,



Guru Nanak at Baghdad



of divine origin and deserved to be rewarded rather than be punished. However, the mood among the majority remained hostile. This strange and forbidden form of worship was a threat to their religion and, if it was not nipped in the bud, it could grow in popularity and endanger the very foundation of Islam.

The most potent force in uniting people and motivating them to violence is a perceived threat to their religion. The tendency towards violent action had gained such force in the minds of the mob that it was only a question of the first stone being thrown. But before one of the hot-headed, orthodox fundamentalists could take

upon himself to cast the first stone, Nanak's hymn came to a close, and after a moment of silence, he surprised his listeners by breaking into the azaan that the muezzin sang each time he called the faithful to prayer. Beyond the opening lines, the words were strange, but there was no mistaking the melody.

They had heard the azaan a thousand times before, but there was something very special about this one. It was sweet and pure like the waters of a mountain spring and had the poignancy of the longing of a murid (a follower or a disciple) for his absent murshid (teacher) and the intensity of the desire of a dervish for his absent master. Paradoxically, it also had the peace and serenity of one who has been face to face with the Maker. The opening had echoed the muezzin's call and the strange new words that came later only reiterated what Islam had taught them.

The azaan is considered by many, including non-Muslims, to be the most beautiful music in the world and Nanak's rendering bore this contention out in ample measure. The hearts of the listeners swelled with inexplicable happiness, a happiness so intense that it brought tears to their eyes. Even the most orthodox and hostile amongst the crowd were moved by the sheer beauty of Nanak's azaan. They knew that, in that moment, they had experienced divinity. As if on a pre-arranged signal, the stones dropped from their hands and as the singing finished, the fundamentalists fell as one on their knees, to pray.

Gurdwara Guru Nanak at Baghdad in Iraq

and there were still others who were angry and upset that one of the tenets of orthodox Islam, which forbade the use of music in worship, was being violated. But the predominant mood was one of confusion as to how to react to this strange and controversial practice. When Nanak finished his hymn, he greeted the group of people with a smile and with folded hands. A few answered his greetings but the majority slunk away guiltily, as if even by just listening to Nanak's song they would be committing a sin.

Word of the strange practice spread like wildfire through the town. The flames of anger and hostility were fanned by the custodians of the orthodox form of Islam, which was practised by the vast majority of the residents. This group had a fiery discussion about the sacrilege that the stranger had committed and how he must be punished. Members of this group fanned out into the more thickly inhabited localities of the town, where they described the terrible sin of the strange faqir and how it was their duty, as true Muslims, to punish him for it. It was agreed that the apt punishment was the traditionally Arab one — stoning unto death.

That evening, as Nanak launched into his Bani, a large, hostile group of men crowded around him. As they listened to the hymn, there were some among the crowd who were touched not only by the beauty of the melody but also by the purity and sweetness of Nanak's voice. They felt their anger melt away and found themselves looking uncomfortably at the stones they carried in their hands. Surely such beautiful music could only be



No words were said, no words needed to be said. Nanak had made his point. The Prophet Muhammad had banned the singing of songs, which could cause evil passions. However, the singing of the eulogies of God, like the azaan, was nectar for the soul.

AZAAN



Azaan is called out by a muezzin from the mosque five times a day, traditionally from the minaret, summoning Muslims for mandatory worship (*salat*). A second call, known as *iqama*, (set up) then summons Muslims to line up for the beginning of the prayers. The main purpose behind the multiple loud pronouncements of azaan in every mosque is to make available to everyone an easily intelligible summary of Islamic belief. It is intended to bring to the mind of every believer and non-believer the substance of Islamic beliefs, or its spiritual ideology. In modern times, loudspeakers have been installed on minarets for this purpose.

The azaan recites the Takbir (God is great) followed by the Shahada (There is no god but God, Muhammad is the messenger of God). This statement of faith, called the Kalimah, is the first of the Five Pillars of Islam.

Towards A More Peaceful World



Lord Indarjit Singh of Wimbledon was invited the keynote Sikh speaker at the 2015 Parliament of World's Religions at Salt Lake City in the USA.

*The Lord first created Light:
From the Lord's play all living creatures
came,*

*And from the same Divine Light all creation sprang.
Why then should we divide human creatures
Into the high and the low?*

*Brother, be not in error:
All Creation emanates from the one Creator
Evident in all creation,*

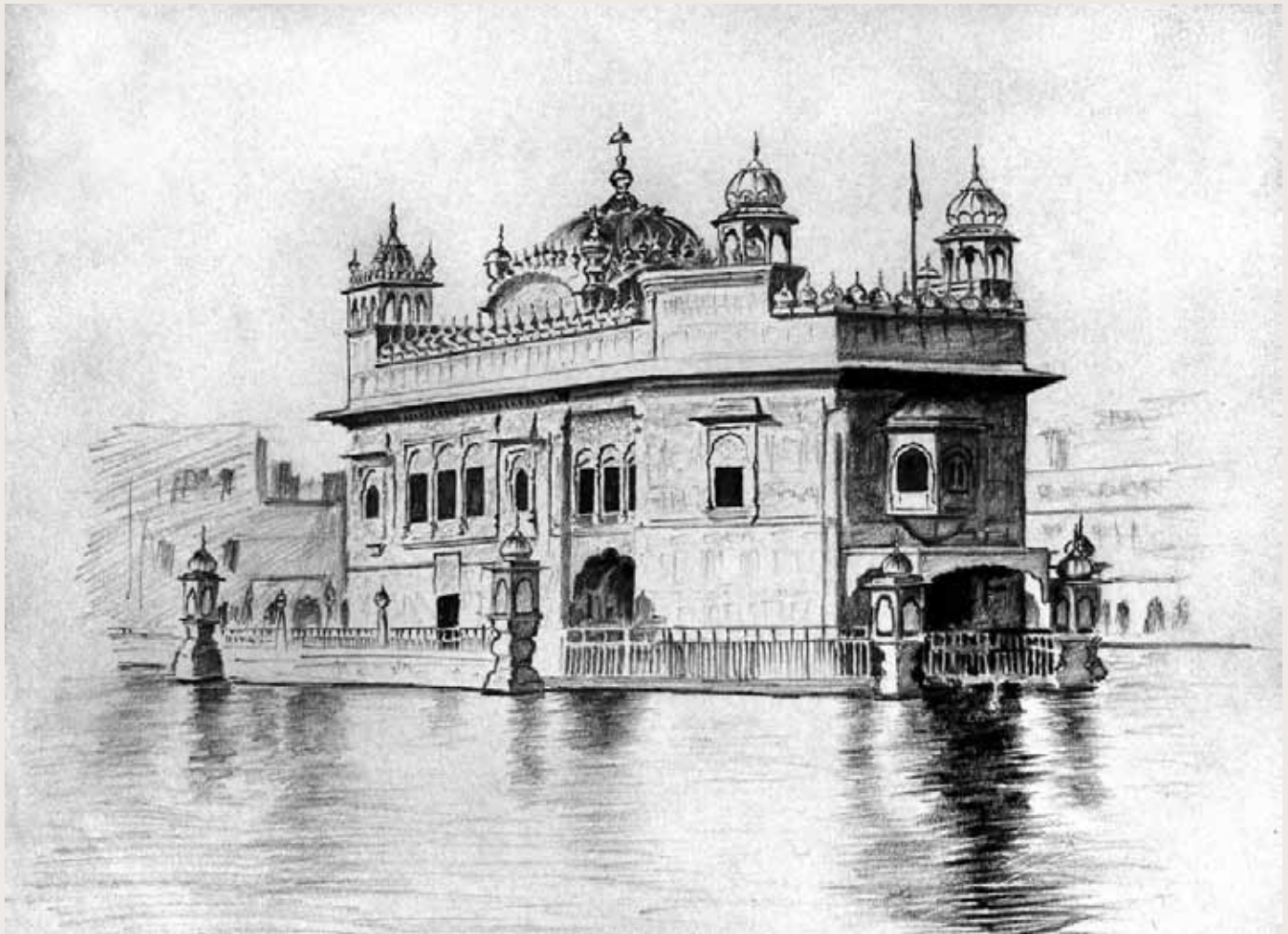
*The Lord's Spirit is all-pervading
The Lord, the Maker, hath molded one mass of clay
Into vessels of diverse shapes.
Free from taint are all the vessels of clay
Since free from taint is the Divine Potter.*

Guru Granth Sahib page 1349

The allusion to the different vessels of clay and the one Divine Potter, reminds us that despite apparent differences, we are all equal members of our one human race. This verse or shabad taken from the Sikh Holy Scriptures, the Guru Granth Sahib, in many ways encapsulates both the thrust of Sikh teachings and the central theme of this historic Parliament, in its emphasis on the absurdity of all man made distinctions of birth, class or creed. Other verses in the Guru Granth Sahib make clear that this equality also extends to full gender equality.

Sikhism is one of our different paths towards a summit of understanding of our common responsibility to the Creator, to work for the benefit of our fellow human beings. Sikhs believe our different paths are not mutually exclusive, but frequently merge to give us both a heightened understanding of our own faith and our common responsibilities.

Our Gurus emphasised respect for other ways of life in many different ways. Guru Arjan, the fifth of our ten



founding Gurus incorporated some uplifting verses of Hindu and Muslim poets into the Guru Granth Sahib, including the one I've just read, to show that no one religion has a monopoly of truth and all faiths should be respected.

To promote this reaching out to others, the Guru asked a Muslim saint to lay the foundation stone of the historic Darbar Sahib at Amritsar, commonly known as the 'Golden Temple'. In furthering the world's first major move to interfaith understanding, the Guru placed a door at each of its four sides to signify a welcome to all from any spiritual or geographic direction. The Ninth Guru, Tegh Bahadur, took this further by giving his life for defending the Hindu community's right to freedom of worship against a policy of forced conversion by the then Mughal rulers. In doing so he gave practical utterance to Voltaire's famous words: "I may not believe in what you say, but I will defend to the death your right to say it."

I am delighted that this Parliament has set its goal as the reclaiming of our common humanity. It is a

recognition that religion has largely failed to move minds to what Sikhs call a Gurmukh or Godly direction, by making concern for others central to all we do. Instead of recognising the common thrust of our different faiths, we have set barriers of belief between them smugly, and sometimes violently, proclaiming our superiority and exclusive path to God.

Our failure to give a clear ethical lead centered on compassion and concern for others, has led to a society obsessed in searching for contentment through material possessions, creating a selfish society in which the vulnerable suffer. Our common task then is to reclaim the heart of society by working together to create a society that makes responsible and compassionate living central to all we do. I am confident that this Parliament will help us explore ways to do just this.

Role of Religion in a Secular World

Today, we look with bewilderment and disbelief at brutalities inflicted on the suffering people in Syria, Iraq and much of the Middle East and in many other parts of the world. Killing in the name of religion is nothing

new. Guru Nanak, founder of the Sikh faith was himself a witness to the Mughal invasion of India and the atrocities against a mostly Hindu population. The Guru, reflecting on the killings and atrocities, put the blame firmly on the divisive packaging of competing faiths, as superior and exclusive paths to God, with claims to be inheritors of God's patronage and 'final revelation'.

It is this bigotry of belief with God on our side, applauding all we do in his name, that led to conflict in the past and today, is used to justify killings and atrocities against thousands of innocents across the world.

Guru Nanak, in teachings rooted in compassion and common sense, argued that the One God of all humanity does not have favourites and is not in the least bit interested in our different religious labels but in what we do. He saw different religions as different paths to responsible living, and taught that all such paths should be respected.

Guru Arjan the Fifth of Guru Nanak's nine successor Gurus, emphasized this need for respect between different faiths by asking a Muslim saint Mia Mir to lay the foundation stone of the Golden Temple to show his respect for Islam. In the world's first major move in inter faith dialogue, he included verses of Hindu and Muslim saints in our holy scriptures, the Guru Granth Sahib, to underline the central Sikh teaching that no one religion has a monopoly of truth; a concept, that in my view, is essential if our different faiths are to play their true role of giving meaning and direction to compassionate and responsible living.

It is important to remember that misplaced religious zeal is not the only cause of conflict in our troubled world. Stalin, Hitler and Pol Pot were not particularly religious. A few years back, I did some work for the Human Rights organisation Amnesty International, looking at genocide and human rights abuse in a number of different countries; abuse which often involved unbelievable depravity. Almost as bad as the abuse, was the realisation that those who we learn to trust are often the perpetrators: police and soldiers, and, even worse, priests and teachers and previously friendly neighbours. Why do people behave in such ways?

The sobering conclusion is that our human family has only a thin veneer of civilisation that differentiates us from those we call savages; a veneer that is all too easily shed at times when, either through misplaced religious zeal or the simple pursuit of power, we are persuaded to see others as lesser beings.

How can we move our wayward human race into what Sikhs would call a Gurmukh or Godly direction?

Why has organised religion lost its sense of direction?

The problem, is that the ethical teachings of our different faiths, are extremely easy to state, but difficult to live by. It is hard to put others before self; it is hard to forgive. Lust and greed have their attractions. So, in our perverse way we develop surrogates for true religious teachings. If, once a week, we sing words of ethical guidance in beautiful hymns and chants, perform rituals, build beautiful places of worship, fast, and go on pilgrimages, we can easily convince ourselves, that we are following the main thrust of religious teachings.

Guru Nanak, the founder of the Sikh faith was not too impressed with such practices. He taught:

*'Pilgrimages, austerities and ritual acts of giving or compassion
Are in themselves, not worth a grain of sesame seed'*

It's living true to ethical imperatives that count. It's much easier to look to the trappings of our different religions, than to their actual teachings. Sikhism is a fairly new religion and we haven't had much time to develop rituals to take the place of ethical imperatives. But sadly, we are doing our best to catch up, with interminable arguments over the holiness of sitting on the ground as opposed to chairs or buffet, in the meal that follows Sikh services, and in other ways that confuse peripheral arguments with true religion!

The vacuum created by this failure to focus on key religious teachings was quickly filled by the pursuit of material wealth. Society rightly rejected the so-called religious view that taught spiritual improvement and at the same time countenanced poverty, disease and suffering. Unfortunately, the pendulum has swung too far and mankind is engaged in seeking happiness and contentment through the blind pursuit of material wealth to the neglect of the spiritual side of life.

To me as a Sikh, much of the unhappiness in the world today stems from our basic failure to recognise that life has both spiritual and material dimensions, and if we neglect either of these, it will be to our ultimate neglect. This fundamental truth has, as you all know, long been recognised by our religious founders.

Sikhism gives the story of the miser Dunni Chand who spent all his time amassing wealth until he was given a needle by Guru Nanak to take into the next world. On another occasion, the Guru gently chided some so-called holy men who had left their families to go in the wilderness in search of God. The Guru told them that God was not to be found in the wilderness but in their homes in looking to the needs of their families

and others around them.

The Guru taught that we should live like the lotus flower, which having its roots in muddy waters, still flowers beautifully above. Similarly we should all live and work for the benefit of society, but should always be above it meanness and pettiness.

Today in our preoccupation with things material, we have forgotten the importance of balance between material and spiritual and, as a result, have previously unheard of prosperity side by side with escalating crime, rising alcoholism and drug dependency, loneliness, the homeless and broken homes and other disturbing evidence of social disintegration.

A More Cohesive and Caring Society



How can we move to more balanced and compassionate living? How can we make ours a more cohesive and caring society. Voluntary effort and increasingly government and other statutory effort are becoming more alert to social ills in our society. But in focussing on problems, rather than more holistically on causes, we sometime tend to look through the wrong end of the telescope, and seek to treat spots and sores of social maladies, rather than look further to underlying

causes.

If problems resulting from drug abuse take up too much police time, the call is “legalise drug use and free the police”, rather than question why the use of drugs has risen so dramatically. Increasing alcohol abuse? Let’s extend or abolish licensing hours to spread the incidence of drunken or loutish and drunken behaviour. Result, a rise in binge drinking. Too many people ending up in prison? Let’s build more prisons! Extend this thinking, of looking to the wrong end of a problem, to the behaviour of little junior who greets visitors to the house by kicking them in the shins. Solution: issue said visitors with shin pads as they enter the front door!

It is important to differentiate between two levels of behaviour. The first is behaviour that keeps us out of trouble. For the small child it not throwing food about, or not kicking aunts and uncles in the shins. For adults it’s being reasonably polite to those around us, and complying with those in authority and the rules and laws of society, unless we know we can get away with it.

Is religion necessary for promoting such conformity? Of course not. No more than it’s necessary to involve religion in teaching a dog to stand on its hind legs or a dolphin to perform tricks. Sanction or reward in the teaching of social norms are sufficient motivators. Hindsight however reminds us that accepted social norms of the day, like acceptance of slavery or discrimination on grounds of gender or ethnicity can later be seen cruel and oppressive.

The teachings of our great religious leaders on the other hand, frequently challenge social norms. Religious teachings have nothing to do with unthinking conformity, or, equally importantly, individual or material advancement. Instead, they look to spiritual and ethical advancement for both the individual and society as a whole.

Religion takes us away from obsession with self, to active concern for others. As Guru Nanak taught, where self exists there is no God, where God exists there is no self. Or as a Christian theologian put it: it’s the ‘I’ in the middle of ‘sin’ that makes it Sin. Ironically, a recent edition of the Journal Experimental Psychology after detailed recent studies underlined the same important truth. Religion then, is fundamentally different from civics or citizenship education, in that far from conforming, it has its own standards that often can and do, challenge existing unjust and discriminatory social norms.

This is particularly important because politics and the democratic process are geared to pandering to short-

term popularity, and this can result in populist policies that harm our long-term interests. In a debate in the British House of Lords, a speaker argued that “religion was out of step with society”. I replied that to me this was like saying, my satnav is not following my directions.

Sikhs believe that mankind’s different religions should work together and take the lead in addressing the real causes of our social ills – starting with the role of the family. We see marriage, fidelity and the family as central to the health and wellbeing of society. It is easy to allow understanding, compassion and support for those in different situations to blind us to the importance of an ideal. TV comedy in which infidelity is seen as something of a giggle, blinds us to the hurt that transient, adult relationships, can cause to children.

A short true story makes the point better than any words of mine: Two small boys were fighting, hammer and tongs in the school playground. With great difficulty, a teacher finally managed to prise the two apart demanding to know what it was all about. Looking at the teacher, with eyes swollen with tears, one of the children said it was because the other’s dad had taken his mum away. While we should not condemn those who chose different lifestyles, there is a need for clearer highlighting of responsibility and the benefits of stable family relations. Both those in political life and leaders of faith communities have much to do here.

Hypocrisies of Nations

Today, in our yearning for peace we know the direction in which we have to go. Yet, rooted in material greed, bigotry and selfishness, we continue in a direction that is bound to lead to further conflict. We talk of a common brotherhood yet are prepared to accept our brothers and sisters and their children being killed by bullets and bombs manufactured by us and other developed and developing countries. Even India, the land of Mahatma Gandhi, boasts that it is now an exporter of arms.

Most industrialised nations see the arms industry as an important earner of foreign exchange as well as a means to political leverage on the less ‘developed’ world, often regardless of gross human rights abuses in recipient countries. The current situation in the Middle



East is a case in point. We criticise Russia for supporting President Assad, a dictator without a democratic mandate. Yet, in the name of strategic interest, the West sells billions of dollars of arms to Saudi Arabia, a country that ferments unrest in the region, a country that barbarically beheads hundreds of those who dissent from its dictatorial rule every year, and amputates the limbs of many others. A country that oppresses women and does not allow Sikhs and other faiths to openly practice their religion. Yet, with Britain’s help, Saudi Arabia today chairs the UN Human Rights Council.

Unbelievably, when I questioned, in the House of Lords, the morality of a government statement that human rights should not be allowed to get in the way of trade with China, I received a reply to the effect that strategic interest must trump human rights!

When a government Minister spoke of the need for an international inquiry into human rights abuse in Sri Lanka, I congratulated the government, and asked if they would support a similar inquiry into the widespread killing of Sikhs in India in 1984, I received a short, sharp reply: that is a matter for the Indian government—a much bigger trading partner! It was the great Human Rights activist, Andrei Sakharov who wisely reminded us that “there will never be peace in the world until we are even handed in human rights abuse”.

As our children and grandchildren look back on today’s times, I am sure that they will do so with loathing and revulsion at a generation prepared to countenance and continue the suffering of millions for its own economic prosperity. Today, the dominant creed



in much of the world is that individual happiness and so-called strategic interest are all that really matter. What do we need to do to change to promote greater social justice both at home and abroad?

In 'do it yourself' activity, there is a saying that when all else fails, look at the instructions. In the past, religion failed to give true ethical direction because it looked more at the packaging than on far seeing guidance. Arrogant secular society is not, as we've seen, doing much better and it is the responsibility of our different religion to get it to look and act on the ethical instructions for sane peaceful and responsible living contained in the teachings of our different faiths

True Respect and Tolerance

The first step in doing this is to move from hostility and suspicion of one another, to true respect and tolerance. Not the sort of tolerance that grudgingly puts up with others, but a tolerance that says, in the words of Voltaire, "I may not believe in what you say, but will defend to the death your right to say it". A sentiment translated into action by Guru Tegh Bahadur, the Ninth Guru of the Sikhs, who was martyred defending the right to freedom of worship of the Hindu community, against Mughal persecution.

The second step would be drastic spring-cleaning of religion. Today there is an urgent need for us to discard rituals, superstitions and dated customs and practices that have nothing to do with teachings of founders of our different faiths. Practices that here over years

become falsely attached to religion and simply serve to distort teachings. Practices and customs that have no relevance to life today. We need to look at guidance in the context of today's times rather than the particular social or political circumstances of earlier days.

At the same time, we have to knock down the false barriers of belief and exclusivity between religions. When, in the course of redevelopment, a building is demolished in a familiar area, we see the surrounding landscape in a quite different light. In the same way, when false barriers of bigotry are demolished through dialogue and understanding, we will see our different religions as they really are: overlapping circles of belief, in which the area of overlap is much greater than the smaller area of difference. In that area of overlap, we find common values of tolerance, compassion and concern for social justice: values that can take us from the troubled times of today, to a fairer and more peaceful world.

Extracted from 'The Sikh Messenger', the quarterly magazine of the Network of Sikh Organisations, UK



Lord Indarjit Singh is a prominent British Asian active in Sikh and interfaith activities and a member of the House of Lords. His 'Thought for the Day' has been regularly broadcast on BBC Radio for decades.

Sikhs at the Parliament of World's Religions

The Council of Parliament of World's Religions (CPWR) was held at Salt Lake City in the USA from 15 to 19 October 2015. This event is held every four years and this year it was attended by over 9,500 people from over 50 different religious/peace organisations and more than 80 countries.

The Parliament of the World's Religions included five days of interfaith dialogue, exhibitions and performances. The 2015 Parliament was officially opened with a parade of flags and Native American drumming as regional tribal chiefs welcomed visitors to their land, and prayed for world peace. It was attended by 10,000 people from 80 countries and 50 faith and non-faith groups. Lord Indarjit Singh of the UK, delivered the Sikh message of interfaith understanding and of defending religious freedom, during the opening plenary session.

Also, as Mejjindarpal Kaur wrote, "This year, United Sikhs volunteers at the Parliament spoke on service (seva) as a pathway to alleviate human suffering; that society will have to address fear in order to address hate crime and prejudice; how technology may help alleviate poverty in Panjab where a farmer is committing suicide every few hours; and how there can be no peace until truth is revealed for justice and reconciliation to take place."



Kamla Kaur addressed attendees on her journey discovering Sikhi and said, "Having so many people from so many faith traditions talking, singing, praying and working for world peace is grand. The Parliament of World Religions gives me renewed hope for humanity, and faith in Creation/Creator."

Norman Kreisman, a Californian attorney, spoke as 'The American who lived with Bhindranwale' and shared insights into the spirituality of Sant Jarnail Singh. Mr Kreisman lived for 18 years in a room next to Sant Jarnail Singh's at Guru Nanak Niwas at Darbar Sahib (The Golden Temple), before the June 1984 attack on the Sikh sanctum sanctorum.



Thousands of delegates were served langar everyday

Prof Indira Prahst, from Vancouver, examined media representations of Sikhs and how the turban has been signified through a "violent" gaze by the public towards the turban against the back drop of the war on terrorism, secularism and nation building. She argued that the image of Sikhs is a politics of representation.

The highlight of this year's Parliament arguably was the Guru ka Langar which was a combined effort of Sikhs from across the world. The local sangat of the Utah Gurdwara took the lead, providing volunteers and services in every aspect of the langar; *Guru Nanak Nishkam Seva Jatha* (GNSSJ) of United Kingdom organised excellent displays and provided volunteers

to serve the langar; the Khalsa Care Foundation of Los Angeles, California offered services to cook the langar at the Gurdwara and provide outstanding seva overall; and all other panthic organisations provided financial support for the langar to be a resounding success and making a lasting imprint on all the attendees.

One of the Sikh presenters, S. Sutinder Singh observed: "As I entered the building I found myself in a huge hall full of people having Guru ka Langar. I was just awe-struck with the number of people being served (over 5000 every day) and the way they were being served, in a very organised and respectful manner by about a hundred Sikh sevadars. I had been travelling all day and now at 2 pm I decided it was time for me to have langar."

"So I joined the line and the first thing we did was remove our shoes, and the Sikhs helped others cover their heads with cloth. As we moved along the line, another group of Sikhs handed us damp tissues to clean our hands with. Moving along the line we were guided to one of several rows where people were sitting on the floor and already having a meal.

"As soon as I sat down one of the sevadars handed me a plate, and in no time at all, it was filled with naan, daal, chick peas, salad, raita and fruit. I could not believe the efficiency with which it was done. Soon I was enjoying a delicious meal. As I looked around, I saw about a hundred Sikhs serving the food in a very respectful and



Volunteers serving langar at the Parliament of World Religions



Harinder Singh addressing the gathering



Bhai Sahib Satpal Singh Khalsa from Beverley Hills California speaks at a Seminar



Professor Harbans Lal from Texas emphasising the teachings of love, humility, universality of all and the oneness of the Almighty.

dignified manner. For those who were infirm or had difficulty sitting down on the floor, a special area was provided with tables and chairs – how considerate!”

Rev. Marie Gasau, from Oak Creek, Colorado, who had not partaken Langar before, approached one of the Langar organisers, Balwant Singh, and requested his help to start Langar in her home town where there is no Gurdwara (Sikh place of worship).

Sikh speakes held several seminars, panel discussions



Some of the audience at the conference



Bhai Baldeep Singh of the Anad Foundation with Native Americans

and presentations, speaking about their religion, their history and their traditions. There was also made focus on the issues and problems Sikhs have had in the past, especially since 9/11/2001. Other speakers focused on the current issues such as discrimination, hate crimes, bullying and harassment, in the US and in the Punjab.

Some of the key presenters were Lord Indarjit Singh from the UK, Valarie Kaur from the USA, and S. Gurtej Singh of Chandigarh, Punjab, the presentations very well received.



Ragi Kultar Singh and his jatha doing kirtan

Other programmes included kirtan by the *Nishkam Sevak Jatha* and by Ragi Kultar Singh and his Jatha. Sikh youth organisations had a good display and presentations in the 'Sacred Space' room. The visiting guests were treated with detailed information on the Sikh Faith.

The American Sikh Council (ASC) had an exhibit where they handed out educational materials on the Sikh Faith while tying turbans on anyone who wanted one. Over the next few days ASC volunteers tied over 500 turbans. While tying turbans ASC members had one on one contact with guests and the undivided attention for five or so minutes to explain and discuss their heritage.

The turban tying became so popular that when ASC ran out of turban material, guests brought their own scarves and had ASC members tie them like dastaars/turbans. Thanks to local and the Los Angeles sangat who contributed additional turbans, ASC members ended up tying over 850 turbans.



S. Gulbarg Singh of the American Sikh Council tying turban on a delegate

One out of every ten guests had a dastar/turban on their head. And some of the attendees even reported that they slept with their turbans in case they may be unable to put it back on next day. Some actually went to the airport on their way back with the turban on their heads as they wanted to experience the treatment that each

Sikh gets when they travel by air.

As ASC Chair S. Gulbarg Singh witnessed, "Many of the people we tied turbans on would either have tears in their eyes or they would openly start crying. When asked why, they would typically say, 'I never knew you were such generous people, you have had so many bad experiences, from discrimination to killings and yet you are here giving us free food, and tying turbans and being so kind to everyone!,'

"Another teary eyed woman said that her son is homeless in Los Angeles and the only people who care to feed him are the Sikhs. Many of the attendees knew about the Sikhs already and would pass by wishing us well." Hundreds of non-Sikhs were seen sporting colourful turbans at the Parliament and on the streets and shopping malls near the Parliament venue. One non-Sikh attendee who wore his turban to the airport on his way home said, "I have not taken my turban off because I want to know what Sikhs go through at airports when their turbans are searched."

On the final day during the closing ceremonies in a hall with over 5000 attendees, the organisers singled out the Sikhs for praise. Although there were only about a hundred Sikhs in total, there were another 400 people walking around with turbans! The chairman of CPWR said that it was "the first time I have seen so many Sikhs - brown Sikhs, white Sikhs, black Sikhs, yellow Sikhs - and why not?"

In addition, he asked all the Sikhs to stand up and thanked all of them for the 'Guru ka Langar' and once again the attendees responded with thunderous applause. This was the moment that the Sikhs put themselves on the map. This was a truly inspirational meeting. The Sikh participation in this year's Parliament of World's Religions was a monumental success, all due to the collective effort of Sikhs across our nation and beyond.

ASC member S.Iqbal Singh stated the most common comment by the attendees on the final day was, "The Sikhs have stolen the show!"

Imam Abdul Malik Mujahid, the Chair of the Parliament of the World's Religions, stated: "And who says there is no free lunch in America? Sikhs came with kirpans and conquered the Parliament by sharing their langar tradition all five days!"

The next Parliament of World Religions has been scheduled in two years (not four) with the country to be announced in time.

With inputs from sikhchic.com

The Extant Khalifa of Classical Gurbani Kirtan Bhai Baldeep Singh



Bhai Baldeep Singh descends from a long lineage of masters of the Gurbāni Kīrtan *maryadā*, and is today its 13th generation exponent. His repertoire includes masterpieces that were first composed by the Sikh Gurus and the Bhagats themselves. Bhai Baldeep Singh is also the prime exponent (*khalifā*) of this oldest *gharāna* of classical percussions, *pakhāwaj/mridang* playing of Punjab known as Sultanpur Lodhi – Amritsari Bāj.

In 1989 he renounced a promising career in aviation, choosing instead to devote himself to the study of the highly evolved and complex heritage of Gurbani Kirtan.

His pilgrimage began with intensive meditation on the classical shabad-kirtan taught to him by his granduncles, Bhai Gurcharan Singh and Bhai Avtar Singh and the vast knowledge that they bequeathed to Bhai Baldeep Singh included masterpieces that were first composed by the Sikh Gurus themselves. From the highly distinguished and eminent Bhai Arjan Singh 'Tarangar', he learnt the system (*silsila*) of *pakhawaj/mridang* playing known as Amritsari Baaj. Today, Bhai Baldeep Singh is the prime exponent (*khalifa*) of this *gharana* of classical percussions of Punjab.

During his long journey he pursued masters all over India, Pakistan and indeed the world, seeking



any fragment of the Guru's tradition that might be still remembered. Many of these teachers had fallen into obscurity or were in the twilight of their lives. Fortunately, their knowledge has been preserved in the imprint they left on Bhai Baldeep Singh.

Dhrupad has been the music of the devotees of India's many spiritual traditions. The Sikh gurus also expressed deep spiritual mysteries through musical compositions in the *dhrupad* style. Bhai Baldeep Singh has been mentored in the *dhrupad* genre by his granduncles Bhai Avtar Singh (1925-2006) and Bhai Gurcharan Singh (b. 1915) as well as Ustad Rahim Fahimuddin Dagar (1926-

2011), a 19th generation scion of the Dagar-vani and Ustad Malikzada Mohammad Hafiz Khan Khandehre Talwandiwalé (d. 2009), the 133th exponent of the Khandar-vani.

The Sultanpur Lodhi – Amritsari baaj is the oldest surviving *pakhawaj-jori* traditions in South-Asia. Bhai Baldeep Singh is the for-bearer of one of the most illustrious lineages that was once known as *Naeeyan-dagharana* for Baba Maiyya Singh's father was the Naeé (hygienist) of Maharaj Ranjit Singh.

For his field-specific percussion related research and comparative studies, Bhai Baldeep Singh has also interacted with the exponents of various traditions, such as *Padma Shree* Pandit Shankarrao Shindey Appegaonkar, Ustad Gyani Darshan Singh, Bhai Narinder Singh, Pandit Laxmi-narayan Pawar, Pandit Gopal Das, Pandit Bal-krishan Sharma, Bhai Mohinder Singh, Bhai Balbir Singh, Maharaj Bir Singh Namdhari, Pandit Ram-ashish Pathak, Ustad Altaf Hussain, Bhai Ranjit Singh, Bhai Sham Singh, Shri Pawan Kumar Sharma and Pandit Panna Lal Upadhaya of the Gaya *gharana*.

For his vocals related research he has benefited from his conversations with Professor S. K. Saxena, Dr. Sumati Mutatkar, Sardar Balbir Singh Kalsi of Agra *gharana*, Bibi Jaswant Kaur, Raja Mrigendra Singh and Pandit Vidur Mallik.

Bhai Baldeep Singh has inspired interest in the structure of the classic poetic forms found in Gurbani, has revived the rare art of singing the 22 *vaars* (odes) and other folk based genres, and has awakened the artist elements hidden in the old compositions.

Following Gurmat Sangeet exponents of yore, who often included instrument making in their repertoire, Bhai Baldeep Singh sought out master craftsmen to learn their art. Among them was the legendary Gyani Harbhajan Singh who helped Bhai Baldeep Singh sharpen his skills as an instrument maker.

In 1988, Bhai Baldeep Singh undertook a herculean



Bhai Avtar Singh, who bequeathed the classical form of shabad-kirtan to Bhai Baldeep Singh

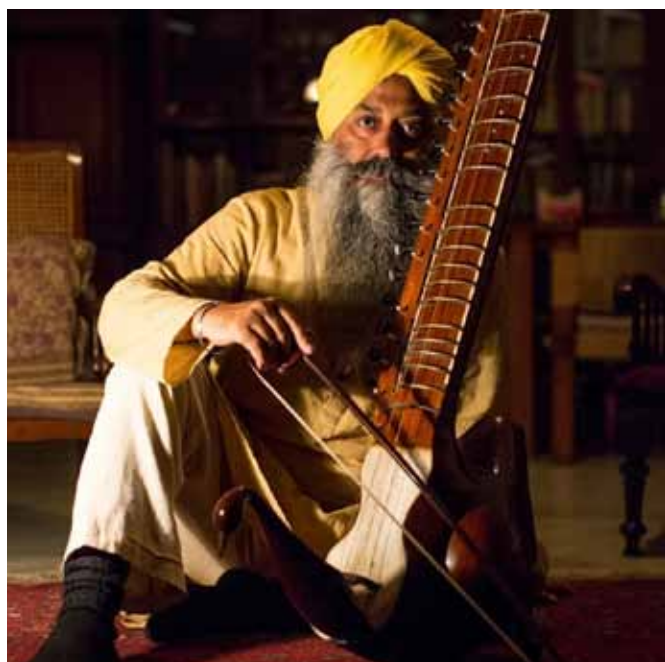
project to revive almost all the instruments from the Gurus' times by personally handcrafting them under the guidance of master luthier Gyani Harbhajan Singh of Village Dandian, Hoshiarpur. Today, he has the unique distinction of having carved the nomadic rebāb (also known as the *hindustani* or *dhrupadi-rebāb*), *sarandā*, *tāus*, *dilruba*, *tamburni* (*tanpura*), *jori* and *pakhāwaj – mridang*. In January 2002, he made a violin based on the Stradivari violin in Spring City, Utah (USA), under the guidance of his friend Paul Hart, a master lute-maker. He has designed four new bows for the *tāus*, which have been handcrafted by Allan Herou in Paris (2003) and Nicola Galliena in Milan (January and March 2007, January 2008).

He has also made a detailed audio-visual presentation on the subject, *The Musical Instrument of Gurbāni and Bhakti Traditions*, which has received rave reviews around the world. Bhai Baldeep Singh has inspired people around the world to take up the musical instruments of the Gurus' court and many institutions around the world have now included the playing of some of these instruments as a part of their curriculum.

Bhai Baldeep Singh has developed a comprehensive educative process, which consists of the original practices of *nāda yoga*, and the modes of teaching-cum-learning traditionally prevalent among the exponents of Gurbani and Bhakti traditions. Besides giving many concerts, he has also conducted workshops, lecture-demonstrations and seminars in India, Europe, North America, Southeast Asia and Australia. Several of his



Bhai Baldeep Singh with other musicians



**Bhai Baldeep Singh hand carving a Rabab.
Photo by Parminder S Bhamra. 2006**

articles, poems and papers have been published in renowned academic journals. Since May 2009, he has been conducting interviews for the National television (Doordarshan) and All India Radio (AIR), in which eminent artists and musicians are featured.

In 1997, he received the prestigious Bhai Batan Singh Memorial Award and Delhi State Annual Award (2002-03) for contribution in the field of Music. He has also been conferred the Sikh Gaurav Award for the year 2003 at Amritsar and in 2007, the Kapurthala Heritage Award at Kapurthala. On 15 August, 2011, he received the Punjab State award for his seminal contribution to music (Gurbani Kirtan and classical music) and the arts.

Bhai Baldeep Singh has been very active in the contemporary Indian cultural scene by producing and publishing recordings of rare Indian musical instruments and contributing to the inter-religious and inter-cultural exchange organizing musical festivals and lectures. Some of his most successful presentations include *Laya Darshan: Revealing the Riches of Indian Rhythm* in 2005, *Jashan* in 2006, *ANĀD Kav Tarang* in April 2008, November 2009, November 2010, May 2011



Punjab Languages Department and the Sultānpur Lodhi Development Board. He is also a patron of the Kapurthala Heritage Foundation, Kapurthala. Bhai Baldeep Singh represents the State of Punjab in the General Council of the National Academy of Music and Theatre (Sangeet Natak Akademi), New Delhi and serves in its Executive Board. He is also member of the Advisory Committee for Music, Advisory Committee for Archives and Documentation and the Advisory Committee for Grants of the National Sangeet Natak Akademi.

and November 2011, *Expressions On Nature: Dhart Suhavi* in December 2008 as well as in September 2011 and *Venice and Punjab: Water Memoirs* on February 8, 2010 at the Tagore Theatre, Chandigarh.

Bhai Baldeep Singh is also a sensitive interpreter of the need for a cultural transformation and rejuvenation. He is the Founder and Managing Trustee of The ANĀD Foundation, a non-profit organisation dedicated to the promotion and preservation of traditional culture, with particular focus on the preservation of South Asia's intangible heritage and cultural traditions. One of The ANĀD Foundation's aims is, in fact, to establish institutions as a means of facilitating the recovery and enhancement of the intangible (*sukham vīrsā*) and tangible (*sthūl vīrsā*) heritage. Bhai Baldeep Singh is in the process of developing the ANĀD CONSERVATORY: *An Institute of Arts, Aesthetics, Cultural Traditions and Developmental Studies*, a 120 Crore project at Sultanpur Lodhi, Kapurthala (Punjab). To encourage the young talent to dedicate and express themselves in various artistic forms, including poetry and literature, especially in the vernacular arts, crafts and musical forms, the Foundation confers ANĀD *Sanmān*, in the fields of poetry, music, dance, sports, science, technology, art, literature, theatre, cinema and handicrafts. In memory of the Punjabi poetess Baljit Kaur Tulsi, the Anād Foundation organizes the poetry festival *Anād Kāv Tarang* since 2008 and confers the *Anād Kāv Sanman*, which is offered to eminent poets and carries a cash prize of Rupees 2.25 lacs, a citation and a *tamra-patra*.

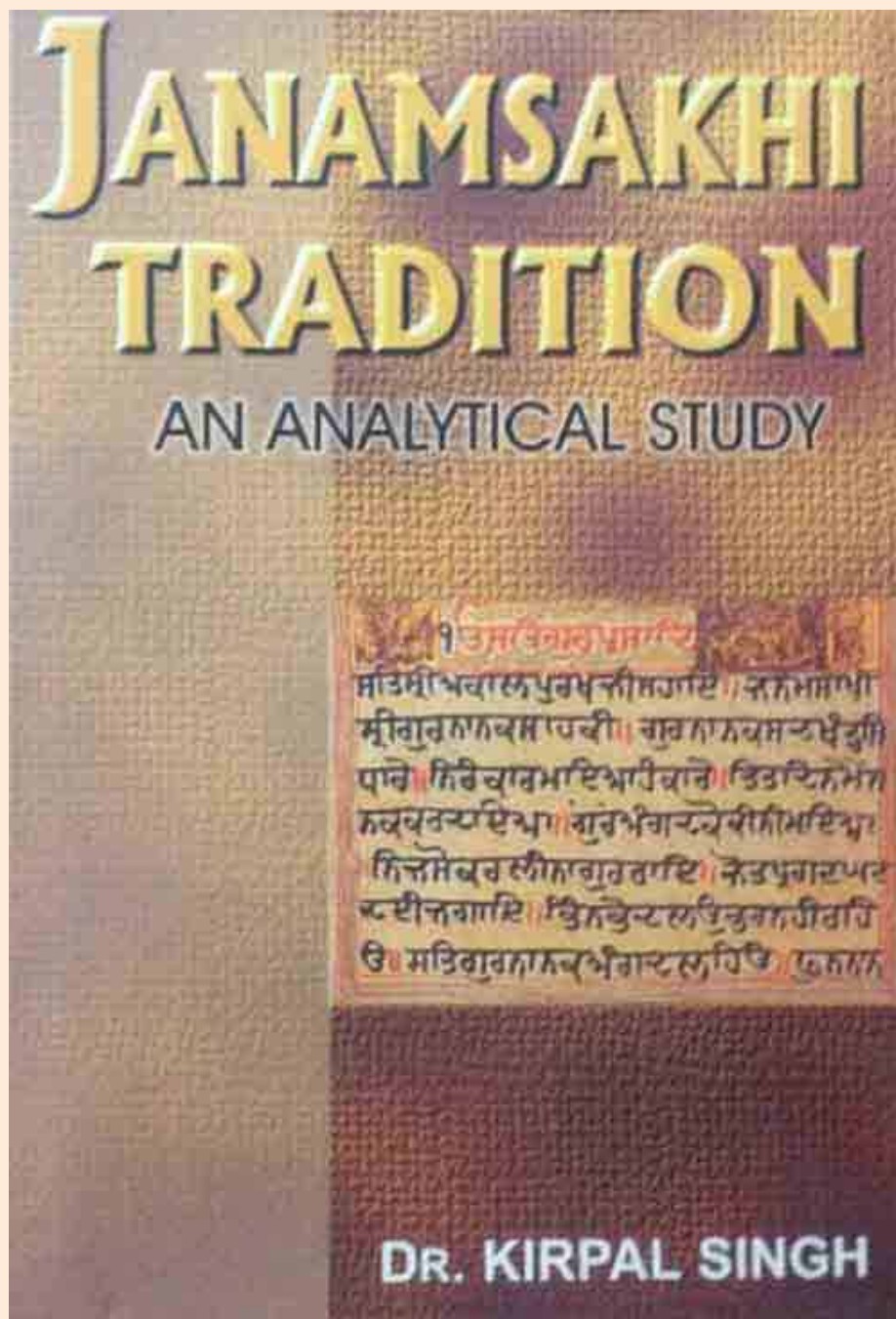
Over the years, Bhai Baldeep Singh has served on many boards and committees, notably in the Core Committee of the Khalsa Heritage Complex (Anandpur Sahib), Executive Committee of the Punjab State Sangeet Natak Academy (2001-3 and 2004-6). He currently serves as member of the Advisory Council of the



Bhai Baldeep Singh with his handcrafted Rababa.
Photo by Thomas R Hughes. 2012. Edits by Manpreet Singh Khalsa.

Excerpted from: SikhWikipedia and <https://anadfoundation.org/about/board-of-trustees-advisors-of-the-anad-foundation/bhai-baldeep-singh/>

Extracts from JANAMSAKHI TRADITION,



An Analytical Study by Dr Kirpal Singh

In his Preface to the book, the learned author Dr Kirpal Singh writes that the *Janamsakhi* literature as such relates exclusively to the life and teachings of Guru Nanak, the founder of Sikhism. The spectrum of this genre of literature has several strands. It elucidates mystic concepts of spiritual elevation, provides the earliest exegesis of the hymns of Guru Nanak and illustrates the teachings of Guru Nanak by narrating interesting anecdotes. The most significant aspect of the *Janamsakhi* literature is that it has preserved the tradition of Guru Nanak's life that became the primary source of information for all the writings on Guru Nanak. Of late the historical validity of this material has been called to question in the name of methodology. I, therefore, propose to dilate on this aspect in the first instance.

According to R.G. Collingwood, the author of *The Idea of History* "the historian must in two ways go beyond what his authorities tell him. One is critical way and this is what Bradley has attempted to analyse. The other is the constructive way. Of this he has said nothing, and to this now, I propose to return. I described constructive history as interpolating, between the statements borrowed from our authorities; other statements simply by them. Thus, our authorities tell us that on one day Caesar was in Rome and a later day in Gaul, they tell us nothing about the journey from one place to other, but we

interpolate this with a perfect good conscience."

"This act of interpolation has two significant characteristics. First, it is in no way arbitrary or merely fanciful; it is necessary in Kantian language a *priori*..... But if our construction involves nothing that is not necessitated by the evidence, it is legitimate historical construction of a kind without which there can be no history at all."

"Secondly what is in this way inferred, is essentially something imagined... That is already an example of historical thinking; and it is not otherwise that we find ourselves obliged to imagine Caesar as having travelled from Rome to Gaul when we are told that he was in these different places at these successive times..." -

"...That the Historian must use his imagination in a common place, to quote Macaulay's *Essay on History*, a perfect historian must possess an imagination sufficiently powerful to make his narrative effective and picturesque." Commenting on it Collingwood writes, "but this is to underestimate the part played by the historical imagination which is properly not ornamental but structural. Without it the historian would have no narrative to adorn." "The imagination that 'blind but indispensable faculty', without which, as Kant has shown, we could never perceive the world around us, is indispensable in the same way to history: it is this which operating not capriciously or fancy but in a *priori* form, does the entire work of historical construction."

At another place Collingwood states, "here and equally in all other kinds of art, a *priori* imagination is at work. Its other familiar functions what may be called the perceptual imagination supplementing and consolidating the data of



Guru Nanak and Mardana

perception."

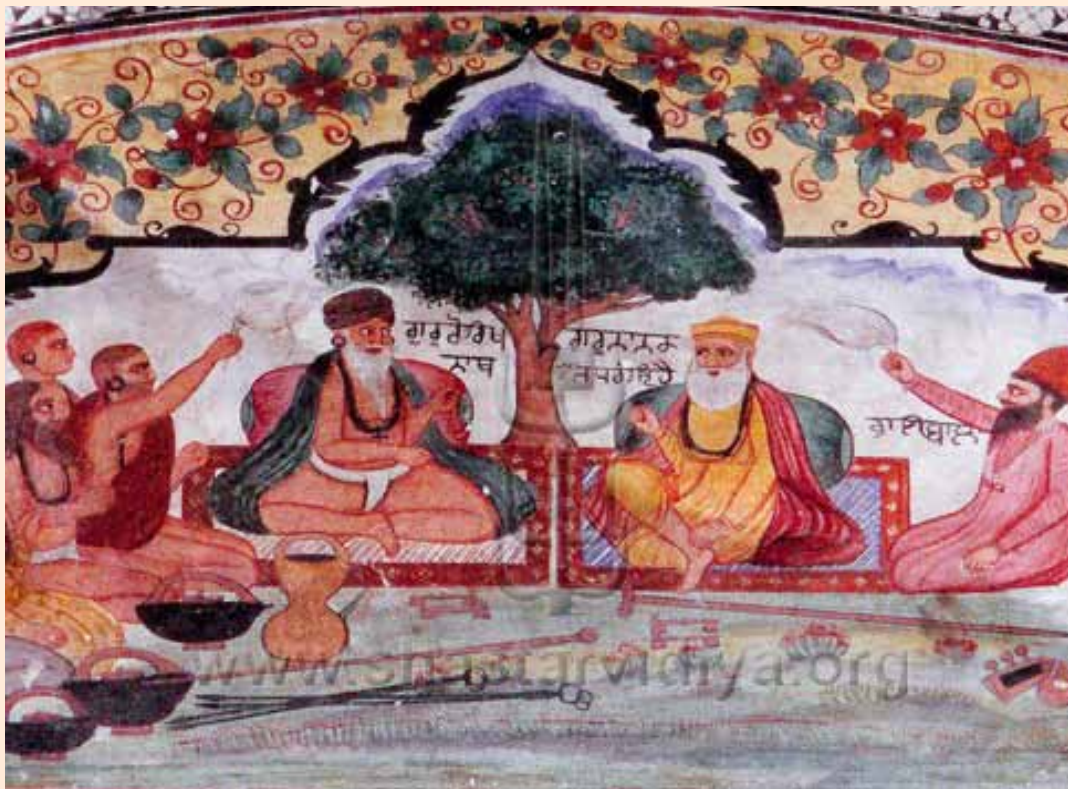
But historical imagination is different. For this; following three conditions are essential :

- Historian's picture must be localised in space and time.
- "All history must be consistent with itself ... there is only one historical world, and everything in it must stand in some relation to everything else, even if relation is only topographical

and chronological.

- "It is of utmost importance that historian's picture stands in a peculiar relation to something called evidence."
- It has been accepted that history is a science as well as an art, 'no more no less'.

In every work of art some kind of imagination is always involved. So is the case with the *Janamsakhis*. The *Janamsakhi* writers were men



Guru Nanak explaining the art and science of Shastravidya

of faith with desire for spiritual pursuits. About Guru Nanak's life, they had before them authentic data in two forms. One was the *Bani* of Guru Nanak as enshrined in the *Adi Granth*, the Sikh scripture, compiled by Guru Arjan Dev, the Fifth Guru. Guru Arjan had rejected works attributed to Guru Nanak like *Nasihat Nama*, *Pransangli* etc. etc. It is an established fact that all the extant *Janamsakhis* came to be written after the compilation of the *Adi Granth* in 1604 AD. A large number of verses of Guru Nanak quoted in the *Janamsakhis* could not be available before 1604 AD. As a source, these verses of the Guru, found in *Adi Granth* in the form of dialogues with the persons of different denominations like Muslim divines, Hindu men of learning (*Pandits*), *Siddhas*, *Yogis*, *Brahmins*, *Qazis*, *Shaikhs*, traders, peasants etc. etc. became basic to the compilation of the *Janamsakhis*.

The second important datum

available to the *Janamsakhi* writers was the tradition of Guru Nanak as incorporated in the first *var* of Bhai Gurdas (died 1637 AD). Bhai Gurdas was a very close companion of Baba Buddha who had lived during the life-time of Guru Nanak, had embraced Sikh faith and was witness to the making of the traditions regarding the founder of Sikhism. Moreover, his close association with the Guru's family enabled him to know more about the anecdotes relating to the Guru's travels within India and abroad. Bhai Gurdas was the nephew of Guru Amardas, the third Sikh Guru, he served the fourth Guru as a missionary and was honoured by Guru Arjan when he was asked to act as scribe for the compilation of the *Adi Granth*. As a matter of fact, he possessed unimpeachable credentials to record the traditions of Guru Nanak. His first *var* delineating the life of Guru Nanak can be called anchor sheet of most of

the *Janamsakhis* which more or less remain elucidation, illustration and explanation of the first *var* of Bhai Gurdas.

The *Janamsakhi* writers were not content with the pithy and sketchy material as available in the first *var*. They wanted more details for the life of the founder of Sikhism. Consequently, they used this material to elucidate the narration as much as they could. For instance Bhai Gurdas has stated, "*Baba Gaya Tirathin Tirath Purb Sabe Phir Dekhey*" viz Guru Nanak visited all the places of Hindu pilgrimages. This line was expanded to include several

Sakhis like Guru Nanak's visit to Kurukshetra, Haridwar, Prayag, Benaras, Jagannath Puri etc. etc. The details were filled from the verses of Guru Nanak which were taken as dialogues with the learned *Pandas* of Benaras, the priests performing *Aarti* at Jagannath Puri, Guru's hymns on death ceremonies of Hindus at Budh Gaya etc. etc. Some *Janamsakhi* writers who ventured to visit the places associated with Guru Nanak added in their own accounts of local traditions as well. Miharban appears to have visited some such places as his description of a few places is very lucid (see his *Sakhi* of Guru's visit to Ujjain).

The *Sakhis* of the Guru's visit to Sumer (Kailash mountain) and his dialogue with *Siddhas*, his visit to Mecca and Baghdad and his discussions with Muslim divines etc. are based on the first *Var* of Bhai Gurdas. Almost all the *Sakhis* with the exception of a few have

been constructed on the basis of historical data as referred to above and with historical imagination of one form or the other. Therefore, most of the anecdotes recorded in the *Janamsakhis* fall within the orbit of history. In my opinion it will be fallacious to call them by any other name.

It is a very pertinent question as to why western scholars could not appreciate the Sikh tradition and properly assess the *Janamsakhis*. Unfortunately, for them; Ernest Trump became the sole guide for the study of entire Sikh literature. The most popular Bhai Bala's

Janamsakhi which was compiled by a follower of Baba Hindal, a dissenter, was translated into English by Dr. Trump. It claimed to be an eye-witness account which it was not. Bhai Balas name does not appear in any of the *other Janamsakhis*. Dr. Trump also translated the *Puratan* or *Vilayatwali Janamsakhi*. Most of the western scholars base their studies on both *Puratan* and Bala traditions. But they could not reach the originals as they were not proficient in Gurumukhi script and could hardly delve deep into the entire text of *Janamsakhis* or verses of Guru Nanak. Secondly these scholars did not care to study the contemporary conditions and travel routes of those times by applying historical imagination which is so essential for the construction of every historical narrative. It is in this context that Dr. McLeod hastened to conclude that there is no record of the Guru's visit to Ceylon or Mecca. He does not seem to have cast a critical look at the conditions prevalent in Ceylon and South India during 14th and 15th centuries. Tamil Kings from South India had been ruling Ceylon upto 13th century. Thousands of Tamils travelled from Nagapatnam to Madakulapa modern Batticaloa

district on the eastern coast of Ceylon which is associated with the *Ramayana*. I toured the whole district and found there overwhelming influence of Indian culture visible. When Guru Nanak visited South India it was not unlikely for him to visit Ceylon. Only balanced analysis could help arrive at such a conclusion.

A source of medieval history may not be rejected because it contains miracles. Miracles have remained an integral part of all types of spiritual exercises. Religious books like *vedas*, Buddhist texts, *Bible*, *Quran*, all contain miraculous accounts. Miracles also find mention in the *Adi Granth*, but only as references. The people in medieval ages believed in miracles and considered them as an index of spiritual elevation. Therefore, the miracles in the *Janamsakhis* should not be rejected or decried outright, rather their historical settings need to be studied.

I started the study of *Janamsakhi* tradition in 1966 AD at the Punjabi University, Patiala as a major project. I travelled to various places

from Nanakmatta (Uttaranchal) to Colombo in Ceylon in pursuit of my researches tracing the old memorial Gurdwaras built in the memory of Guru Nanak's visit and old routes prevalent during the early sixteenth century. All this material was verified and compared with the written tradition of Guru Nanak viz the *Janamsakhis* in order to decipher the historicity of the tradition of Guru Nanak. Attempts were also made to collect material (from the places which I could not visit) through knowledgeable persons who were interested in such studies.

My studies lead me to conclude that the *Janamsakhis* shall ever remain the most important source of information on Guru Nanak if we study them carefully and intensively. Most of the Muslim saints whom Guru Nanak is said to have met and find mention in *Janamsakhi Miharban Part II* were contemporaries of Guru Nanak. Their names are found in *Tazkara-i-Sufia-i-Punjab*, recently published in Karachi (Pakistan).

The Akal Takht bestowed the title of 'National Professor of Sikhism' on Dr Kirpal Singh in 2014. Born in 1924 in Gujrawalan district, now in Pakistan, Dr Kirpal Singh, who was a founder of Oral History Department in Punjabi University, Patiala, has made a seminal contribution to the modern and medieval history of India. "Even at this age, Prof Kirpal Singh spends six to eight hours daily to supervise the editing of Gurpartap Suraj Granth, 13 volumes of which have already been published and two are under print. The granth is one of the major sources of historical events during the period of the Sikh Gurus".



Gurdwara at Lakhpat Sahib

Gurdwara Pehli Patshahi is at Lakhpat in north western Kutch which was visited by Guru Nanak Sahib during his second and fourth missionary journeys (Udasis) in 1506-1513 AD and 1519-1521 AD respectively. Gurdwara Guru Nanak Sahib preserves the memory of these visits by the revered Guru during the early sixteenth century, while he was on his way to Mecca during the Fourth Udasi. Some very rare possessions of the Guru are preserved here.

In the course of Guru Nanak Dev ji's travels, he visited Gujarat and traveled on to Lakhpat, some 170 kms from Gandhidham in Gujarat. In the sixteenth century, Lakhpat was known as 'Basta Bander' and used to be a rich rice growing area and also an important port. However, after an earthquake in 1819 the area became barren owing to lack of water, with the original river disappearing after the earthquake.

In fact Lakhpat is the last inhabited place on the western extremity of India, virtually on the Indo-Pakistan border, at function of the Kori creek and Rann of Kutch, hotly disputed by the two countries since 1947.



To commemorate Guru Nanak Dev ji's visit to Lakhpat, a Gurdwara was built here in the early nineteenth century, a large tract of land bestowed the Gurdwara to offset expenses for maintenance and to look after visitors. Revenues from the land and the crops grown there sustain the Gurdwara. Lakhpat is about 20 kms from Korini village where there is a big Sarovar in memory of Guru Nanak Dev ji's visit to this area. From Lakhpat, Guru ji crossed the sea to Somiani port in Sind to start his epic journey onward to Mecca and Medina in today's Saudi Arabia.





During the twentieth century, some Sikh families settled near Lakhpat and in other parts of Kutch, particularly at Gandhidham, and the port-city of Kandla, which was built in the 1950s. In the wake of India's partition in 1947, many Sindhi's families settled in Kutch from erstwhile Sind Province. Sindhi's have been devotees of Guru Nanak Dev and with co-operation of the Sikh's, built a Gurdwara at Gandhidham, have been looking after the Lakhpat Gurdwara for the past half century.



Lakhpat is the last town situated at the western extremity of India, on the Indo-Pakistan border, at the juncture of Kori creek and as Rann of Kutch. Guru Nanak Devji camped at Lakhpat on his way to and from Mecca. The home where he stayed was later sanctified as a Gurdwara.

Lakhpat probably derives its name from the prosperous maritime trade which generated a daily income of one lakh Kori, an old currency of the Kutch state

Guru Nanak Dev ji stayed at Lakhpat several times during his trips to Mecca and Medina, the place serving as seat of the Udasi Sect. Several rare treasures are preserved at Gurdwara Shri Lakhpat Sahib, including the 'Charan Paduka' Khadvas (wooden footwear) that belonged to Guru Nanak Dev ji.

Over the years, extensions have been made to the Gurdwara complex such 'sewa' including building of Yatri Niwas (visitor's rest rooms), Langar Hall, Diwan Hall (congregation hall) being undertaken by Baba Lakkha Singh ji - Baruch.

In 2004, the people of Lakhpat in Kutch, celebrated when the Gurdwara Sahib was given the UNESCO Asia-Pacific Heritage Conservation Award, then going to the CRCI (Cultural Resources Conservation Initiative).

The Archaeological Survey of India, the State Department of Archaeology. United Nations Development Programme and United Nations Volunteers supported the Conservation programme which took seven months for restoration, after the Gurdwara was damaged during the 1998 cyclone in Gujarat and the January 2001 earthquake in Gujarat.

"Impressed by these efforts, UNESCO conferred the UNESCO Asia-Pacific Heritage Award to the Lakhpat gurdwara and thereby recognised efforts of the State Government".

Conferring the award, an UNESCO official stated, "The restoration of this Sikh house of worship demonstrates a sophisticated holistic understanding of both the technical and social aspects of conservation. "Careful attention to detail and sensitive repair work have ensured the retention of the building's historic character. The emphasis on involving and empowering the community ensures the long-term survival of the historic building and its associated cultural traditions."

The Editor of Nishaan visited the Gurdwara Sahib at Lakhpat, with an Army group hosting officers and families of The Sikh Regiment, organized by Brigadier Suneel Limaye, who had earlier commanded the 5th Sikhs. After paying obeisance at the Gurdwara Sahib and partaking langar, some more details were gleaned from the Sevadars at Lakhpat. These were S Nirmal Singh, Dharam Singh and Harvinder Singh, the last named have having from the Indian Air Force and then settling at Mundra-Mandvi.

Nearly 100,000 Sikhs are settled in Kutch, many of them ex-servicemen who have since by dint of hard work, transformed much of the inhospitable and arid region to productive farm lands.



Gurdwara Bhai Mokham Singh at Dwarka Bet



This famous Gurdwara is located in Bet Dwarka, close to the city of Dwarka. When Guru Nanak Dev ji was on his way to Lakhpat in Bhuj, he stopped at Dwarka city and his religious discourses impressed many local people, making them convert to Sikhism. One Sikh converttee, Shri Tirath Ram was later blessed with a son whom he brought up as a Sikh and named him Mokham Singh. When the child was 9 years old, he was taken to Anandpur Sahib by his parents where they sought the blessings of Guru Gobind Singh ji. It was during that visit when Guru Gobind Singh ji called for volunteers ... Bhai Mokham Singh was one of 'Panj Piaras'.



Sikh families are primarily settled at Gandhidham, Naliya, Kothava, Narva, Mandvi, Khavra, Pandry and Lakhpatt. At the time of Nishaan's visit, there were several Muslims at the Gurdwara Sahib including Mohd Usman from Nani Khakhar, reflecting the close ties between the communities, five centuries since Guru Nanak visited the region.

Guru Nanak Dev Ji's Udisis

From Uch to Lakhpat, thence Mecca and Medina

After spending some time in Multan, Guru Nanak and Mardana left for Uch or Uch Sharif, which according to historical records had been founded by Alexander the Great in 325 BC, and was some 70 kilometres from Bahawalpur in Southern Punjab, at the confluence of the Punjab rivers Chenab with the Indus. During that period, Uch was one of the main centres of Islamic studies in South Asia, and there were several tombs of famous Sufis there, including the famous Sufi faqir, Jalal-ud-din Bukhari who lived here in the 13th century. The *Makhdum* at the time of Guru Nanak's visit was one of his descendants, Shaikh Haji Abdul Sahib Bukhari.



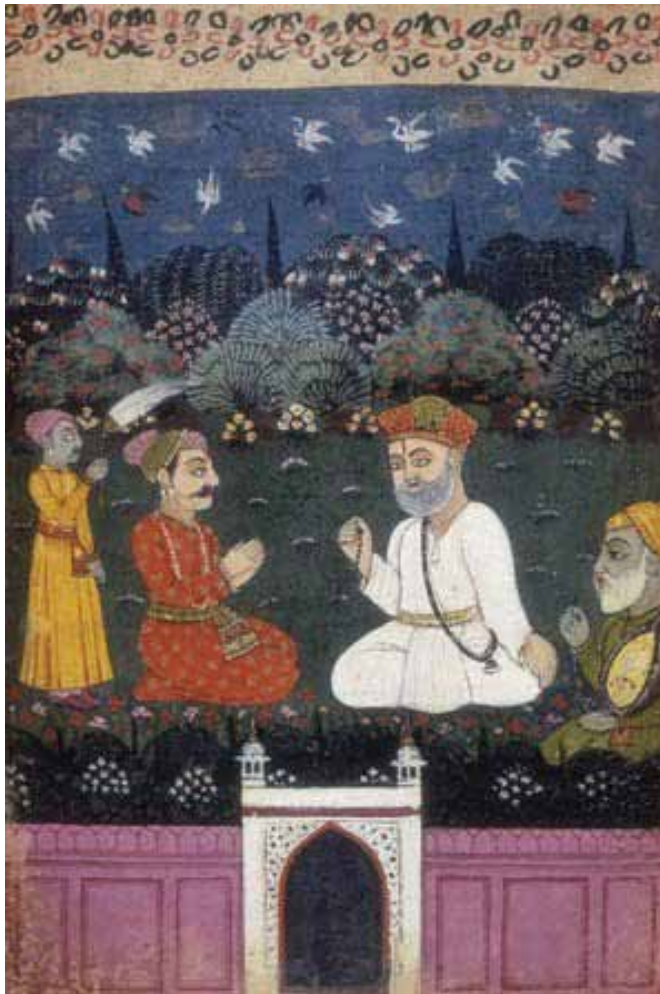
Guru Nanak stayed with the *Makhdum* when he visited Uch, while making preparations for *Haj*. After some time, Baha-ud-din *Makhdum* of Multan also arrived in Uch and all of them set out for *Haj*, the Guru accompanying them after some days at Uch.

Commencing their journey to Mecca, Guru Nanak, Mardana, the *Makhdum* of Uch and the *Makhdum* of Muhan boarded a boat from Uch, which crossing via Panjnad, took these holy men to Sakkhar along the Indus river. Those days the Hajis of Multan region would travel to Mecca via Sakkhar and Shikarpur or through the Bolan Pass in Baluchistan. *Makhdum* Baha-ud-din and *Makhdum* Abdul Wahab wanted to get down at Sakkhar then go to Mecca via Shikarpur, along with their disciples who were travelling in separate boats.

Guru Nanak and Mardana however took another boat on the Indus river and travelling on the river *Kori* in Kutch, as also the river Lakhpat reached the present city

of Lakhpat Nagar (District Bhuj), those days, being part of Sindh. The river Indus and its subsidiaries flowed into the sea after passing through Kutch, such signs of which can be seen even today. Arab writers record that in the 7th century, two tributaries, *Mehran* and *Hakara*, originated from eastern part of the Indus and passing through the region of Rann, flowed into the sea. Till the 10th century, Lakhpat was a prosperous region, but thereafter its water-levels declined and by the 18th century, the area had turned into barren land. The earthquake of 1819 completely destroyed Lakhpat along with Sindhri, a port town, the land depressed by 12-15 feet, with salt water spreading over 2000 square miles (3200 kms.) beyond Sindhri.

At the same time, over an area of 600 square miles, Lakhpat the earth was thrown up, creating 'bumps' of upto 100 sq ft, which made Lakhpat into an unhospitable area. Earlier, this was quite fertile for paddy, but had turned into an unhospitable region.



At the time of Guru Nanak's visit, Lakhpat was known as Basta Bandar, earning revenue worth one lakh *kori* (six *koris* were roughly equivalent to one rupee). Transportation was by boats, the village coming to be called Lakhpat, where there now is a splendid *gurdwara* enshrining the visit of Guru Nanak. The original *gurdwara* was built at beginning of the 19th century and the land of Kuriani village attached as *jagir*, to it. A manuscript in the *Gurdwara* is in Gujarati, translated to read : "Rao Sri Raedhanji, Ro Sri golji Samvat 1863, Har Sudi 2, Maharaj Rao Sri Raedhanji declared that the Court bestows one village Kuriani for use by the religious place of Udasi Brahm Chetan, son and disciple of Brahm Suchet of Lakhpat village. The production, revenue, etc. are hereby given to this shrine so that Lakpat and Kuraini remain cordially inclined and the holy men duly served".

Kuriani is a town about 10-12 miles from Lakhpat where there is a very old *sarovar*, called Nanaksar. There is also an old *gurdwara* in Kuriani following the visit of Guru Nanak.

Asa Purani Devi, also called Kali Mata, has been worshipped in the Lakhpat region for many centuries and an old temple dedicated to her is situated forty miles (54 kms) east of Lakhpat. According to tradition, goddess *Asa Purani* came to Lakhpat to meet Guru Nanak and request that "the entire world accepts your spiritual suzerainty but let this region Kutch be spared for me". According to tradition, the Guru did not go into the interior of the region.

The Guru Nanak left Lakhpat, and travelling via Kuriani and Kotesvara reached the old temple of Naraina Swami situated on the sea shore. From here he boarded a boat for the port Sonmiani, locally called Miani, situated some 50 miles (80 kms.) west of the present city of Karachi which was an important port in Baluchistan. However, before the founding of Karachi, most trade was carried out from this port via Kalat, which was a natural port, having a semi-circular being of 28 miles and a width of four miles enclosing the sea. Guru Nanak took a boat from Naraina sarovar and reached Hinglaj, where an old temple on banks of the river was an important shrine. The Muslims called it the shrine of goddess Nani while the Hindus called it Kali Mata Parbati.

This temple was set at a height which could be reached climbing steep stairs. Guru Nanak visited this temple, to the east of which is a *gurdwara* in memory of Guru Nanak's visit. Here some *sadhhus* had met the Guru, saw him attired like a Haji and were astonished not being able to make out whether he was an ascetic or a Bairagi, Vaishnava or Udasi, Hindu or Muslim, Khatri or Brahmin, Vaishya or Sudra. Some of them came to the Guru and asked: "O Beloved of God! What is your dress and what do you partake, so that we can prepare some food and serve you appropriately." In reply to this, the Guru uttered the following hymn :

Those adopting the fast of truth, holy pilgrimage of content and bath of illumination and meditation;

Making compassion their deity, forgiveness their rosary, a preminent among men.

To make union with the Lord the *dhoti* Absorption in God the ritually pure kitchen,

Love the food consumed

Saith Nanak : Rare are such and thus are blessed.

-*Guru Granth Sahib*, p. 1245

The *sadhhus* understood the sermon, and fell at the Guru's feet.



An early painting of Guru Nanak Dev Ji resting at Mecca with his feet towards the Kabba. The local quazi is asking Mardana, Guru Ji's companion, the reason for this.

Mecca and Medina

From Hinglaj, Guru Nanak and Mardana reached the port of Son Miani, taking the sea route reach and the port of Kalhatt, which was famous those days and on other end of the Persian Gulf. Travelling through Kalhatt (which was near Muscat) reached and thence to the port of Al-Aswatt, popular among the *Hajis* and only twelve miles south of the present port of Jeddah. From this port, they went on to Mecca.

According to Bhai Gurdas Guru Nanak first visited Mecca and thereafter went to Baghdad. The Bala and the Mani Singh Janamsakhis also support the view that Guru Nanak first visited Mecca and then Medina. There are only two routes from India to go to Mecca – one sea-route and the other land route. In the over-land travel one reached after passing through Baghdad, and Medina. Since all Janamsakhi versions agree that the Guru first visited Mecca and since Bhai Gurdas also supports this view, it can be surmised that the Guru took the sea-route.

Mecca was a very important centre of trade well before it became a holy place for the Muslims. The famous Greek writer Ptolemy calls the town Makoraba.

Sura 106 of the Quran calls it “the eternal establishment for caravans both in summer and winter.”

Guru Nanak stayed in Mecca for some time. In the meanwhile, *Makhdum* Baha-ud-din of Multan and *Makhdum* Abdul Wahab, who had been separated from Guru Nanak at Shikarpur, had arrived, but were quite surprised to find the Guru had arrived before them.

One day during his stay at Mecca, Guru Nanak slept with his feet towards the holy *Ka'aba*. When other *Hajis* awoke they found the Guru's feet were towards *Ka'aba*. One *Haji*, named Jiwan, went to the Guru and shaken his feet said that his feet were towards the abode of God. The Guru answered that he should shift his feet in the direction where God did not reside. According to Islami, God is *Rabul-almin*, all-pervasive. So the Guru's feet were moved to another side, the *Ka'aba* was perceived also changing direction.

The tradition of Ka'aba changing direction has actually come from Islamic texts. Farid-u-din Atar (1119-1230), Tazkara-i-Aulia says about Prophet Rabia : “When she went to the Haj second time, she saw that the respected Ka'aba was coming to welcome her.” It goes on, “Hazrat Ibrahim went to holy Mecca reached Mecca in fourteen years, but he saw no Ka'aba there a voice came saying that it has gone to receive an old weak holy lady.” Tazkara-i-Aulia.

Having *Hajis* had some apprehension and asked the Guru, “O holy man! Whether you are a Hindu or a Muslim.” The Guru uttered the following hymn.

Lord! Thy fear is my hemp-drug, my mind the leather pouch.

Mad in this intoxication, an anchorite am I become.

With my bowl for Thy sight I beg, that I hunger for.
This ever at Thy door I beg.

For Thy sight I yearn;

At Thy door a beggar, pray dole out this charity to me.

Saffron, flowers, musk and gold by all persons of all castes may be offered. The merit of sandalwood and God's devotees is,

To all they impart fragrance.

The utterance of this hymn by Guru Nanak had nothing unusual about it for the *Hajis* who put these questions to him were those who had come from India and could comprehend *Sadh Bhakha*. The *Vilayatvali Janamsakhi* records that the Guru uttered this hymn in Mecca in response to the questions of *Hajis* there.

Extracts from ‘Janamsakhi Tradition’ by Dr. Kirpal Singh

Guru Nanak Dev Ji's Udasīs Gurdwara Nanaklāma Sahib, Chungthang in Sikkim



This wonderful and historic Gurdwara in the high Himalayas is at Chungthang, in North Sikkim at the confluence of two rivers Lachen and Lachung Chu, both tributaries of the River Teesta. The thumb-shaped state of Sikkim borders Nepal in the west, the Chinese Tibet Autonomous Region to the north and east, Bhutan in the south-east and the state of West Bengal to its south.

Chungthang is some 95 kilometres from Sikkim's capital Gangtok, and the lake Guru Dongmar is at a height of 18,000 feet, alongside a glacial peak known by the same name. The lake remains frozen most of the year, experiencing heavy snowfall for almost six months a year.

It is believed that Guru Nanak Dev ji covered this area during his visit (Udasi) to China and Tibet and met the Karma pa Nying ma pa sect then being hounded



out from Tibet by the Ge lug pa sect. It is also said that Guru Nanak, on one of his journeys, had subdued two demons here before proceeding. The footprints of that event were believed to be still left on that cordoned off rock.

Guru Nanak Dev ji dug his walking stick at a place where eventually the stick has grown becoming a tree which has trunk in stick shape and leaves are below the rounded trunk which looks like handle of stick. An amrit kund was also made to appear there by Guru ji.

Many of the Karma pa Nyingma pa sect are followers of Guru Nanak, with their Head Lama becoming Guru Nanak's follower in Kailash Mansarovar after Guru Nanak's discussions with the famous Sidhas of the age. This sect had fled from Tibet to the Himalayas in Northern India, which encompassed Ladakh, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Nepal, Sikkim, Bhutan, and



Arunachal Pradesh. Guru Nanak visited all these states around 1516 AD. After his visit to Kailash-Mansarovar, Guru Nanak returned along the Kali River and went to Nepal, where the Gurdwara at Kathmandu, on the banks of river Bishnumati commemorates his visit. Visiting various religious places in Nepal, he crossed over to Tibet through Nathu la and reached the Sakya monastery. The earlier king of Tibet from Karma-pa sect was, by then, deposed by the Ge-lug-pa sect but was still holding on to this monastery. Guru Nanak helped

Trasung Deochung reconstruct this monastery and was honoured with a robe which is preserved in Lachen Gompha.

From Tibet, Guru Nanak entered Sikkim through Chhorten Nyi ma la. Passing through Dolma Sampa and Tongpen, he entered the Muguthang valley where he visited Kedang, Bendu, Sherang, Lyingka,



and Muguthang. He went through Naku la and Lawu Gompha and reached the plateau around Guru Dongmar.

In this plateau the yak grazers had begged Guru Nanak for help them to get water as in severe winter, the lake freezes with temperatures falling down to minus 35 degrees. The Guru struck the perpetually snow-covered Guru Dongmar Lake with his stick, the ice melted giving way to crystal clear water. Ever since then water of the lake has never frozen. The lake and the hill feature atop





have come to be known as Guru Dongmar Lake and Hill respectively, the names recorded in maps prepared by British surveyors in the nineteenth century.

Dongmar Lake image courtesy Wikipedia

Some grazers then projected another problem to Guru Nanak. Owing to high altitude, their virility was affected, and requested the Guru for help. Guru Nanak blessed the lake, saying, "Whosoever takes the water of this lake will gain virility and strength and be blessed with children." The people of the area have firm faith in the Guru and consider the water of the lake as nectar (amrit). A Gurdwara was constructed here in the 1980s to commemorate Guru Nanak's visit to the place. The local people of the area and Lamas of Karma-pa Nying-ma-pa Sect regularly visit Darbar Sahib Amritsar, to pay obeisance to their beloved Guru Rimpoche, Guru Nanak, whose footprints, a robe and a water-carrying utensil (kamandal) are preserved in Lachen Gompha, Sikkim, commemorating his visit to the place.

From Gurudongmar, Guru Nanak went to Thangu, Lachen, Chungthang, Lachung, Yumthang and Pyakochin. Around the Chungthang Gurdwara, a tree has grown at the place where the Guru's walking stick had struck, along with footprints of the Guru, a spring, and the rice-fields blessed by Guru Nanak commemorate the holy visit. At Pyakochin, an engraving on stone, in Gurmukhi script, was earlier preserved to commemorate the visit of Guru Nanak. From Pyakochin the Guru





is stated to have crossed over to the Chumbi Valley through Ghora-la, en-route to Bhutan.

The present Gurdwara structure was built by officers of the 17th Assam Rifles and Indian Army personnel with help of the local Lepcha tribe in the early 1980s. The area was restricted to service personnel and local people owing to its strategic location near the border with China. On 24 April 2005, The Tribune newspaper reported that the Gurdwara Nanaklamba at Chungthang Sikkim had been opened to public and devotees. The Gurdwara had been constructed following research done by the head lamas of Buddhist monasteries (gomphas) at Fudong, Chungthang, Lachen, Lachung and Thangu and all the local people, and with their enthusiastic help.

They local people continue to pay obeisance at the Gurdwara with reverence, and in recent times, groups of Sikh pilgrims have been visiting the gurdwara annually and have always had goodwill of the local people and return with wondrous memories.

Extracted from 'Travelogue to Chungthang and Gurdwara Nanaklamba' and images by Gobindar Singh Chopra.



An Enchanting Retelling

In her 'Foreword' to the book *The Singing Guru: Legends and Adventures of Guru Nanak, the First Sikh*, Nikki Guninder Kaur Singh elucidates her thoughts.



first-century author. In a way it is a feminist utopia, much like the one dreamed by the Bengali writer Rokeya Hossain (*Sultana's Dream*, 1905), for the women govern all spheres of private and public life, and are highly successful. On the other hand, the legend is misogynist: the women are actually temptresses and sorceresses. In this case, Mardana, having left the guru's company, is lured by the sorceresses and turned into a goat for his captors' meal. It is in the pen—with his fellow goats, all awaiting their death—that Mardana shares Baba's stories. Interestingly, the various protagonists have their own individual character

The Singing Guru is an enchanting retelling of Guru Nanak's life and message in the voice of Bhai Mardana, the Guru's Muslim companion and rabab player. Here Kamla Kapur has chosen a highly innovative and subtle perspective to reveal the historicity and timeless reality of the founding Sikh Guru. Mythic narratives (sakhis) about Guru Nanak's birth and life are very popular in the collective Sikh imagination, and have come down in a variety of renditions such as the Bala, Miharban, Adi, and Puratan. But when we hear Mardana animatedly talk about a fellow companion he so closely sees and hears, time and space collapse; like Mardana, we begin to feel the numinous magic of the Guru's presence. Mardana interlaces his meta-narrative of the country ruled by women with many other legends and accounts of his travels with Nanak, whom he endearingly calls "Baba." This ancient story with Nath antecedents has enjoyed immense popularity among the Janatnsakhi traditions (except for the Miharban), and has clearly captured the imagination of our twenty-

and attitudes represented by their names—Taakat, Mannay, or Rondoo. As Mardana retells, rethinks, and deconstructs the narratives of his beloved. Guru, each listens, questions, and responds in different and new ways. The dialogic format reinforces and renews the Guru's teachings in an effective communal setting. And this is the triumph of Kamla Kapur's work: she sets off on a fantastic hermeneutic adventure within a highly charged atmosphere.

We find Baba linked in a dynamic nexus with his family and the larger society. His relationships with his wife and sons, neglected in traditional narratives, are here brought into meaningful discourse. Since Mardana is a fellow villager, he is also able to render a vibrant immediacy to the names and places associated with Guru Nanak. For instance, there is something ineffably warm and personal in his reference to Daulatan (the Muslim midwife who delivered baby Nanak) as "Masi" (mother's sister). Mardana depicts the Guru as an intrinsic part

of his vibrant geographical, cultural, and multireligious land-scape—a human being like him and his fellow villagers with the same faculties, the same angst, the same tensions, and the same potential. The difference: by living authentically, Baba hones his self and actualises divinity. In Mardana's words, "I . . . saw how he had made a ladder from the sound of God's name and climbed' out of his own darkness. Baba was a man with animal instincts who had become the pinnacle of what a human could be: divine?" Thus the divine Guru emerges as a powerful role model. The goats can follow his example and the degenerate, egocentric manmukhs can become spiritually oriented gurmukhs. In their own and different ways, readers of Kamla Kapur's text will be inspired by the Guru's divine personality and accomplishments, his ethical views, and his metaphysical vision.

The Singing Guru highlights Sikh ethics as a coalescence of the sacred and the secular. This human life is precious, and should not be regarded casually, which Mardana and his fellow goats had done. All aspects of life are important and must be lived authentically. Family and society must not be rejected. As Mardana reminds us, Baba has no conflict between marriage and God: "He says they are compatible and necessary. God and the world are one; to separate God from life is ignorance and duality." The Singing Guru provides the perfect definition of a Sikh as a student who is always eager and passionate to learn how to grow into his or her full potential as a true and conscious human being.

Kamla Kapur's text also expresses the intricacies of Sikh metaphysics in a profoundly simple manner. The Sikh theological reality is the singular One, transcending space, time, gender, and causality, and yet this One permeates each and every finite being. Instead of the mind-body dualism and its harmful hierarchies, the body is exalted with its Divine ingredient. To discover and experience this miraculous element in the daily rhythms is affirmed as the ideal mode of existence—wah----full of wonder, amazement, and awe. Kamla Kapur's nuanced explanations advance our comprehension of Guru Nanak's distinct worldview.

The traditional Janamsakhis frequently construct concrete scenes to contextualize Nanak's hymns recorded in the Sri Guru Granth Sahib. The Singing Guru recreates the symbiosis between his person and word---for after all, the ladder that Baba climbs up is made of sonorous textures of sacred verse. In fact, the way Mardana utilizes the sublime lyrics in the stories he tells and the way in which his audience receives them generate new interpretations, new understandings, and new applications of the Guru's hymns.

Like Mardana's audience, we too may find ourselves at times rolling our eyes and at others craning our neck to hear more. When have we had a chance to slither past a slimy tongue and jostle about in the digestive juices of a fish's belly? Have we ever experienced the daily dawn when "the- orb of the full moon glowed like a pearl against the steel blue sky of early morning"? Whether describing the extraordinary or the ordinary, Kamla Kapur delineates her scenes with enormous artistic finesse. This modern writer's use of medieval analogies is particularly compelling. For instance, she uses the Persian wheel, which we frequently hear gurgling in Sikh scripture and see rotating in the visual art of the Janamsakhis, to describe Mardana's fluctuating emotions of despair and joy. While deepening our understanding of the past, Kamla Kapur's literary disclosures evoke new possibilities.

At some level, The Singing Guru is a replay of Nanak's triple formula, expressed in the Japji: "Simla mannia mani kits bhau." Sunia literally signifies hearing, the sense that most directly connects the conscious and the uncon-scious realms. Hearing is the first step toward awakening to the transcendent core of the universe, which Mardana is doing by narrating his stories. Mannia means remembering the One, and it is the second step, for it is only after something is heard that it can enter the mind. Keeping the Divine constantly in mind is not an entirely intellectual process, because it connotes trust and faith, which are embodied in "Mannay," one of the listeners in the pen. "Mani kita bhau," meaning "full of love for the Divine," is the third step. It goes beyond hearing and keeping the One in mind. Intensely passionate and joyous, love is the death of all fears, phobias, and barriers; it is living out the divine transcendence in the fluctuating fullness of temporality. This love is ignited by the melodious verse coming from the lips of the three-dimensional figure of Baba Nanak resonating off the pages of The Singing Guru. We all owe a deep debt of gratitude to the prolific Kamla Kapur for wonderfully retelling the narrative of the singing guru, who dominates the lives of over twenty-five million people worldwide.



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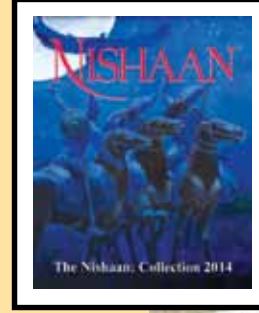
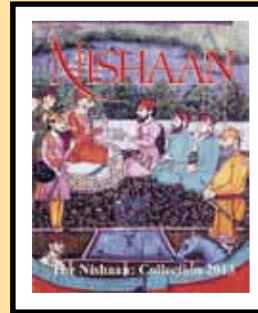
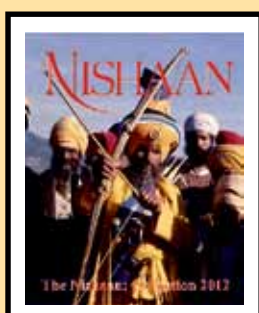
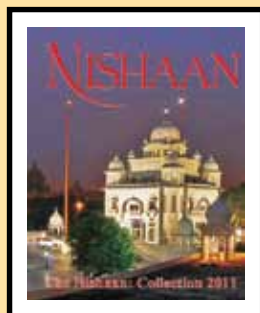
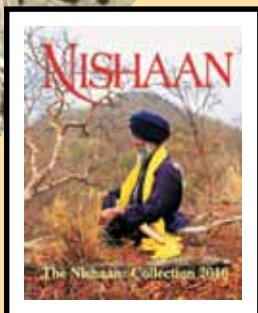
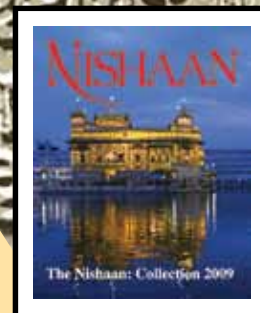
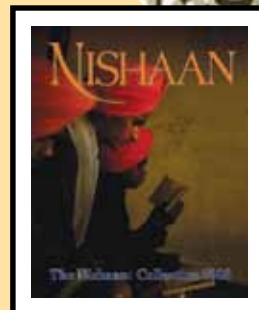
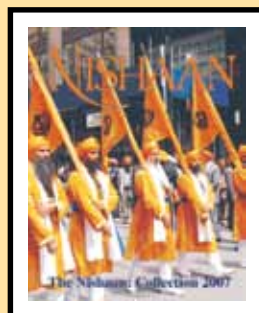
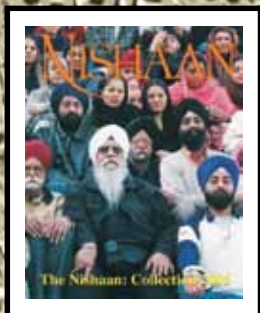
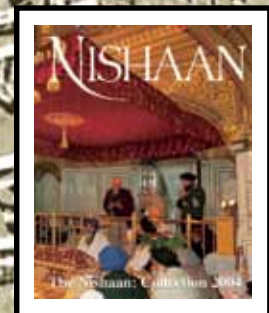
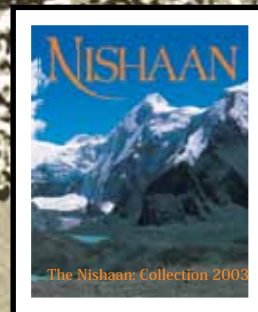
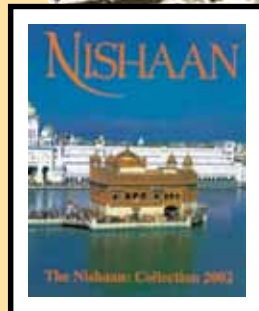
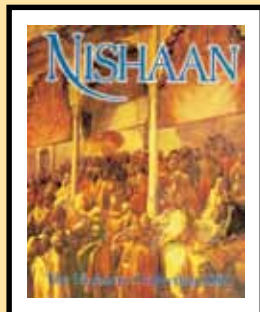
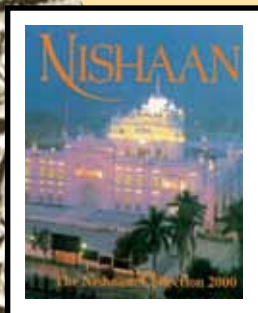
Cover: Victory Column at the Indian Army Memorial at Neuve Chapelle. The bayonet was that of Subedar Thakur Singh MC and the poppy an internationally recognised symbol of Remembrance.

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