

NISHAAN

I/2013

NAGAARA



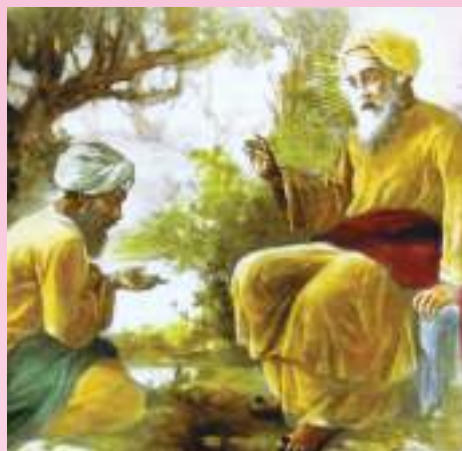
Gurdwara by the Gulf
Sikh Heritage : Ethos & Relics
Rural Olympics of Punjab
The Sword for Justice

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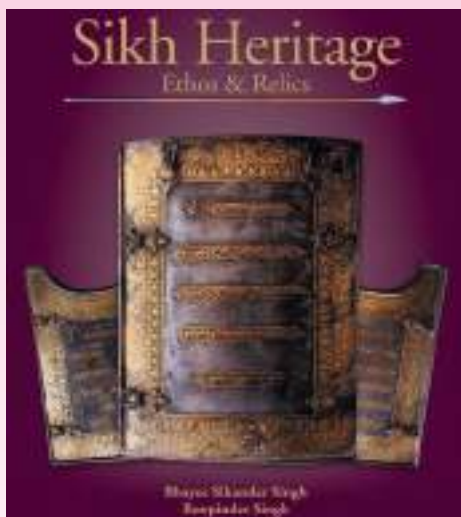
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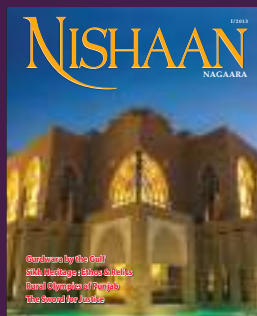
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Guru Nanak Darbar in Dubai

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“Inspired by Guru Nanak’s creative mysticism, Sikh architecture is a distinct harbinger of holistic humanism based on pragmatic spirituality”.



Bangla Sahib Gurdwara, New Delhi

Wherever there are Sikhs there will be a gurdwara. It may be a magnificent white ornate building rising high above the trees and houses of a Punjabi village, or it may be a plain flat-roofed building remarkable only for its size compared with the other houses nearby. In the UK, it may be a terrace house or a former Christian church. Strictly speaking, a gurdwara is any place where the Guru Granth Sahib is installed. The unique and distinguishing feature will always be the nishaan sahib, a flagstaff with the yellow flag of the faith flying from it. This serves as a statement of the Sikh presence, enables the traveler, whether he be Sikh or

not, to know where solace can be sought. It is not any assertion of authority, but is the freedom to worship.

The presence of Guru Granth Sahib normally means being at a gurdwara, religious centre for the Sikhs, where the egalitarian principles of the Panth are most naturally followed. When Sikhs travel out of their hometowns, either to other parts of their country of residence or foreign places, they usually look for, and soon head to, a gurdwara.

Gurdwaras can be broadly of two types with the Golden Temple at Amritsar (the Darbar Sahib or Harmandir) as the epitome. Gurdwaras are also

where any visitor can partake of community meals at the langar. There is a proliferation of gurdwaras worldwide built by Sikhs as part of their religious and social life. Then, of course, there are the historic gurdwaras, essentially in India and what is now Pakistan. These were erected on sites which are important in the history of Sikhism. For example, the Sis Ganj in Delhi marks the place where Guru Tegh Bahadur was martyred and the Keshgarh at Anandpur was erected over the place where Guru Gobind Singh instituted the Khalsa. This practice seems to have begun with Guru Hargobind, to whom the first use of the word gurdwara is attributed. He visited places associated with his father or his predecessors, especially Guru Nanak, restored the buildings which he found, encouraging proper teaching and preaching to be given in them.

The Sikh places of worship were originally known as dharmsalas, which normally signifies a rest-house for travelers in its normal Indian context but was used in the early days of Sikhism to denote a room or building used for devotional singing (kirtan) and prayers. Guru Nanak built a dharmasala at Kartarpur and Bhai Gurdas claims, possibly with some poetic licence, that,

Centres of worship were established wherever Baba (Nanak) set foot.

All the Siddh centres (i.e. religious centres) in the world became centres of Nanak's teaching.

Every house became a dharmasala and kirtan was sung as if it were an unending Baisakhi festival.

(Var 1, pauri 27)

The word 'gurdwara' is in fact, compounded of *Guru* (spiritual guide or master) and *Dwara* (gateway or seat) and, therefore, the Sikh house of worship has an architectural connotation. These are by and large commemorative buildings connected with the ten Gurus in some way, or with places and events of historical significance. For example, Gurdwara Dera (halting place) Sahib in Batala in Gurdaspur district commemorates the brief stay there of Guru Nanak, along with the party, on the occasion of his marriage, Gurdwara Sheesh Mahal (hall of mirrors) in Kiratpur in Ropar district was built where the eighth Guru, Harkishan, was born. Gurdwara Shaheed Ganj (martyrs' memorial) in Muktsar in Faridkot district commemorates the place where the bodies of the Sikhs, who were killed in the battle fought between Guru Gobind Singh and the Mughal forces in 1705,

were cremated, Gurdwara Ram Sar (God's pool) in Amritsar stands on a site where the fifth Guru, Arjan Dev, compiled the *Adi Granth*, the holy book of the Sikhs, with Bhai Gurdas, his maternal uncle, acting as the amanuensis.

The nucleus of a gurdwara is that of a select room in which the *Adi Granth* is placed and a *sangat* (congregation) can be seated to listen to the *paath* or readings from the Holy Book, as also to sing and recite the sacred verses as kirtan. Quintessentially, Gurdwaras have entrances on all the (four) sides signifying that they are open to one and all without any discrimination whatsoever. This distinguishing feature also symbolises the essential tenet of the faith that God is omnipresent.

Many Sikh Gurdwaras have a *deorhi*, an entrance gateway, through which one must pass before reaching the shrine. A *deorhi* is often an impressive structure with an imposing gateway, from where visitors get first glimpse of the sanctum sanctorum. The buildings of Sikh shrines, when classified according to their planform, are of four basic types: the square, the rectangular, the octagonal, and the cruciform. On the basis of the number of storeys, gurdwaras have elevations which may be one, two, three, five, or even nine-storey high. One comes across several interesting variations of gurdwara-design worked out on the permutations and combinations of the aforesaid basic plan and elevation-types.

A *gumbad* (dome) is usually the crowning feature of a gurdwara. Rarely, a shrine may be flat-roofed, as in the case of Gurdwara Guru-ka-Lahore near Anandpur Sahib in Ropar district. Sometimes, a small one-room shrine is topped by a *palaki*, a palanquin-like roof, as can be seen in Gurdwara Tahli Sahib in village Tahla in Bathinda district. Gurdwara Bahadurgarh in Patiala district has a *palaki* instead of a dome as its crowning feature. The architecture of the major gurdwaras is normally in the Mughal style of Shah Jahan which Sikhs find a congenial blend of Muslim and Hindu forms, though they have developed it in a distinctively Sikh manner.

A recurrent element of the gurdwara-design is the preferred use of two storeys to gain sufficient elevation for the shrine. However restrained the design may be, the elevation is usually treated by dividing the facade in accordance with the structural lines of columns, piers, and pilasters, with vertical divisions creating areas of well-modelled surfaces. The most important division is, of course, the

entrance which receives more ornate treatment than other areas. The treatment often creates bas-reliefs of geometrical, floral, and other designs. Where magnificence is the aim, repousse-work in brass or copper-gilt sheeting is introduced often with a note of extravagance.

Sikh architecture represents the last flicker of religious architecture in India. The Darbar Sahib, or Golden Temple at Amritsar is its most celebrated example as this is the only monument in which all the characteristics of the style are fully represented. Golden Temple is by far the sheet-anchor of the stylistic index of Sikh architecture. Almost levitating above, and in the middle of, an expansive water-body, the 'Pool of Nectar' (*Amrit-Sar*), the Darbar (court) Sahib, or Harmandir (Lord's Temple), stirs one deeply with glitters of its golden dome, kiosks, parapets, and repousse-work, and the enchanting evanescence of its shimmering reflections in the pool. With the temple and tank as the focus, a complex of buildings, most of which repeat in their architectural details and the characteristics of the central structure, have come up in the vicinity of the shrine in the course of time.

As a style of building-design, Sikh architecture might strike the lay onlooker as eclectic : a pot-pourri of the best features picked up from here and there. But it embodies much more than meets the casual eye. It shares its stringent regulation with the awesome austerity of Islam's uncompromising monotheism. And celebrates its lush exuberance with the playful polytheism of Hinduism. Eclecticism might have been its starting-point, but Sikh architecture has flourished to a state of artistic autonomy so as to work out its own stylistic idiosyncrasies. It is now an apt expression of spontaneous outbursts of psycho-spiritual energy that celebrates the immaculate majesty of Being within the churning melange of opposites encountered during workaday existence and the arena for continual becoming. Inspired by Guru Nanak's creative mysticism, Sikh architecture is a mute harbinger of holistic humanism based on pragmatic spirituality.

Water bodies as an element of design has been frequently exploited in Mughal and Hindu architecture, but nowhere in so lively a manner as in Sikh architecture. Water becomes a *sine qua non* of Sikh buildings as in the Golden Temple at Amritsar, or Darbar Sahib at Tarn Taran, and not merely an appendage to the main shrine. The gurdwara is placed

lower down than the structures in the vicinity, unlike a masjid or a mandir which are usually placed on raised platforms.

While sticking to the same basic requirements, different Sikh shrines have developed their own characteristic expressions. It may be recalled that most of the gurdwaras are commemorative buildings, and therefore the sites, on which they have been built, had the intrinsic challenges and advantages which were more fortuitous than premeditated. Most situations have been handled with remarkable imagination and ingenuity. Eventually, no two shrines look exactly alike although there are exceptions such as Dera Sahib in Lahore, and Panja (Palm-impression) Sahib, both in today's Pakistan. Also, the low metal-gilt fluted dome of the Golden Temple has been copied in these two shrines as well as in the Darbar Sahib at Tarn Taran.

This description of a seventeenth-century act of worship not only shows the importance of kirtan, but it also emphasises the Guru Panth, the congregation met in the Guru's name. It is a tenet of the Sikh faith that where the company of believers (*sangat*) is, there too is the Guru:

Attuned to you your devotees constantly sing your praises. You are the refuge in which they find deliverance, O Creator Lord. You unite them with yourself...Without the True Guru there is no congregation and without the Name no one is ferried across the world ocean. He who utters the Lord's praise day and night merges his light with the supreme light.

(AG 1068; 3rd Guru)

So it has been, and is, in every country of the world that Sikhs reside in, from Norway to New Zealand, from British Columbia to Brunei. In certain parts of the Arab world, there have been archaic laws concerning the rights of other faiths and thus it is a tribute to the sagacity of the Rulers of Dubai that a magnificent Gurdwara has been built in their Emirates on the Gulf.

The Guru Nanak Darbar in Dubai is an incredible amalgam of the essential attributes of a Gurdwara and sentiments of the State. This is akin to an oasis of Sikh faith in the heart of an Islamic state. The Guru Nanak Darbar is the first 'official' Sikh temple in the whole of Gulf for the 50,000 strong Sikh community living in Dubai and has just entered its second year, shimmering like a beautiful mirage amidst the sands of Arabia.

SIKH HERITAGE: Ethos & Relics

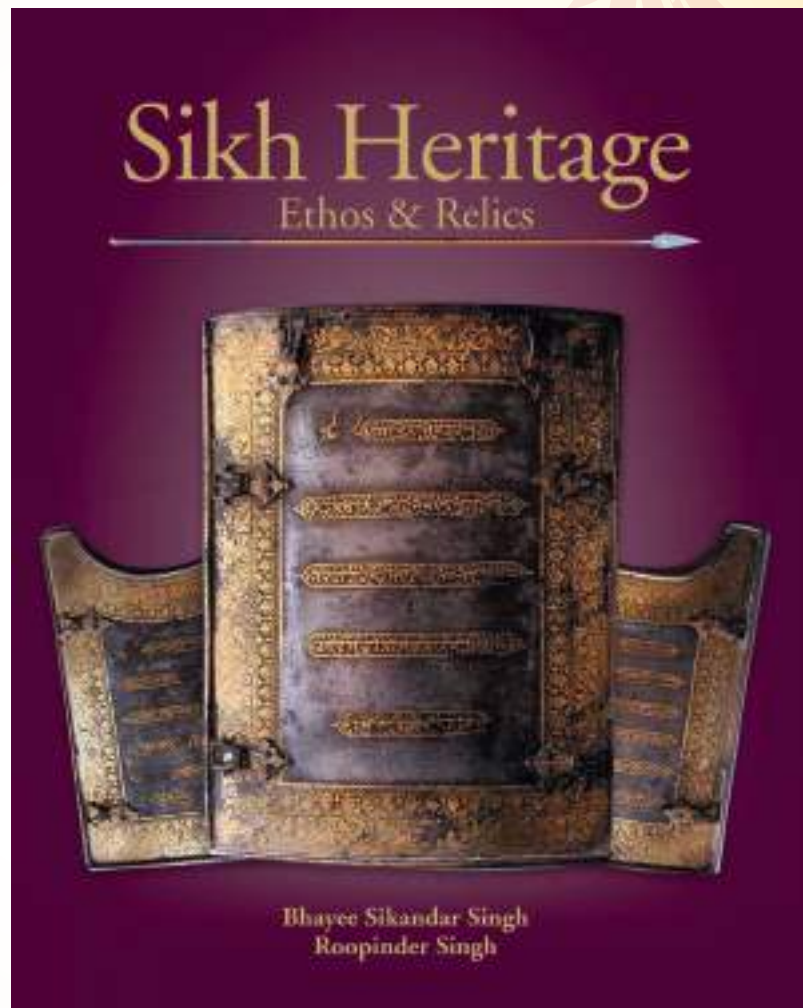
A Review by Dr I.J. Singh

This book is the product of a five-year collaborative effort by the two authors. Full disclosure: I admit with pleasure that I have known the authors for years – Bhayee Sikandar Singh through my association with *Nishaan* magazine; Roopinder Singh as a friend for about 25 years who has reviewed my books and I have reviewed some of his. And a blurb by me graces the back cover of this book.

Whether human social units are small as families and neighbourhood large as countries with political borders, or secular and religious entities, relics and heritage define them; in fact, they are the glue that binds communities and give them structure and identity. Artifacts and relics connect people; they create and preserve history.

There are many milestones in the relatively young 544 year-old Sikh presence in the world. Historical narratives of a people take their life from relics and heritage. No history is a linear trek; there are many vicissitudes, turns, twists in the road, *cul-de-sacs* and pitfalls in the road. Sikhs have had more than their share in an eventful story; it adds richness to their existence.

The ten Founder-Gurus of Sikhism spanned two and a half centuries – from 1469 when Guru Nanak was born in a part of Punjab that is now in Pakistan to 1708 when Guru Gobind Singh breathed his last. The Gurus traveled widely across the Indian subcontinent, at times well beyond its borders; memorabilia of their visits and their influence, therefore, pervade the Indian countryside, transcending borders of language and culture.



Many of the heirlooms dating from the Guru period that are highlighted in this volume are now owned by families with long-standing, centuries-old connections to the Sikh movement. Many have preserved the relics with unmatched love and devotion; a few have neglected them because of ignorance of their value. Even though history is found in them, not many relics have been exhibited and discussed in public forums. Bhayee Sikandar Singh's family is singularly rich with such artifacts and now with the collaboration of Roopinder Singh has brought the treasure trove out into the sunshine of public display.

Both families have been equally known for their long-term dedication to Sikhi and for their collections of Sikh memorabilia. For instance, Sikandar Singh's ancestors became Sikh in the early 1600's in the time of Guru Hargobind and the connection continues through the many collectables that the Guru gifted to the family. Their availability today creates a narrative that truly informs us. Roopinder's father, the late Giani Gurdit Singh, was a respected scholar of Sikh scriptures besides being a well-known Punjabi author.

In a particularly cogent 'Introduction', Paul Michael Taylor, Director of the Asian Cultural

History Programme at the Smithsonian Institution in Washington DC traces the story of this seminal project from the first discussions (with the participation of the West Virginia based *Sikh Heritage Foundation*) at America's national museum, the Smithsonian in 2003, in which scholars from India and North America participated. Some of the heirlooms in this volume were exhibited and highlighted at the Smithsonian lectures.

As Taylor became more intimately involved with the collection and its possibilities both in the United States and in India, it was but natural that he would suggest to Sikandar Singh the possibility of a book.



The opening page of the illuminated Dasam Granth.

He did and I, therefore, without hesitation and singular appreciation, dub Paul Michael Taylor the midwife to this excellent work – a collector's dream, way beyond a coffee table book.

The text is mercifully without the cobwebs and pontification that are the hallmarks of much religious writing, no matter what the religious label. Religions are products of a people, time and place, hence this context of historical and socio-cultural realities must always be front and center in describing a people and their faith. Although born amidst the clash of civilisations of Hinduism and Islam, Sikhism was—and remains—a smaller but dynamic third way. This theme is competently developed here in a well annotated and footnoted presentation and, therefore, provides a wonderful framing for the religious relics and memorabilia that are the kernel, the meat, of the project.

The historical socio-cultural framework is maintained throughout the book that is divided into two sections, *Ethos* and *Relics*. The bios of the ten Gurus are brief but informative. The two-century development of the Sikh movement is sketched well. The evolution of Sikhism from Guru Nanak to Guru Gobind Singh is ably traced, as is the development of the Sikh scripture (Guru Granth).

The story moves seamlessly to the post-Guru period, the times of Banda Bahadur and Maharaja Ranjit Singh; the Anglo-Sikh wars, the Sikh struggle for self-governance of the historical gurdwaras and shrines, the Gurdwara Reform Movement, The Singh Sabha movement, and finally into the recent past – the movement for independence from the British in which Sikhs had such a momentous role, far in excess of their population.



Detail of craftsmanship of the rabab of Guru Arjan Dev, which shows fine carving.

A rabab of Guru Arjan Dev, who was an accomplished musician. When he compiled the Bani of his predecessors, he arranged it in ragas, and gave Sri Guru Granth Sahib its unique format in which the compositions are arranged under the headings of the ragas.



A close-up of an arrow given by Guru Gobind Singh to Babas Rama and Taloka at Anandpur Sahib in 1696. The arrow has three bands of gold on it.



A kirpan that belonged to Guru Gobind Singh, which he gave at Talwandi Sabo to Babas Rama and Taloka, before leaving for the Deccan in 1706.

Six arrows, given by Guru Gobind Singh to Babas Rama and Taloka of Damdama Sahib in 1706.

In summary, the *Ethos* section is a coherent story of the Sikhs, briefly but well told. The people who made a difference find a place – men like Max Arthur Macauliffe and C.F. Andrews, Giani Ditt Singh, Bhai Kahn Singh Nabha, Captain Ishar Singh and many others. Even the infamous General Dyer, who was the architect of the 1919 massacre at the Jallianwala Bagh and Mahant Narain Das, the corrupt caretaker of the birthplace of Guru Nanak are not neglected.

The crown jewels of this book, however, are the heirlooms and relics of *Sikh Heritage*.

Locating relics from several hundred years ago is no easy matter. The land and people go through many changes; time, wars and pestilence take their toll, as do familial break downs and rivalries that surface everywhere. Where political strife is normal, relative poverty abounds and powerful institutions like the Catholic Church do not exist, collection and preservation of memorabilia then takes a back seat; it needs a miracle. Many of the relics are no longer in the keeping of Sikhs – individuals or institutions. Some are now in Pakistan, either individually held by Muslim families or in the care of government institutions. Many of the items highlighted in this book are not easily available to be viewed.

In this collection each item carries an explanatory note. There are paintings from that period, and items of personal use of the gurus — *phulkaris* and garments with their intricate designs, metal work, utensils from *langar*, old cots and many weapons, etc. And then, of course there are the handwritten documents that we need to value and preserve before time takes its toll and destroys them.

In this work we do have a miracle! This book depends primarily on the Bagrian family collection and also draws on the treasures held by many renowned families of the time and rulers of many quasi-independent states in the Indian subcontinent like Patiala and Nabha who were connected through historical and social ties with the Bagrian family.



Guru Hargobind with a hawk. The painting was commissioned by Bhai Bidhi Chand, according to Gurbilas Patshahi 6. A similar painting is at Sursinghwala.



A cage for the pet birds of Guru Hargobind. The Guru was fond of koels (cuckoos) and in one of his *Hukumnamas* to the sangat of Patna, we find a reference where he asks them to send him a pair of healthy koels.

The family of Sikandar Singh displays an unbroken line from the time Rup Chand came to the court of Guru Hargobind in the early 17th century. He and his family became Sikhs and the intimate contact has remained ever since. And the Gurus – from Hargobind to Gobind Singh – blessed the family, sometimes with their own personal items. Now time has transformed these memorabilia to worth their weight in gold and more.

Remarkably, in the politico-cultural landscape of India, the family and its holdings have survived intact, as have other collections featured in the Relics section of the book—Patiala, Nabha, Drauli, Sursinghwala. Hence a coherent, cogent story can be constructed and that's what the authors have done. In its entirety the story is also the history of the last half of the Guru period – an eye catching narrative of Sikhism and its evolution.



Entrance to the fort-residence of the Bhai Sahibs of Bagrian



"Rare record of a glorious heritage" is how Harish Dhillon, a reviewer dubbed this work. This is no ordinary book; a degree of visible veneration has gone into its making.

At first glance one might find this book a bit pricey. But resist that thought; it's worth it.

Authors : Bhayee Sikandar Singh & Roopinder Singh xvii + 204 pages, 2012, Price Rs. 1500.00 Rupa Publications India Pvt Ltd, New Delhi 100 002, INDIA A specially gilded edition is available outside India through the Sikh Heritage Foundation, 485 Colliers Way, Weirton, WV 26062, amrikchattha@gmail.com (\$100.00)

Reproduced from the book 'Sikh Heritage: Ethos and Relics' is this chapter on

Guru Nanak and His Teachings



Guru Nanak in a discourse with Behlol, a Muslim seer, at Baghdad, during his travel to Mecca. The legend says that so charmed was Behlol by the Guru's presence that even after he had left, Behlol sat at the same spot, saying he did not want the divine experience to be eclipsed. A Gurdwara near Baghdad Railway Station commemorated Guru Nanak's visit, where Behlol met him. The painting by an unknown artist depicts the Guru in attire that could have been of a rabbi of the period, although the Indian wooden toe-knob sandals (kharawan) are distinct.

While Guru!' the Sikhs exclaim in wonder as they endeavour to fathom the Reality of the Creator, the Ultimate Truth, the Timeless and Eternal Being. The understanding of God, who is the Ultimate Reality, forms the core belief of any religion. Guru Nanak uses the symbol ੴ pronounced *Ekankar*, to sum up the Ultimate Reality as One that permeates everything. This Reality has no name, and yet is known by innumerable names.

God is *Naam*, which means the name by which one remembers or addresses someone. In fact, He is remembered by His attributive names, names given by man according to his understanding.

In Sikhism, self-realisation is the primary step to God-realisation. Through intense devotion and repetition of His name (*Naam*), the soul progresses and ascends to achieve God-consciousness and feels God's eternal presence within. Thus, *Naam* is close to what the Greeks called *Logos*.

Guru Nanak affirms, 'In the beginning was the Truth. Before the beginning was the Truth, even now is the Truth. In future shall remain the Truth-God is Absolute and makes Himself manifest in His creation. 'He is self-created, eternal and beyond time', says Sri Guru Granth Sahib, the Sikh scripture, in its opening stanzas. 'There is, therefore, no sin, no virtue, no Veda or any religious book, no caste, and no gender. When God became manifest, He became what is called the *Naam* (Name) in order to realise Himself. He made Nature, wherein He has His seat and is thus diffused everywhere and in all directions in the form of "love". There is no antithesis to Him and as such the concept of evil incarnate or Satan does not exist.'

The self has always remained a favourite theme in the philosophical and religious traditions of the world, as it is considered essential, leading to the realisation of the Truth and Liberation *moksha, mukti, or nirvana*.

A Sikh does not aim for individual salvation or to enter a heavenly abode called paradise. He develops the best in himself, the human in the being, an element of Divinity.

As a personal God, He is capable of being loved and honoured. He has no incarnations. He Himself stands for the creative agencies. He Himself is Truth and Beauty and the Eternal yearning of the heart. In a way, the Sikh Gurus have combined the Aryan idea of immanence with the Semitic idea of transcendence, without taking away anything from the unity and the personal characteristic of God, and thus delineated a unique concept.

The universe, according to Sikh thought, is transitory, being rooted in God, who alone is Real. First, God is indivisibly one, above every other being. Second, He is the highest moral being who has inscribed all men with His *Naam* or moral presence. He is not a God belonging to any particular people; He is the dispenser of life all over the universe. He can be attained by practising His presence through the *Shabad* (Word) with intense devotion, and contemplation on *Naam* (His Name). The only way of worshipping Him is to sing His praises."

The Sikh way of life believes in the upliftment of man based on his character and deeds. It thus distinguishes itself from idle mysticism.

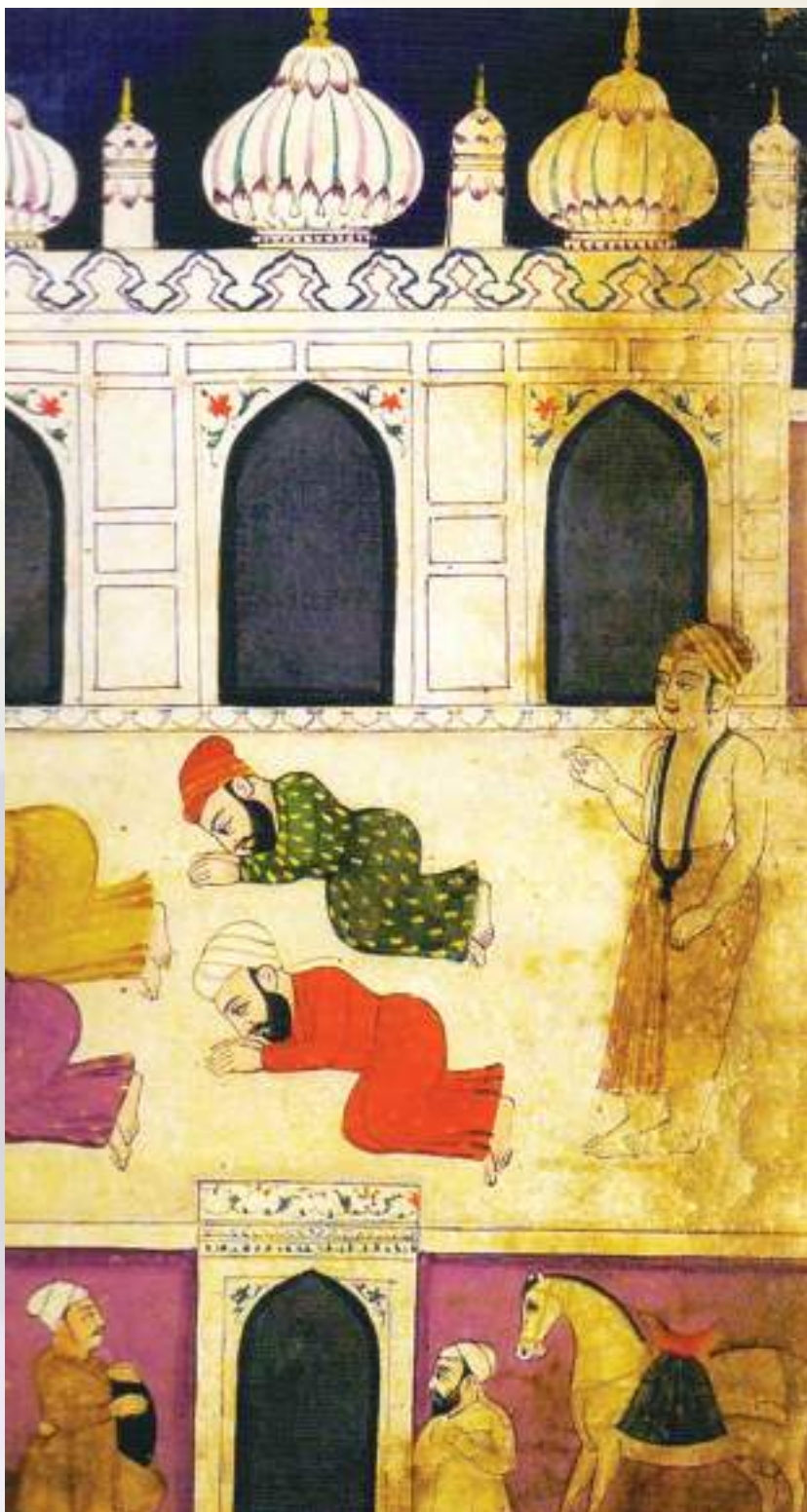
An ideal man, conceived for an ideal society, is not the solitary individual of yogic mysticism, but a

part of society (*sagal jamaati*). The message of Sikhism is- 'Abide pure amidst the impurities of the world'. There can be no worship without good actions. These actions, however, are not to be formal deeds of so-called merit for compensatory benefits, but should be motivated by an intense desire to please God and to serve one's fellowmen. Fundamental to the Gurus' thought was building man's character, based on values of truth, love and equality. It is character alone that helps in moral crises. Consequently, the Gurus did not think it sufficient only to lay down rules of conduct in a book, but built a living social organisation based on these principles.

Varanashram, and other philosophical Hindu concepts, were deeply embedded in the Indian social psyche, which they had dominated for thousands of years. The Gurus understood the strength of their challenge while asking people to adopt a new mode of living. The Gurus thus found it necessary to take in hand a whole people, through a continuous course of reorientation and schooling in wisdom and experience spread over many generations, before they were sure that the people thus trained had acquired a character of their own, and the ability to self-regulate and self-sustain.

Faced with centuries of entrenched biases, socio-religious prejudices and ritualistic redundancy, the whole value system had to be changed and it was, in fact, transmuted during this process. The spirit of man was thus raised with a belief that he was not a helpless creature in the hands of a Being with an arbitrary Will, but had the inherent Divine spark within him, which, when invoked, would enable him to uplift and redeem himself. In Sikhism, the law of karma—according to which one reaps what one sows—is not inexorable. The burden of past sins, the taint of karma, the weight of our past can be thrown off by delving deeper into Truth, by leading a pure and noble life and, above all, by earning the grace of God: *Gur Prasad*. Human life is an opportunity for man to rise to immortal heights, or alternatively, fall into the pit of disgrace. The scripture says, 'The Guru's word erases the blot of thousands of evil deeds of the past and the greatest sinner can become the greatest saint'

Man is given a will with which he can modify the inherited and acquired tendencies of his past, and determine his future conduct. This will of man, channelled through the Guru's word, gets attuned to the Supreme Will, and acquires a force with which he



Guru Nanak at namaz at the mosque in his village. The folio from the eighteenth-century *Janamsakhi* depicts an episode from his early life. Guru Nanak is shown standing in the picture while others are bowing. When asked why he did not bow during the prayers like the others, he told the qazi that while his mouth was uttering the prayer, his mind was busy trading horses! Thus, the Guru exposed the hypocrisy of the priestly order by pointing out that the prayer should be from the heart.

can transcend his past and gain a new character altogether.

The ultimate source of everything is *Akalpurakh*, the Timeless, who is also within us. Nothing exists beyond Him, not even 'evil' can function independent of God. Thus there is no antithesis to God, no Satan. Man himself is responsible for his actions, whether good or evil. One sins as long as the 'light' within remains unmanifested. Regeneration comes when one begins to subject one's tiny self to the highest Self, i.e. God, and one's own will is gradually attuned to His Supreme Will, until one feels and moves just as He wishes one to feel, and moves in sync with Him.

The problem of good and evil is only the problem of union and dis-union with God. As long as man is conscious of this, he lives and moves in union with Him. But when he is led away by the overwhelming 'sense of the self – his *haumai* (ego) – he breaks himself away from that Unity with Him and begins to flounder in moral isolation.

Although it is difficult for man to resist evil and do good with his own power, he could acquire a transcendental capacity for the purpose if he is primed with a divine personality possessing dynamic powers. This personality is to be the Guru's; the teacher's message, the Word of the scripture, *Shabad*.

The way of religion perceived for the Sikhs is not a set of views or doctrines but a way of life lived according to a definite model, based upon disciple-ship, or following a path shown by the preceptors and not just governed by a narrow framework of dos and don'ts, dictated by a clergy. The personality of the Guru is all along operative in his disciple, conducting his whole being and shaping his life.

Without such a personality, there would be no cohesion or direction for the moral forces in a society. There would be no force to connect man with man and then with God. Everyone would exist in moral isolation, only for himself.

When such a devoted disciple (Sikh) merges his personality into a perfect Guru, he is transformed into Khalsa, the perfect one. In this respect, Guru Gobind Singh is a role model for every Sikh. He himself describes such a perfect Sikh:

*'The Khalsa is my Image special
In the Khalsa ever resides my Spirit
The Khalsa is my Beloved and
Venerable Master
The Khalsa is my Divine Protector
The Khalsa is an embodiment of the
True and perfect Guru.'*

This character was demonstrated by the Sikhs during the height of persecution and sufferings against formidable odds in the eighteenth century. The Gurus intensified their character and increased their power manifold by filling their personalities with his own, and the result was for history to take note.

The ten Gurus organised their disciples into sangats and infused their personality again into the Sikhs. This led to a remarkable development in the institution of 'Guru-ship', which eventually became the Guru Panth, thus bestowing divinity on the people.

The Sikh idea of religion was something more practical than merely mystic; it was to consist of the practice of *Naam* and *sewa*. To practise *Naam* means to practise the presence of God by keeping Him ever in our minds, by singing His praises, and dwelling on His excellence. This is to be done not only when in solitude but also in public, where worship of this *Naam* is more effective when organised in the

form of congregational recitations or singing. *Sewa*, or service, should not only be liberal, but also efficient and economical. It should do the greatest good with the least possible means. Sikhism—or this way of life whose aim is to serve and uplift mankind—necessarily requires organisation of its followers as an essential condition for its success. Moreover, where religion consists of realising God mainly through service done within the world, where people have to constantly deal with fellow people to promote each other's good, it is impossible to do so without institutionalisation.

Over the years, a new social order emerged, as also a method of administering it. The founder of this faith, Guru Nanak, had



Guru Nanak at the house of Bhai Lalo, a poor carpenter. The Guru chose to share this man's bread, which had been earned as a result of hard work, while declining to join a feast hosted by Malik Bhago, a local chief. Bhai Lalo's name is mentioned in the Guru's compositions.



The spirit of the Guru is in the panth

begun with two things in his religious work: the holy Word, *Shabad*, and the organised holy fellowship, *sangat*. The idea of *sangat* led to the establishment of local assemblies, headed by authorised representatives called *massands*. Every Sikh was supposed to be a member of such an organisation. The Guru was the central unifying personality, and in spite of changes in succession, the love between the Guru and the Sikh was intense. Homage paid to the Guru was made impersonal by creating a mystic unity between the Sikh and the Guru on the one hand, and the Guru and the Word enshrined in Sri Guru Granth Sahib on the other. The greatest respect began to be paid to the incorporated Word (*Shabad*), even with the Guru choosing for himself a seat lower than that of the scripture. The only form of worship allowed to be practised was the meditation on the Word and singing the praises of the Creator, as inscribed in the scriptures.

The Sikh assemblies also acquired great sanctity, owing to the belief that the spirit of the Guru lived and moved among them collectively, the whole body being called the *panth*. This *panth* follows the path

shown by the way the Gurus lived their lives, as also the precepts laid down by them. In turn, it is regarded as an embodiment of the Guru – *Guru Panth*.

In 1699, Guru Gobind Singh, the tenth Guru, himself received baptism from the five Sikhs he had first initiated. The *panth*, the assembly and the Guru became one. After his demise, there was no living Guru for the Sikhs. The *Shabad*, in the presence of the *sangat*, became the Guru, the guiding light and in presence of *Akalpurakh*, the Timeless Being.

The *panth* thus was invested with the personality of the Guru, and the incorporated Word became *Gyan Guru* (knowledge). This *panth*, called the Khalsa, was to be the Guru in spirit, and was authorised to work with collective responsibility, with Guru Granth Sahib as its guiding spirit. They were directed to worship none but the *Akalpurakh*. The authority of the *massands* was terminated, and thus Sikhism became more of an 'ethos' than mere theology. *Amrit*, or a formal baptism, was made an integral part of this organisation. All those who wanted to serve humanity through Sikhism would join it earnestly as regular members and receive baptism. This entailed and ensured that all had the

same creed, which would be well-defined and not confused or corrupted with the beliefs and practices of the prevailing religions. The Guru had ordained the Khalsa to be distinct from the contemporary prevailing main religions. Such a brotherhood of the committed, the Khalsa, was to embody in itself the highest ideal of manhood as exemplified by Guru Gobind Singh's life. In this regeneration of man, the biases were terminated. This act symbolically destroyed *karma*, *kula*, *dharama* and *jaat* (deeds of the past, lineage, religion and caste).

In the ranks of the Khalsa all are equal, the lowest with the highest, in race as in creed, in political rights as in religious hopes. Women are to be baptised and to baptise others in the same way as men and enjoy the same rights.

Being a Khalsa also entails certain additional codes of discipline in the shape of baptismal oaths of conduct (*rehat*). The importance of these vows cannot be understated. Religion, as taught by the Gurus, is a force that not only ennoble individuals but also binds them together to work for the service of mankind. Discipline keeps up the spirit of the individual against relaxation in times of hardship, and maintains the individual's steadfastness and loyalty to the cause.

The Sikh forms, or visible symbols, were appointed to serve as aids to the preservation of the life of the community, and anyone who likes to serve humanity through the Sikh way of life can adopt them. It is possible for a man to love God and cultivate his individual soul, which is the Sikh goal, without adopting this form. But, if he wants to work in a systematic way, not only for his own advancement, but for the welfare of all (*sarbat da bhala*) in the company of Sikhs, he must adopt this disciplinary form. This association is not with places or things but with an ever-living personality that is itself a symbol of the highest personality. As is God, so is the Guru, and as is the Guru, so must be his followers.

A baptised Sikh is thus enjoined to keep Five Articles of Faith as an inalienable part of his person. These are *kesha* (unshorn hair), a *kanga* (a small comb), a *kirpan* (sword), a *kara* (an iron bangle) on his right forearm, and he should wear *kachha* (underpants which are a longer version of boxers). All starting with the Gutmukhi letter *kaka*, phonetically 'k', hence called the *kakaars*, or the 5 Ks.

The Sikh is to keep his hair uncut, which has always been associated with the ideal man and

saintliness. A comb is a simple necessity for keeping the hair clean and tidy, antithetical to the ascetic with matted hair.

An iron bangle on the right arm is a sign of sternness and constraint. A sword by a Sikh's side, *kirpan*, also called *bhagauti*, represents the primal Divine energy. It is the protector of the oppressed and an emblem of power, dignity and man's sovereignty. Moreover, combined in him is the saintliness of the rishis of old with the sternness and strength of a knight.

The *kachha* is a symbol of continence, restraint and tolerance, and ensures briskness of movement at time of action, and comfort at times of rest. It is also symbolic of man's evolution from a state of nakedness to being civilised by covering himself.

These baptismal forms, with the accompanying commitment of purity, love and service, have aided them in keeping themselves united and their ideals unsullied even in times of the greatest of trials.

Ceremonies, among Sikhs, whether in a temple or at home, whether for birth, marriage or death, consist of nothing but praying. Constant singing of hymns from scriptures creates a frame of mind and ambience.

The Sikh is enjoined to make these five elements of forms a part of his living. This also gives him an identity that stands for commitment to the precepts mentioned above, and also makes every Sikh a living, acting, committed and unabashed epitome of the way of life given to him by his Gurus.

The Guru

The word 'Guru', a term often used in Indian religious tradition, has a special connotation in Sikh ethos. In Sikhism, the Guru is not an incarnate of God; he is not a prophet or messenger of God, in whom the light of God completely and visibly shines. He is not God and is not to be worshipped as God. The mysteries of God and His creation are known either to God or to the Guru. The true Guru is the true instrument of God's Will (*Hukam*), and is commissioned by Him to reveal His Truth to humanity.

Guru is a Sanskrit word consisting of *Gu* = darkness, and *ru* = light. Accordingly, Guru is the true enlightener of the Soul, dispeller of ignorance and spiritual guide.

A Guru is vital to man's spiritual progress, not as God Himself, but as one who shows the path and is an

archetypal exemplar. It is through him that Divinity–Akalpurakh (the Timeless One)–instructs, and is capable of leading the believers to the highest state of spiritual enlightenment, which is experiencing the Divine presence. The Guru is a witness of God’s love for His creation. He is His *Hukam* (Will) made concrete. As a guide, the Guru is Revealer of the Divine Word and message. Guru is synonymous with the Word (Shabad), the Divine light within, the self-revelation. He is not to be confused with the human form. The real Guru is God, for He alone is the source of all Light.

Guru Nanak says that the true Guru must be such as to unite all men. He must not be above man’s capacity to emulate, as would be the case if he were a supernatural being. His humanity must be real and not feigned. He should be subject to the same laws as the ordinary human and should have attained his perfection through His Grace, which is also available to all ordinary men, and through perfect obedience to God’s Will. Thus, the Guru is the central concept and theme in Sikhism. The preceptors, the ten Sikh Gurus, demonstrated this with full intensity.

This feeling of incorporation with the Guru makes the Sikh strong beyond his ordinary capacity. The transformation comes not only through close association with the Guru, something to be found in many other religions as well, but in the unique manner in which the Sikh believes that he is subsumed in the Guru.

The Sikh Gurus are revered as spiritually enlightened human beings, not worshipped as incarnations of God. In the scriptures, they declare themselves to be champions (representatives) and bards of God. Guru Gobind Singh declares himself to be His slave, and prohibits his Sikhs from identifying him with God. Before his demise, the tenth Guru instructed the Khalsa to follow the Eternal Guru–Shabad, the Word – enshrined in Sri Guru Granth Sahib.

Throughout the development of Sikhism up to Guru Gobind Singh, the Guru had been assigned a place of predominance. Guru Nanak, in so many of his verses, highlights this point. As a matter of fact, in Guru Nanak’s system, the Guru formed the pivot on which everything else hinged. The disciple was asked to walk on the path of the Guru, to remain ever-content in his Will and his Commands. But in these matters, as in everything else, the Guru was to point out the right path; he was to interpret the Will of God, and the commands of the Almighty were also to be issued through the medium of his ordinances. The Guru, therefore, was to be implicitly obeyed and his will was to be accepted.

The place of the Guru in Sikh faith and tradition is of great importance. That is why Guru Gobind Singh bestowed the pontifical office for all times to come on Sri Guru Granth Sahib and the *panth* (*Khalsa Panth*), representing the spiritual and the temporal aspects respectively. Since then, the Sikhs revere Sri Guru Granth Sahib and seek guidance from it on all crucial and not so-crucial moments in personal life. However, the reverence shown to the scripture is not to be identified with worship.

Sri Guru Granth Sahib is the ever-lasting guide and teacher. Among other things, its uniqueness lies in the fact that it is the only scripture which was compiled, edited, signed and sealed by the preceptors themselves. The integrity of this scripture is unassailable, for the simple reason that copies of the original, signed by the Gurus, are available.



Guru Granth Sahib is the ever-lasting guide

Gurdwara by the Gulf



The Guru Nanak Durbar in Dubai

17 January 2013 marked first anniversary of the Arab World's first Gurdwara, the Guru Nanak Durbar in Dubai. The United Arab Emirates is an oasis as such where people of all religions enjoy the kind of freedom that reflects the wisdom and equity of its rulers. Owing to the faith of UAE's Sikh and Sindhi community and the generosity of the UAE's Rulers, Dubai is now home to the most magnificent Gurdwara in the Middle East.

Ornate 24-carat gold canopies for the Guru Granth Sahib, Italian marble on the walls and floor, stunning chandeliers and a five-star kitchen : Dubai's first gurdwara is a grand realisation of the aspirations of 50,000 Sikhs in the United Arab Emirates.

On entering the building, one is in awe of its sheer grandeur and the attention to detail. A sense of calm descends as strains of *Tu Prabh Daata*, an inspirational *kirtan* fill the air. NRI businessman Surender Singh Kandhari, the man behind the Gurdwara urges devotees to use the lift instead of taking the stairs to the main prayer hall.



Built at a cost of Dh65 million, the 120,000 square foot Sikh temple opened on 17 January 2012.



The gold-plated palki or canopy under which the Guru Granth Sahib is kept. The Gurdwara complex houses three other gold-plated canopies crafted and assembled by artisans from Thailand.

Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, the ruler of Dubai, who donated a piece of land in the Jebel Ali area for the gurdwara about six years ago, wanted it to be 'iconic'. The opulent building is worth every bit of the 65 million Dirhams spent on it - a large part of it contributed by Kandhari himself.

"We didn't want to compromise on anything. It has the latest Italian marble and best lights. I told the contractor I want a 100-year guarantee for the building so that our future generations are able to utilise it," he stated in an interview.

"I told the ruler (who wanted the world's finest) 'well, one can't surpass the Golden Temple. But what we have is the most modern gurdwara in the world,'" recalled Kandhari, chairman of the Al Dobowi Group that manufactures and distributes automotive batteries and tyres.



Aardas at the Guru Nanak Darbar.



The architecture is influenced by Southhall Gurdwara in London, with a massive chandelier imported from Italy.

The dream of an iconic building was born 11 years ago with the growing need of a proper place of worship for the Gulf Sikhs, who until January 2012 had makeshift gurdwaras in various locations including the Bur Dubai. The 'go ahead' came through six years ago when the ruler of Dubai gave 25,400 sq feet of land to build the temple, said Kandhari.

On grand opening of the gurdwara on 17 January 2012, Surrender Singh Kandhari compared Sheikh Mohammed, also vice president of the UAE, to Muslim saint Hazrat Mian Mir, who had in 1588 laid the foundation stone of the Golden Temple in Amritsar, the holiest shrine for Sikhs. Today, as many as 10,000 people visit the Dubai gurdwara, which has three floors of parking space, on Fridays.





The Darbar on the first floor accommodates 3,000 people.



"On Baisakhi day 2012, we served langar to around 40,000 people visiting the gurdwara," Kandhari recalled, adding that several Pakistanis are amongst those also come regularly besides many Sindhis and Hindu Punjabis.

The state-of-the-art langar kitchen, which feeds devotees through the day every day, is worth a visit. It is complete with a dough-kneader, a chappati-maker and large dishwashers. And as with the entire Gurdwara, the kitchen too is spotless.

Apart from a large carpeted prayer hall, there are three smaller rooms for private functions, a meditation room, a library and the spacious 'langar' or common kitchen hall.

The Guru Nanak Darbar is, in a manner modelled on both the Golden Temple, the new gurdwara in Southall, London as also the Sikh Centre at Silat Road in Singapore. Interior designer Paul Bishop was sent to these locations "to get the feel".

Importantly, to develop religious values among the next generation of NRIs, special three-hour sessions are held for children on Saturdays where they are taught Punjabi and kirtan. "There already are 55 children attending these classes. All four of my grandchildren, one of them just two years old, go there," said Surender Singh.

"The women are keen on sending their children to learn kirtan. When you are out of India, your desire to connect to your roots becomes stronger," he continued.

Having grown up in Andhra Pradesh and later studying in Chennai's Loyola College, he admitted that he really learned about his language and religion only when he came to Dubai in 1976. Thus, he



The exquisite waterbody which surrounds the Gurdwara



Raagis at the Gurdwara

understands the need for children to know about their culture in a foreign land.

“They cannot learn without getting proper lessons. In Vijayawada, I had no one to teach me Punjabi. While in Loyola College in Madras, I used to go to church every Sunday. I started learning about Sikhism and Punjabi after coming to Dubai.”

Although the NRI businessman had to borrow funds from friends to complete the gurdwara, he calls the income generated thereafter as “unbelievable”. He already has plans to use the money. “I want to build a hospital for the poor. Healthcare is so expensive in Dubai... labourers living in camps nearby can’t afford the high medical costs.”

Surender Singh Kandhari said the gurdwara attracts visitors from across



the world. “We have visitors from the UK, the US, France and Canada... they get surprised that in an Islamic country, we have perhaps the most modern gurdwara in the world”.

Malavika Vettath
[From IANS]

The Langar



The langar at the Gurdwara, open from 6am to 9pm every day.

The traditional langar or free community kitchen at the Guru Nanak Darbar in Dubai feeds tens of thousands of visitors every week, with the Guru Nanak Darbar having emerged as a community and tourist centre. "No one who visits the gurdwara goes without partaking food," said Kandhari, noting that the concept of langar stresses equality and teaches people to eat as a community.

The langar, open from 6am to 9pm every day, provides hot meals to all visitors, Sikhs and non-Sikhs alike. On weekdays, visitors help themselves from a buffet counter but on weekends they are served in traditional manner as they sit on the floor to eat together in a huge hall. The elderly and handicapped sit at dining tables.

The meal is nutritious and sumptuous and usually comprises salad, *sabzi*, *dal*, *roti* and rice. There's a sweet dish too and tea for the asking – all produced in a 4,000 square foot state-of-the-art kitchen that has five separate stores, including a chiller and deep freezer.

As Kulwant Singh said, "The catering and cleaning have been outsourced to Accuro, a Dubai-based specialist support service which has a dedicated professional team of chefs and cleaners working to the highest standards of hygiene." The kitchen is well equipped to cater to large numbers of people: two automatic kneading machines that can knead up to 90 kg of flour in 10 minutes, an automatic roti machine than can make 1,200 rotis an hour, a dishwasher that can clean up to 1,000 plates and glasses an hour and so on. Over weekends, 1,500 kg of vegetables, 300 kg of lentils and 350 kg of rice are used to feed the large numbers. "We make 90kg of dal and sabzi in one hour," said one of the chefs.

The sheer scale of the Gurdwara has visitors impressed. The main prayer hall, which can accommodate up to 3,000 people at a time, turns into a sea of visitors on weekends. They include both residents and tourists.

"We arrived from London this morning and the Gurunanak Darbar was the first destination on our sightseeing agenda," said Dave Gill, a British tourist who was visiting with his wife. "It's beautiful and blends in well with the rest of the landscape."

"I have come from Mumbai and my father told me this is a must-visit. Now I can see why," said visitor Neelu Chadha.

"I visit everyday and we are blessed to have such a place in Dubai," said Charanjeet Banga, a resident of Dubai's Discovery Gardens.

Sharmila Dhal



The concept of langar stresses on equality and teaches people to sit and eat together as a community.

Inspiration behind the Guru Nanak Durbar



Surender Singh Kandhari and his wife 'Bubbles'

Men who achieve great success are not uncommon in business. But those who acquire everything the world can offer and pay little attention to earthly gains to seek the greater satisfaction of spiritual fulfilment are an uncommon breed. Perhaps they are the ones who ultimately realise their destiny.

Surender Singh Kandhari, founder and chairman of the Dubai-based Al Dobowi Group, is one such archetype individual. His unique 11-year spiritual quest to build a place of worship for his peoples has culminated in a contribution that will remain undiminished far beyond his lifetime.

Kandhari has created history by spearheading the UAE's Sikh and Sindhi community's efforts to build the Middle East's first Gurdwara in Dubai, the Guru Nanak Darbar, in Jebel Ali. In an interview, Kandhari recalled how he had followed his family tradition of leading the community's efforts to build Gurdwaras in places where there were none and how it was his destiny to serve God and the Sikh community.

It all started more than 58 years ago when Kandhari's grandfather Atma Singh, who himself had helped build a Gurdwara in Vijaywada, in the southern Indian state of Andhra Pradesh, in 1956. He told his eight-year-old grandson Surender Singh Kandhari, that one day he too must help build a Gurdwara when he grew up.

"I was just eight-years-old at that time and it struck me as a bit odd that my grandfather should ask me to do something as huge as that," he recollects. "Then strangely, when I was 12-years-old and studying at Hyderabad Public School, an itinerant palm reader told me that by the age of 45, I would become a priest. I promptly told him "no" as I wanted to run our three generation-old family business in automotive spare parts in India. I had no intention of giving it all up. However, that incident stuck in my mind and often made me think about what my grandfather said to me years ago," recalls Surender, who was born in Vijayawada in 1948, the family having earlier migrated to India from Kandahar in Afghanistan.

Still, the demands of life soon occupied all of his thoughts and time, after he graduated with honours in Commerce from Loyola College, Chennai.

"Most of the people in the tyre and automotive parts business in those days used to be uneducated or poorly educated people. But my father wanted us to be different and he made sure that we got a good education so that we would be capable of taking the family business to the next level," he explains.

"I share my father's views on that and I too made sure my sons Jasjeev and Harjeev Singh, who will one day inherit my business, were educated at the best possible institutions in Europe and they also started their careers there. Jasjeev is a chartered accountant, and Harjeev's background is in banking and private equity," says Surender with natural pride.

In 1976, at the age of 26, Kandhari, along with his wife 'Bubbles', and their two young sons Jasjeev and Harjeev, came to the UAE to take the family business further, setting up a modest shop in Deira, Dubai.



Chairman of Al Dobowi Group Surender S Kandhari (middle) with Jasjiv and Harjeev Singh Kandhari at Dubai.

Talking about his reasons for coming to the UAE and his first impressions, Surender recalls: "When I came to Dubai, I saw a wealth of opportunity in front of me. We had the 'early bird' advantage as there were very few automotive parts and tyre companies back then.

"Predictably as Dubai grew, our business grew. Massive construction projects meant that heavy equipment vehicles needed tyres to be brought into the Emirate to build roads and infrastructure. As the number of vehicles in the Emirate grew, our business expanded," he reveals. Kandhari's hard work, business acumen and reputation for honesty paid off handsomely and today the Al Dobowi Group has a multi-billion dirham business with offices in different locations in UAE, a tyre factory in the Jebel Ali Free Zone and offices in several countries across the world.

However, despite all the success and the substantial perks that come with significant achievement, Surender Singh, though being an

avid sportsman and also Captain of the prestigious Emirates Golf Club in Dubai, always felt that there was something missing from his life.

"My family and I consider Dubai our home now, but there was always something missing from our lives because there was no Gurdwara in the UAE where we could go and worship and bond as a community.

"In the Sikh culture and religion, a Gurdwara is central to the community as that's where we gather and hold our weddings, celebrate births and festivals, mourn deaths, meet each other, eat at the *Langar* and bond as a people to show our care and concern for another. The *Langar* is open from 6am to 9pm everyday, and provides vegetarian food to all visitors, Sikh and non-Sikh alike. Volunteers serve people sitting traditional style on the floor, except on busy weekends, when there is a buffet counter."

"A Gurdwara is not just the house of God for us, it is the life force that ties the whole Sikh community together and our lives revolve around it. That was missing here," Surender reminisces. He decided to do something about it and along with other prominent Sikhs in the UAE spearheaded the community's efforts to build a Gurdwara in Dubai.

Recalling those days of struggle when they would petition the rulers of Dubai to grant them permission to open a Gurdwara, Kandhari says: "It was a long drawn-out process. We had to explain the concept of the Sikh religion and convince them that it was a basic need of the community."

"It was hard to explain to the UAE officials the very idea of *Sangat* (community worship) and *Langar*. I had to translate excerpts from the Sikh holy book the Guru Granth Sahib, and read them out to the officials. I had to tell them that just like followers of Christ and in Islam, Sikhs believe in One supreme God, do not worship idols and that everyone is equal in the community."

"After six long years of petitioning the rulers, who I must point out always gave us very patient hearing, we finally had cause to celebrate when His Highness Sheikh Mohammad bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Vice President and Prime Minister of the UAE and the Ruler of Dubai, very generously gave us permission not only to build the Gurdwara but he also gave

us 25,000 square feet of land absolutely free near the Jebel Ali Hospital."

"His only condition was that the Gurdwara should be 'number' one in the world in keeping with Dubai's image of being the best at everything, with its superlative architecture. I assured His Highness that while I could not give him the 'number one' Gurdwara in the world, as that is the unique Golden Temple in Amritsar, but I could certainly ensure that it would be the best in the outside world and it would have the world marvelling," narrated Surender Singh Kandhari.

Once the land was given, there was no stopping the 50,000 strong Sikh community and 40,000 Sindhi follows in the UAE from India and Pakistan.

The finest engineers, architects, interior designers and construction firms were commissioned and the work began in earnest on building what has since become an intrinsic part of the UAE's landscape.

The internationally-reputed Dubai-based architect firm Holford Associates, which has built over 20 churches, four mosques and one temple, was entrusted with the task of designing the Guru Nanak Darbar.

The internationally-reputed Dubai-based architect firm Holford Associates, that has built over 20 churches, four mosques and one temple, was entrusted with the task of designing the Guru Nanak Darbar.

It took two years for Holford Associates and Paul Bishop Design Associates to give shape to the three storey masterpiece built over 125,000 square feet with a basement, a community kitchen and assembly halls.

In fact, so vital to the project was precision and detail, that Paul Bishop and designer Arafah Bashir visited the Golden Temple in Amritsar often to study the frescoes and wall paintings of the Harmandir Sahib.

Five years and Dhs 65 million later, the most modern Gurdwara in the world was opened on 17 January 2012 with funds raised almost entirely from within the community in the UAE.

"Sikhs have very large hearts where the Gurdwara and community langar is concerned and donate very generously. This is an integral part of our faith as our Gurus believed in feeding the poor first before he preached his philosophy to them."

To give you an example, every day truck loads of rice, pulses and vegetables are sent by our community members to feed everyone who comes to the Gurdwara. We never have to buy these food items," says a gratified Surender, proud of the Sikh and Sindhi community's commitment. Thanks to their generosity,

the Guru Nanak Darbar is a much talked about community and tourist attraction that has a dedicated floor for community feasts and a huge hall for devotional kirtan.

The main prayer hall of the Guru Nanak Darbar with the 24 carat gold-plated Palki Sahib has a 7.2 metre high ceiling and an 18-metre glass topped dome roof, which can accommodate 3,000 people.

Mauve-coloured carpets, Murano glass chandeliers, Italian marble throughout the building and superb acoustics lend a distinct touch to the column-free main prayer hall. "People from any community and religion can visit a Gurdwara, so we have installed big screens that translate all the hymns and the readings from our holy book in three different languages – English, Hindi and Gurmukhi," Surender Singh explained.

The function hall can accommodate up to 900 people and there are two basement level parking areas. There is a 54-metre water body, inspired by the *Sarovar* (pond) at the Golden Temple and a cascading water feature. There are two entrances to the building where devotees leave their shoes in purpose-built racks. State-of-the-art washing areas and washrooms include special areas for the elderly and mothers to rest in.

As many as 5,000 people can be fed by the Gurdwara's five star quality kitchens and up to 600 people can eat together squatting on the ground floor. "It's a time honoured Sikh tradition that once you are at the Gurdwara, you should partake in the langar. So whoever comes to the Guru Nanak Durbar, no matter what religion or nationality they belong to, eats before leaving."

"In fact, very recently we invited all the priests from the adjacent Churches to come and see the Gurdwara and participate in the Langar," said Surender Singh.



On behalf of the Sikh community in Dubai, Surender Singh Kandhari receiving a kirpan from the Jathedar Akal Takht Amritsar, HS Giani Singh Sahib and Giani Gurbachan Singh ji (right).

Two chefs from India who specialise in Langar food were flown in from India and are now working at the Gurdwara.

The state-of-the-art kitchen has five separate stores, including a chiller and deep freezer, with the capacity to prepare 1,800 meals per hour and wash 1,200 plates and glasses an hour. It is equipped with two automatic kneading machines that can knead up to 90 kg of flour in 10 minutes, an automatic chapati machine than can make 1,200 chapatis an hour. Catering and cleaning has been outsourced to a specialist support service which has a dedicated professional team of chefs and cleaners who work hard to maintain the highest standards of hygiene.

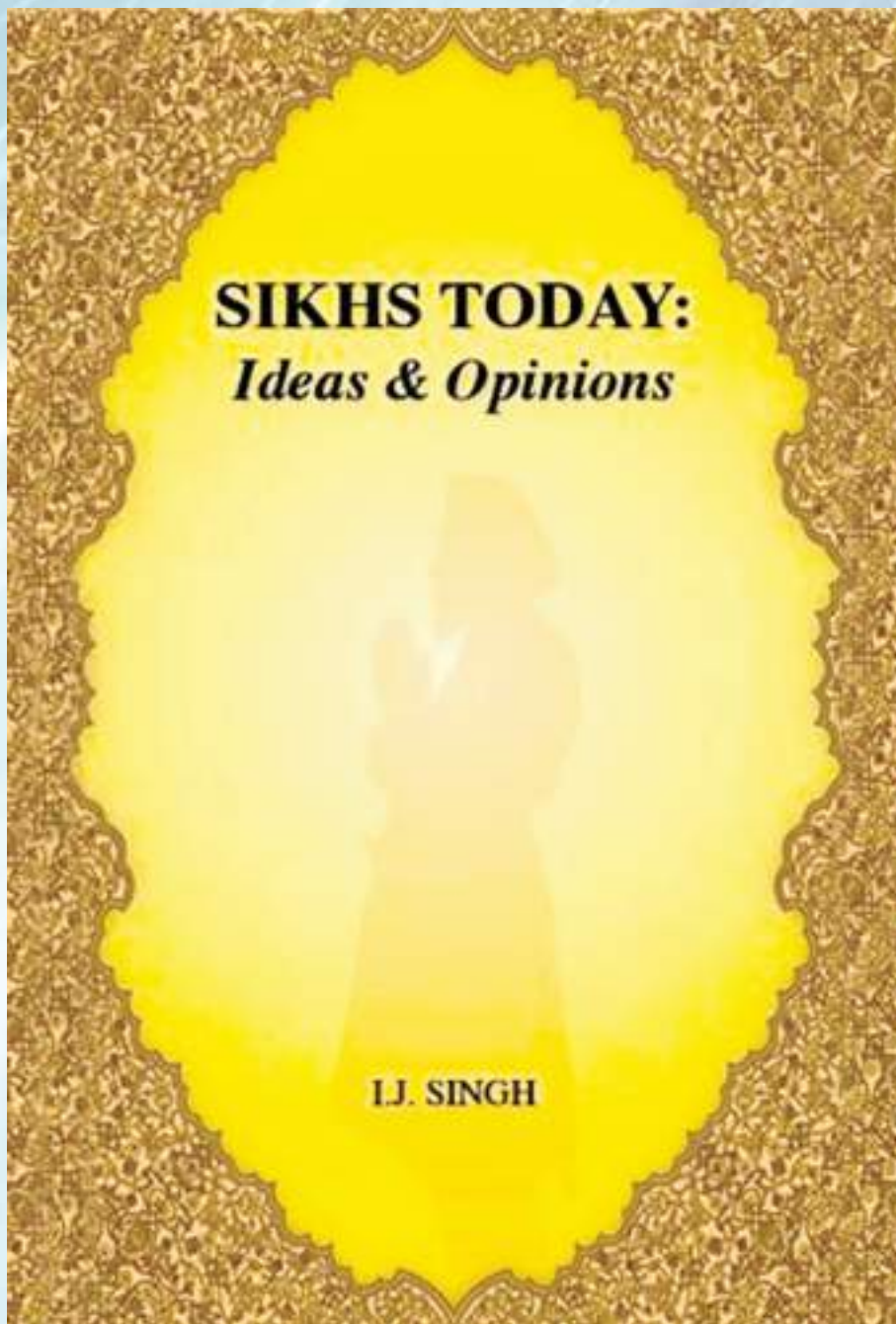
The enthusiasm for the Guru Nanak Durbar has been overwhelming with up to 10,000 visitors, both Sikh and non-Sikhs alike, converging there during the weekends and an average of 500 visitors coming everyday. "It is increasingly becoming a unique part of the community in Dubai. I have often seen people from different nationalities come there just to meditate in the rooms that we have built for that

purpose," observes Surender. It's not just a place for the community to meet and worship, it is also a tourist attraction with visitors to Dubai making a special effort to see the exquisite place of worship.

Surender Singh still cannot believe he has finally been able to accomplish the task his grandfather entrusted him with five decades ago. "It's a dream come true. I still can't believe that the Gurdwara is real. I feel like all of this is an illusion. I go there every morning and marvel at what we have achieved."

"This is perhaps the most talked about Gurdwara in the world and the global Sikh community has graciously acknowledged my humble role in creating this legacy for the Sikh community in the Middle East. "It is the biggest achievement of my life, and it's very humbling to be a part of this region's history. Nothing can top this for me," says Surender Singh Kandhari deep in thought, as he moves towards the Durbar Sahib to make his obeisance.

*Reena Amos Dyes & Frank Raj
[From : The International Indian]*



Book Review by Manjyot Kaur

“Of making many books there is no end, and much study is a weariness of the flesh,” says the Bible verse in the *Book of Ecclesiastes*. As a Sikh (and thus, by definition, a perpetual student) and an avid admirer of the writings of IJ Singh, I would certainly hope that the first part of this quote is true, but the second part is not the case! Indeed, *Sikhs Today: Ideas & Opinions* is IJ Singh’s fifth book, truly an impressive achievement for any author. It is surely as sorely needed as were its quartet of predecessors, not only as required reading in the Sikh community, but also for a wider audience : the public-at-large that remains considerably ignorant of our faith, despite Sikhi’s standing as the world’s fifth largest religion.

Like all of IJ Singh’s writings since the publication of his first collection of essays in 1994, this fifth installment is penned in his inimitable signature style. “I like to connect factoids of Sikh history, as well as snippets of its doctrine and teachings to the way our contemporary society is formed and the way we live,” he avers in the book’s Preface, and this laudable desire is the driving force behind *Sikhs Today*, as it was in all his earlier works.

“I think it is essential that we define Sikh teachings without compromising them in the context and culture in which they will shape us – and that is here,” as IJ Singh soon goes on to say, firmly situating himself

in the North American diaspora, where he has made his home for more than fifty years.

Right from the book's first essay, *Finding, Losing & Having Fun*, we are immersed in the US Sikh experience, as the author recalls the mantra of "finding oneself" so emblematic of the American 1960s, and emphasises Sikhi's embrace of the idea that we must accomplish this aim in our everyday, worldly lives, not by dropping out of society or meditating alone on an isolated mountaintop. Guru Granth, the Sikh scripture and the Eternal Guru of the Sikhs, challenges us to find our self-definition through the universal connectivity that binds us all as "Divine sparks" of the One Creator. In a seeming paradox, it is by joyfully moving away from the self – with our mind grounded in the peaceful equanimity of *sehaj* and in alignment with *Hukam*, Divine order – that we truly "find ourselves" and thereby live a full and meaningful life.

The author's enthusiastic charting of his progress along the Sikh path is especially emphasised in *A Sikh Writer's Journey*, echoing the overarching theme of "being and becoming a Sikh" so deeply intrinsic to his entire body of work. For IJ Singh, the act of writing as self-examination is not an onerous task, but rather a transcendental process which "holds the seeds of ecstasy."

"An examined life and a reality explored is the essence of a life grounded in Sikhi," he reminds us. Indeed, for anyone who is committed to integrating Sikh teachings into his or her daily existence, how could it be otherwise!

The development of the Sikh nation is another topic that IJ Singh takes relish in recurrently parsing, and his exploration is again clearly evident here, in *Vaisakhi Redux*. "I have no doubt that nation building is what Guru Nanak had in mind, as did all succeeding Gurus, including Guru Gobind Singh," the author firmly states. The establishment of new towns by successive Gurus was not because of political and familial rivalries, he opines, considering this overly simplistic interpretation a serious misreading of Sikh history. Instead, each and every Guru whose Guruship lasted for a significant length of time founded a new community of Sikhs as an intentional contribution to the growing "economic and cultural richness and diversity of the Sikh nation," by which "the infrastructure of a nascent Punjab" was built.

Moreover, along with a shared culture, the Gurus endowed Sikhi with the ideology, philosophy, vision and common ethics that were also necessary components of nation building. Vaisakhi of 1699 was the crowning glory of this process, "when Guru Gobind Singh established, within the feudal, caste-driven society of India, a new Sikh egalitarian nation with democratic institutions of accountability, transparency and participatory self-governance." "Now the onus of seeing the Guru is on us," the author reminds us at the end of this powerful essay.

We must ask ourselves: Are we up to the challenge?

IJ Singh's profound delight in the life of the mind and the world of words and books continues to be quite evident in *Sikhs Today*. He has often gently chided Sikhs for their perceived lack of interest in these cerebral pursuits that he deems so essential to his own existence, and continues to do so here in *On Books & Bookshops Etc.* and *The World of Words*. With *On Thinkers, Writers & Public Intellectuals*, he takes his passionate paean to the inner life a step farther by lauding "those great minds whose specialty is the expansiveness of their vision," people with extraordinary abilities to synthesise and stitch together complex, otherwise-isolated ideas and interpret them in the language of the educated layman. While "connecting the dots where others barely see any dots at all," they "influence the nature, quality and diversity of public debate and dialogue." As a worldwide cadre of devoted readers would undoubtedly agree, to the list of eminent public intellectuals enumerated in this essay must surely be added IJ Singh himself!

The author's pinpoints a sense of accuracy in "connecting the dots," one of the principal hallmarks of his writing, as on full display in *Price & Value: A Tale of Two Cities*. For who else would have thought of linking New York City with Anandpur Sahib, much less creating an entire essay out of this astute comparison? If Anandpur "speaks to us from a distant, hoary past," it also still evokes "a revolution of the mind in a people, the transformation of a society, the building of a community and a nation, indeed, of a message that is unique, timeless and universal ..." This eloquent elegy to this "centre of a Sikh's sense of self" not only wryly dubs Anandpur as "the 'Big Apple' of Sikh reality" (lending it the playful moniker often given to New York City), but also poignantly portrays this iconic locale as a place of eternal legacy.



A group of Sikhs from the 'Sikh Dharma Organisation' during an event at the Asian Art Museum in San Francisco.

In *Infinite Courage: Sikhs as Warriors*, IJ Singh goes far beyond a basic discussion of Sikh military prowess, so often cited by non-Sikhs when stereotyping Sikhs as “a martial race.” In probing the intriguing concept of the “battlefield of the mind,” as well as the revolutionary sense of empowerment bestowed by the Gurus on a formerly disenfranchised people, he gives an inspirational definition to the true meaning of infinite courage: not the shedding of fear, but the transcendence of it.

The scope of this stirring essay on courage is expanded in *Brand Recognition*. Here, IJ Singh turns the admission of the fact that “most non-Sikhs remain monumentally unaware of the richness of Sikhi,” into a rousing challenge to all Sikhs. “Do we understand enough of our own beliefs to incorporate them into our lives, so that the market perception of the brand would change, and then others would automatically know us as we know ourselves, and would want to know more?” he demands. Perhaps it is a bit too optimistic for Sikhs to believe others would know us “automatically,” but, as the author says, it nevertheless remains “the only strategy that holds any promise.”

The Tenth Amendment: A Sikh View, is certainly one of the book’s most America-centric chapters. This somewhat circumscribed viewpoint should not be seen

as a shortcoming, however, but rather as one of this book’s greatest strengths. After all, this perspective is totally natural, given that the author is indeed very much an American, both in fact and in his personal outlook. This essay is an excellent example of IJ Singh’s trademark penchant for joining seemingly disparate concepts to form an integral whole. The Tenth Amendment, providing for separation of powers, is meant to ensure the diversity of power centers in the US and provide a system of checks and balances, with individual states ceding some of their inherent authority (for example, the rights to coin money and to declare war) to the federal government. In this astutely-crafted essay, the author uses the US constitutional framework to draw some much-needed parallels and lessons aimed squarely at Sikhs. When ‘We the People’ return to the Gurus’ idea of “a limited government of delegated powers,” the resulting decentralisation would lead to more participatory self-governance and transparency, and hence a revival of our Sikh institutions. Rediscovering the virtues of the Tenth Amendment is necessary for us, the author opines, as “our global Sikh reality is now much more complex than any time in history, even more so than as *Misls* during the post-Guru period.”

When Outsourcing Just Doesn’t Work, relating *Akhand Paaths* (uninterrupted recitations of the

Guru Granth) done by proxy with the contemporary business phenomenon of outsourcing, is yet another essay that shows off IJ Singh's formidable talent for creative dot-connecting and cogent comparisons. He decries contractual agreements with gurdwaras – often historical gurdwaras in India – whereby a reading of the entire Sikh scripture is undertaken in return for monetary donation. Generally, the ones paying the fee are not present at all, or only in attendance when the last four pages of Guru Granth are read. It is not God these people are cheating by this “unholy bargain,” the author declares, but their own selves. Citing examples from his many decades as a professor in academia, he convincingly argues that, since a student needs schooling and training that cannot possibly be completed by proxy, why should putting forth the personal dedication and effort intrinsic to being and becoming a Sikh be any different?

The last essay of this work is *Telling Truth to Power*, which connects in a most gratifying manner the *Zafarnama* of Guru Gobind Singh, an epistle the Tenth Master sent to the emperor Aurangzeb, to modern notions of war and peace, and also to the timely (and timeless) idea of speaking truth to authority. “Forgiveness liberates the doer of evil as well as the victim, but mixing the two – forgiveness and forgetting – does not serve the cause of justice, peace or reconciliation,” IJ Singh reminds us. This inspiring chapter brings the collection of thirty essays to a most resounding conclusion.

Fortunately, though, *Telling Truth to Power* does not quite end the book. It is followed by a valuable Glossary, where nutshell explanations of key Sikh concepts mentioned throughout the work are provided, as well as by a short biographical profile of the author.

The Glossary mitigates one of the book's few shortcomings: *Sikhs Today* can sometimes be a bit puzzling, even virtually opaque, to readers who do not possess a firm grasp of Sikh principles. To be sure, IJ Singh is far too active in interfaith matters and outreach activities to ever be accused of being among those who simply “preach to the choir.” He never addresses himself only to committed Sikhs or to those who have at least a modicum of knowledge about Sikhi. However,

despite the helpful definitions given in the Glossary, more explanation is definitely needed on some basic Sikh concepts; the essay on *Nitnem*, the daily devotional readings recited by observant Sikhs, is a prime example of this requirement. More background information would have made such otherwise excellent essays even more instructive and powerful.

On a related note, beginning *Sikhs Today* with a quote from Guru Granth and the primordial Sikh concept of 'Guru,' as the author did in his fourth book, would have been a much-appreciated touch. In this way, all readers (especially non-Sikhs) would know right from the start, at least in some measure, what is involved when the all-important idea of 'the Guru' in the Sikh sense is repeatedly discussed throughout the rest of the work.

This book would also have benefitted from more assiduous proofreading and editing. A particular example of this can be found in the *Vaisakhi Redux* essay, where there is an error in the listing of the names of the *Panj Pyare* (the first five Sikhs who responded to Guru Gobind Singh's call for “a head” at the Vaisakhi of 1699). Of course, the author's accidental substitution of Fateh Singh for Himmat Singh is unquestionably a simple oversight, and in no way a sign of ignorance! However, such an inadvertent mistake would have been caught, and corrected, if more attention to detail would have been part of the red action process.

These minor caveats aside, this work is undeniably “vintage” IJ Singh: a thought-provoking blend of the adroitly parsed ideas, the trenchant wit, and the fearless dialogue and debate for which he is so well known – and so very justifiably celebrated – both throughout the Sikh community and far beyond. In the case of *Sikhs Today: Ideas & Opinions*, calling this book “more of the same” is one of the highest compliments it could possibly receive.



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A Writer's Journey

On a cruise for a few days - at sea but not entirely adrift, I hope - my thoughts went to the art of writing and my preoccupation with it.

I have heard it said that, at best, a writer has a single idea that he keeps dissecting and parsing all his life in a myriad different ways. When I first came across this, I was offended. I had always admired writers and writing. And I had not yet written much, but wanted to.

So I felt baffled and insulted at the same time. How could one be a writer by beating up on the same hackneyed idea time and time again, for years on end? I had more ambitious pretensions than that and hoped to do better.

Now, some years later, having published reasonably respectable research articles in experimental biology, spent time with some excellent scientists, supervised the research and writing by doctoral students, and then having published just as many essays and ruminations on Sikhs and Sikhi, I have come to understand and treasure the alluring beauty and the possessive power of a single good idea.

Now I see that happy should be the author who has one good idea in his lifetime to explore and develop. If he is lucky and the theme has any merit, the journey will never end and his whole life would become a commentary on it. It will become the dance of a moth around a flame.

What, then, is that single idea that enthralls me?

It seems to me that being a Sikh, for most of us, is an accident of birth or habit; whereas, becoming a Sikh - the journey - remains the more critical reality.

The one theme that drives all of my writing, then, is to explore the idea of becoming a Sikh in its rich multi-faceted splendour. I really don't see how a Sikh could be otherwise and still stay true to the label *Sikh* that brands him a student of life, for as long as life lasts.

The idea is to connect Sikh teachings that come to us from three to five hundred years ago, to our complex, contemporary lives in North America or wherever we live in the diaspora. The Sikh way of life must speak to us today outside Punjab just as completely and meaningfully as it did to countless Sikhs on the sub-continent over the course of five centuries. It must offer sense and substance today, or else it becomes fossilised and irrelevant.

How did this one good idea come to possess me? An apple did not fall on my head, nor was there an electrifying flash of



Dr. I.J. Singh

revelation or an epiphany. It must then be pure grace as manna from heaven.

But this single theme is a rainbow of many hues and shades.

There is history. But history has many convoluted, cunning passages and contrived corridors that can and do deceive and defeat us. Yet, history is important; we neglect it at our own peril.

Then there is the very rich tradition of Sikhi. But traditions are rooted in the culture in which they arise and flourish. So, they end up with an enchantingly baffling mix of language, ritual and interpretation, in which the context is rarely free of cultural and mythological baggage. Yet, culture can never be entirely ignored or casually dismissed.

Then there is the pristine purity of the message at the core, hence, divine to those who experience it. But it is framed, articulated and tweaked by the quirks of language, tradition, history and culture.

Ergo, I do not dismiss quite so easily the habits of the heart that we label traditions. Yet, we must continue to weigh them carefully to ferret out what is strictly cultural baggage that may be safely modified or jettisoned, and what connects us to the practice and meaning of Sikhi that we need to nurture.

My meanderings in Sikhi often remind me of the words of T.S. Eliot who said:

*We shall not cease from exploration
And at the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.*

Exploration of this splendoured existence allows me much pleasure but, more importantly, it allows me to track my own trail along the path.

Why write?

It is indeed a form of self-indulgence, but it remains a most precise, effective and economical way of examining oneself as minutely and microscopically as one's talents and inclinations allow. It is like holding a mirror to oneself, and a good mirror can reflect with brutal honesty.

It also holds the seeds of ecstasy.

I find myself standing astride the past, present and future. As I face the future to discern its promise, I stand in the present, on a pulpit for which the bricks and mortar come from the past. When I step off that dais and close my eyes to the past, I have no sense of the present - nothing to stand on, and will have diminished myself to only the tunnel vision of a fancied and unrealistic future.

Thus are the past, present and future inseparably interconnected in the endless march of time.

One thing I have no intention of doing is to preach the message of Sikhi to anyone, for that would require a degree of hubris on my part that I hope and pray I do not have.

The idea is not much different from what I tell my students in human anatomy in the first lecture every year: "I am not here to teach anatomy or, for that matter, anything in particular. I am here to make it possible for you to learn as much as your talents and inclinations allow."

Whether it is the subject of anatomy or Sikhi, the best I can hope for is to foster a discussion - a need to learn - in the readers' minds.

Though both my parents were dedicated Sikhs, my mother's take on Sikhi was purely devotional, while my father's was largely analytic. It took me a lifetime to see that Sikhi is best accosted by the dual lenses of faith and reason - head and heart. Either one alone is insufficient.

What I do wish for is the camaraderie of fellow travelers - those who do not rob me of my solitude without giving me company. The Sikh savant, Bhai Gurdas, reminds us that some congregations will liberate us, while other associations consign us to everlasting hell

*Kahoo ki sangat mil jeevan mukt hoe, kahoo ki sangat mil
jum pur jaat hai.*

What is the essence of good writing ?

Again, TS Eliot tells us: "Common words exact without vulgarity; formal words precise but not pedantic."

For me, personally, that remains a distant but much admired goal on my wish list. A bit of fantasia !

Even a cursory reading will convince us all - skeptics and believers alike - that the Gurus practiced that and much, much more. They dissected - simply, directly, minutely, effectively and thoroughly, often with a dollop of humour - complex but essential questions on our sense of self and the goals, constraints and freedoms that constitute our existence.

The more I delve into Gurbani [here, GGS:261], the more I am thrilled by the limitless meaning in "*Ek akhar hur munn basat Nanak hote nihaal*," meaning that one blossoms when the Word is enshrined in the heart, and that the entire creation inheres in the Word (*Akhar meh tribhavan prabh dharay*).

Our trouble is that our perceptions, always small and circumscribed, have changed. The allegories, similes and metaphors in Sikh teaching often escape us. These teachings come to us rooted and framed in culture and language that are now often very much alien to us. We lack the context of the time and place when Sikh teaching was elaborated in order to understand the message.

But let me step aside from this and related matters and defer their further consideration to another time.

An examined life and a reality explored is the essence of a life grounded in Sikhi. A line of Gurbani by Guru Amardas comes to mind. It bluntly challenges us with the words: In your life here, what footprints will you leave in the sands of time? -

Eh sareera mairya, iss jug may aaye kae kyaa tudh karam kamaaya [Guru Granth p.922]

My writings have enjoyed such a magical and miraculous run that I am reminded of the words of David Ben-Gurion: "Anyone who doesn't believe in miracles is not a realist."

And then my thoughts go to an idea expressed more than once in Guru Granth: "My aimless life has been graced with purpose and direction"

Moorakh kaaray laaiya [p.449] and "*Hum dhaadhi vekaar kaaray laaiyaa* [p.150].

Sometimes, however, my thoughts go to Hilaire Belloc's doggerel:

*When I am dead,
I hope it may be said;
His sins were scarlet,
But his books were read.*

Extracted from 'Sikhs Today: Ideas & Opinions'
by Dr I.J. Singh

The Sword for Justice



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

**When all other means have failed
It is righteous to draw the sword.**

These are perhaps the most evocative lines from *Zafarnama*, the 'Epistle of Victory', written by Guru Gobind Singh to Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb, sometime in 1705. Besides the tone of fearless defiance, these are emblematic of the poetic power and philosophical underpinning that is so evident in the *Zafarnama*, like in all the writings of the prolific Tenth Guru of the Sikhs.

In their seminal essay, which was originally published in 2011, A. Walter Dorn and Stephen Gucciardi have written that to understand Sikh attitudes towards the use of arms, two quite distinct Sikh sacred texts were carefully examined: the Adi Granth, the most hallowed scripture of the Sikhs, and the Dasam Granth, the controversial scripture of the last human Gurū. But scriptural analysis is not sufficient since

historical developments within the community have exerted a major influence on Sikh thought. Especially relevant episodes are highlighted, particularly the fight against oppressive Mughal rule, emergence of the Khālsā, the martyrdom of prominent Sikhs, the Sikh reform process and the rise and decline of the Khalistan movement, including the events surrounding storming of the Golden Temple in Amritsar by Indian armed forces in 1984.

The martial aspect

From the time Sikhism became better known to the West from the nineteenth century, the martial aspect of Sikh identity has been a dominant feature in the public perception of the religion, and was globally made known during the British Raj in India. That the Sikhs were formidable fighters was repeatedly displayed during the Anglo-Sikh wars 1845-1846, 1848-1849 (being 'betrayed' by traitors in their midst, but not from their faith: Ed) and they then turned around to support the British during the Indian Mutiny of 1857 which in fact was against the mercenary Purbia soldiers of the East India Company. Sikhs were deemed a 'martial race' and continued to fight

with distinction during the First and Second World Wars. However, despite their loyalty to the Empire, Sikhs were at the forefront in movements for Indian independence, both peacefully and martially, at levels disproportionate to their population in numbers.

The Sikhs fell from Western public view in those countries without a diaspora after Indian independence in 1947, but re-emerged in the 1980s during the events surrounding the movement for an independent Sikh homeland (Khalistan), in particular the armed insurgency inspired by Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale and the Indian army's storming of the Golden Temple in June 1984. The Sikhs appeared, to some members of the public, as if they were engaging in the same trend of religious nationalism as found in the 1979 Iranian revolution and the religiously-inspired *mujahideen* resistance in Afghanistan during the 1980s. Furthermore, the distinctly martial public face of the community, exemplified by the sharp-edged khanda as Sikhism's primary representative symbol, contributed towards this perception. Though the might of the Indian state was ultimately

successful in quelling the Punjab restlessness that increased in intensity following the Golden Temple attack, many questions remain unanswered: what gave Bhindranwale's movement such resonance? Is a martial position intrinsic to what it means to be a Sikh? What is the lineage of this position, and how do Sikhs justify the resort to armed force?

Scriptures provide important strands of thought, so the *Adi Granth* and the *Dasam Granth* need to be reviewed. Possible interpretations of these sacred texts are offered, although it is not our intent to assert that these are the only 'correct' or 'proper' ones; some scholars and practitioners might prefer more literal or militant interpretations. The second section of this essay examines historical events that have impacted the Sikh community and its approach towards acceptable use of force. Included here is a discussion of Mughal rule, the birth of the Khālsā, martyrdom, Sikh reform, and the peasant (Jat) culture. This survey offers an overview of Sikh views on armed force within the context of both scripture and history, which are so intertwined in Sikh thought and deed.



Adi Granth

As one of the world's prime religions, Sikh belief is focussed on the single scripture as centre of religious life. The Adi Granth or the 'first holy book', occupies this reverential position for all Sikhs. Treated as the eleventh and eternal gurū (spiritual teacher) in a line including ten human beings, the Adi Granth is the guiding light for Sikhs in their search for God and liberation from the cycle of death and rebirth. Like the Bible, the Adi Granth is a compendium of the works of a variety of different writers. In addition to the writings of six of the ten human gurūs, this includes the teachings of saints from both Hindu and Islamic faiths (*Bhagats*), a variety of poets (*Bhāṭṭas*) and several other figures. Tradition maintains that this inclusive feature reflects the message contained within the scripture itself: egalitarianism in the sphere of spirituality and equal access for all to the divine. The linguistic territory of the holy text shares ground with *Khari Boli*, the predecessor of modern Hindi which historically was used in religious poetry. Some refer to the language of the Adi Granth as Gurmukhi, the script used for writing the Adi Granth.



The Adi Granth was first compiled under the watch of Gurū Arjan, the fifth Gurū, in 1604. The tenth and final human Gurū, Gobind Singh, transferred both the sanctity and the authority of the gurūship to the Adi Granth itself in 1708. Added were the hymns of the Ninth Gurū, Tegh Bahādur, his father, to the holy text. This transformation into its final form was marked by a change in religious terminology. The Adi Granth became the Gurū Granth Sāhib, the active leader of

the Sikh community. Sikhs thus revere the book as if it is a human Gurū, prostrating themselves in front of it and avoiding all actions which may be construed as disrespectful when in its presence. It is consulted at the beginning of each day and during a wide variety of ceremonies. Though Sikhs acknowledge that the religious texts of other traditions may point towards God, the Gurū Granth Sāhib is believed to be the clearest and most focussed regarding the Divine. It is fundamental to Sikh religious life and is considered the ultimate authority for all theological and ethical questions. The extent to which it deals with practical ethics, particularly the use of armed force, is debatable, though many Sikhs refer to it for this purpose.

The Adi Granth is focused around God and salvation. While conduct in this world plays a crucial role in whether or not one finds spiritual fulfillment, virtuous conduct relates more to participation in worship, especially by being constantly mindful of the divine, rather than following strict religious laws which regulate behaviour. General ethical and spiritual themes such as the value of kindness and mindfulness take precedence over specific prescriptions on what is and is not 'holy'. The relationship between humans and the divine has less to do with the physical than with the mental and spiritual realm, as reflected by the central importance of the *nām*, or name. The *nām* takes on a variety of meanings, much like the Greek term *logos*. It can refer to God, God manifest or 'the word'. Liberation is attained only through meditation on the *nām*, not blind ritual or other mandatory physical actions. Furthermore, there is no place for any form of soteriological restriction due to worldly factors; no one is barred from salvation due to caste, disability, ethnicity, gender or even religious creed. The focus of the sacred text therefore has little to do with strictly delineated regulations that would govern proper use of armed force.

Just Wars and the Adi Granth

Given these scriptural characteristics, it is hardly surprising that the Adi Granth contains nothing explicit on issues such as the 'just war' and the appropriate use of armed force. As mentioned, it instead deals with general ethical norms. Consider the following:



(4) *Countless impose their will by force. Countless cut-throats and ruthless killers. Countless sinners who keep on sinning.*

(25) *This body is softened with the Word of the Gurū's Bani; you shall find peace, doing seva (selfless service).*

(662) *The Qazi tells lies and eats filth; the Brahmin kills and then takes cleansing baths.*

What emerges in these quotes and throughout the scripture is a general condemnation of ego-centrism, excessive violence and hypocrisy. Instead, one is urged to focus upon God, serve humanity and strive to attain peace. The writings in the Adi Granth of Bhagat Kabir, author of the final quote above, are often explicit in an aversion of violence, and what emerges leaves room for a theology which is strictly pacifist:

(1103) *You kill living beings, and call it a righteous action. Tell me, brother, what would you call an unrighteous action? You call yourself the most excellent sage; then who would you call a butcher?*

(1128) *One who contemplates the essence of reality remains awake and aware. He kills his self-conceit, and does not kill anyone else.*

(1375) *Kabir, they oppress living beings and kill them, and call it proper. When the Lord calls for their account, what will their condition be? Kabir, it is tyranny to use force; the Lord shall call you to account. When your account is called for, your face and mouth shall be struck.*

Another Bhagat, Fareed writes in a manner reminiscent to the New Testament exhortation to 'turn the other cheek':

'(1378) Fareed, do not turn around and strike those who strike you with their fists. Kiss their feet, and return to your own home.'

Despite this criticism of force in the Adi Granth, strict and explicit pacifism is the exception, not the rule. Violent imagery is found throughout the text. Though metaphorical interpretations may be more appropriate, this imagery often appears at first glance to endorse violent behaviour:

(146) *When it pleases You [God], we wield the sword, and cut off the heads of our enemies. When it pleases You, we go out to foreign lands; hearing news of home, we come back again. When it pleases You, we are attuned to the Name...*

(341) *The warrior who fights on the battle-field should keep up and press on. He should not yield, and he should not retreat. Blessed is the coming of one who conquers the one and renounces the many.*

(1105) *The battle-drum beats in the sky of the mind; aim is taken, and the wound is inflicted. The spiritual warriors enter the field of battle; now is the time to fight! He alone is known as a spiritual hero, who fights in defence of religion. He may be cut apart, piece by piece, but he never leaves the field of battle.*

(1364) *Kabir, kill only that which, when killed, shall bring peace. Everyone shall call you good, very good, and no one shall think you are bad.*

In each of the above quotes, there is room for multiple interpretations. For example, the term 'battle' may refer not to physical conflict, but to the mental, spiritual struggle and egocentrism. This often seems to be implied through context, particularly when coming after references to meditation on the *nām*. The first quote above which speaks of cutting off the heads of enemies may perhaps be interpreted as reflecting the high level of devotion felt by the devotee towards God as opposed to implying that God would endorse violent action. The final two quotes referenced were from Kabir. If one accepts his position as being strictly pacifistic, it follows that Kabir is not endorsing

any form of violence against living beings. Peaceful interpretation is reinforced by the following:

(87) The Gurmukh has conquered his own mind, by applying the Touchstone of the Shabad [scripture]. He fights with his mind, he settles with his mind, and he is at peace with his mind.

(579-80) Death would not be called bad, O people, if one knew how to truly die. Serve your Almighty Lord and Master, and your path in the world hereafter will be easy... The death of brave heroes is blessed, if it is approved by God. They alone are proclaimed as brave warriors in the world hereafter, who receive true honour in the Court of the Lord.

(1237) He [the Lord] is not won over by music, songs or the Vedas...He is not won over by fighting and dying as a warrior in battle. He is not won over by becoming the dust of the masses. The account is written of the loves of the mind. O Nanak, the Lord is won over only by His Name.

Of primary importance in these quotes is spiritual struggle, not outward fighting and conflict. The scholar Louis Fenech points out that the hymn in the second quote above was sung on occasions of mourning, the message being that “a person’s passing should not be mourned, especially if that person piously meditated on the divine name...”

As a dynamic and complex text, the Adi Granth leaves room for a variety of interpretations. This has the effect of supporting the Sikh position that the written Gurū can function as the sole resource for those seeking guidance on moral and spiritual matters. Still, the major thrust of the text is one of spiritual, not physical force. There are few, if any, passages that directly discuss war or armed force.

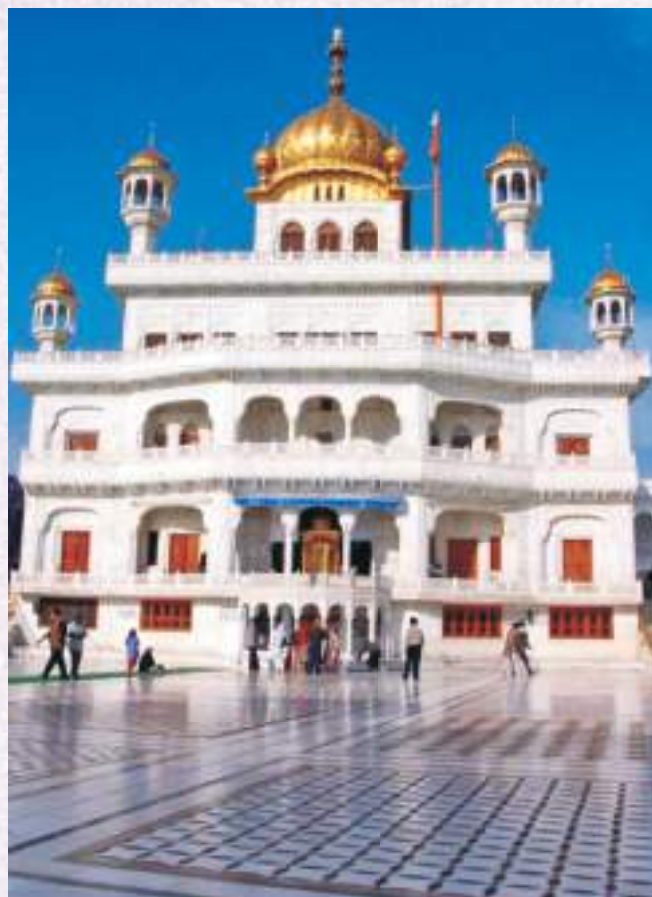
By contrast, the Dasam Granth makes many more explicit references.

Dasam Granth

The Dasam Granth, named in full the *Dasve Pātsāh dā Granth* (book of the tenth emperor), is a collection of writings traditionally attributed to the Tenth Sikh gurū, Gurū Gobind Singh. Even though the Dasam Granth was mostly written in the Gurmukhi script, only a small amount of material was written in language similar to that used in the Adi Granth. The rest is mostly in Braj, the language used in many medieval North Indian writings. Tradition states that the Tenth Gurū chose to compose many

of the works contained within so as to inspire Sikhs to take up arms in defence of their religion and of righteousness. As a result, violent imagery is extremely commonplace, especially with respect to the sword and other weapons. Also present is a variety of mythological tales from the Hindu *purāṇas*, each of which stresses the destructive aspect of God when dealing with those who defy truth and righteousness.

By the time the Dasam Granth was completed in the eighteenth century, the Sikh community had already undergone significant change, beginning with the martyrdom of the fifth *gurū*, Gurū Arjan, in 1606. According to tradition, this act of violence by the ruling Mughals forced the next *gurū*, Gurū Hargobind, to reinforce and expand the role of the *Gurū* as leader of the community. He chose to symbolise this by wearing two swords, one symbolising his spiritual authority, *pīrī*, and the other his temporal authority, *mīrī*. He also built the *Akāl Takht* at Amritsar (part of the Golden Temple complex) as a centre of military planning and poetic recitation of heroic deeds.



Gurū Gobind Singh built upon Hargobind's example and made it his goal to ensure that the Sikh community would be able to defend itself. In 1699 he created the *Khālsā*, a sacred order of Sikhs who promised to abide by rules of conduct and defend religion and righteousness whenever necessary. This action explicitly formalised the changes which had occurred in the community. For the *Khālsā* Sikh, being a follower of the *Gurū* extends beyond personal worship into the realm of righteous action on the physical plane of existence. These Sikhs have a role to play in vanquishing those who challenge truth and righteousness, a role endorsed by God himself. The Dasam Granth certainly bolsters this approach.

As mentioned, the Dasam Granth is a collection of various writings of different genres, many with direct relevance to the proper use of force. The *Jāp Sāhib*, the first text, describes God as the punisher of wrongdoers and upholder of righteousness. The next text, the *Akāl Ustat*, highlights the image of a Goddess of destruction, as does the *Gyān Prabodh*, which also provides a discussion of proper conduct in politics. The battles of the Hindu Goddess *Caṇḍī* are featured in the *Caṇḍī Caritr*, *Caṇḍī Caritr II* and *Caṇḍī dī vār*. Other Hindu deities, *Viṣṇu*, *Brahmā* and *Śiva*, also have their own sections: *Caubīs Avatār*, *Brahmā Avatār* and *Rudra Avatār*, respectively. Scholar J.S. Grewal argues that these sections on the Hindu Gods and Goddesses serve the purpose of highlighting how force can be used righteously if it is on divine behalf.

Another part of the Dasam Granth, the *Savaīye* describes both God and the *Khālsā*, and is followed by the *Khālse dī Mehimā*, in which Gurū Gobind Singh praises the *Khālsā* and speaks of it as being at the root of his success. Particularly militant imagery is found in the *Śastar Nām Mālā* where the focus is on God as protector of his followers. The majority of the work is a listing of various weapons, many of which are identified with God. The *Kabayo Bāc Bentī Caupaī* deals with God's role in the protection of devotees and is recited by the majority of Sikhs who perform evening prayers. The last section that needs to be highlighted is the *Zafarnāma*, the letter written in Persian to the Mughal emperor Aurangzeb by Gurū Gobind Singh. He criticises the Emperor for his army's ill conduct and directly endorses the use of violence as a last resort.

The *Caritropakhyān* and the *Hikāyats*, have a strong bearing on the current debate about the

legitimacy of the Dasam Granth, though the two texts are rarely consulted by Sikhs. They may not have religious significance for most believers, but current events have brought them into the consciousness of a section of the Sikh community.

The present article will not take a stance on the historical and scriptural legitimacy of the Dasam Granth in the Sikh faith, a frequently-debated issue in the twenty-first century. Regardless, the reader should keep in mind that opinions amongst Sikhs range from complete acceptance to total rejection. While supporters of the text consider it fundamental to Sikh religion and identity, those opposed consider it further proof of the blurred borders between the Sikh and Hindu religions in the eighteenth century. What needs to be explored here is the role it has played in the Sikh community and how it has affected Sikh attitudes regarding war and violence.

It would be faulty to claim that the verses of the Dasam Granth have been the primary contributors in developing said attitudes towards armed force. Instead, the work embodies the spirit and goals traditionally attributed to Gurū Gobind Singh, which culminated with the creation of the *Khālsā*. The existence of the *Khālsā* and the image of the *sant sipahi* (saint-soldier), which built up around the tenth *gurū*, have been the driving force in the Sikh concept of the *dharamyuddh*, or war of *dharam* (righteousness). Both theologically and in practice, at least amongst the majority of Sikhs, the work as a whole does not equal to the Gurū Granth Sāhib, the literal head of the community. That is not to say that the Dasam Granth is of no importance as portions are recited during prayer on a daily basis and it does reflect Sikh attitudes towards the use of armed force. Furthermore, its verses have long inspired those looking to scripture for support in times of conflict, including Bhindranwale during his struggle for Sikh aspirations.

Imagery in the Dasam Granth

Violent imagery pervades the whole of the Dasam Granth (2010), reflective of the trying circumstances in which its components were written. In describing God, various qualities and opposing actions are used, including thus:

(5, L2 - *Jāp Sāhib*) *Salutation to Thee O All-loving Lord! Salutation to Thee O All-destroying Lord!*



(36, L12 - *Akāl Ustat*) Somewhere Thou givest inexhaustible gifts to emperors and somewhere Thou deprivest the emperors of their kingdoms.

These extracts and others speak to the theological conception of a deity who is omnipotent and, to an extent, beyond the complete understanding of devotees. The deity is not beyond being partial and impartial to specific groups of human beings, however:

(21, L3 - *Jāp Sāhib*) That Thou Protectest the devotees. That Thou punishest the evil-doers.

(24, L7 - *Jāp Sāhib*) Salutation to Thee O Destroyer of Tyrants Lord! Salutation to Thee O Companion of all Lord!

(339, L9-10 - *Gyān Prabodh*) He is the remover of darkness, the masher of the tyrants, perisher of the egoists and idlers, He is described as the destroyer of people full of vices. Whom should we worship except the Lord who is the Vanquisher of the Conquerors, giver of the Glory of conquest and who shoots miraculous arrows from His bow.

(345, L10 - *Gyān Prabodh*) The clique of tyrants is suppressed; such is the glamour of Thy metropolis (world).

God clearly is perceived to be fundamentally concerned with justice. The penultimate extract listed above demonstrates God's political connection to his devotees, (as those who) invaded Punjab in the eighteenth century and came up against strong Sikh resistance.

The extent to which militant qualities are described in the Dasam Granth is much greater than in the Adi Granth. The poetry of the Dasam Granth draws immediate connections between God and weapons, even characterising the divine with them. Even when not explicitly mentioned, a connection

is drawn between divine strength and the power of arms:

(94, L11 - *Bacitra Nāṭak*) I salute the glorious sword with all my heart's affection.

(102, L2 - *Bacitra Nāṭak*) He, who wields the sword in his hand, he is the remover of millions of sins.

(L9) The sword appears impressive in his hand, seeing which the sins run away.

(1356, L6-8 - *Shastar Nām Mālā*) O Lord! Protect us by creating saang, sarohi, saif (sword), as, teer (arrow), tupak (gun), talwaar (sword), and other weapons and armours for destruction of the enemies. O Lord! Create As, Kirpan (sword), Dharaddhari, Sail, Soof, Jamaadh, Tegh (sabre), Teer (arrow), Talwaar (sword) causing the destruction of armours and enemies. As, Kirpan (sword), Khanda, Khadag (sword), Tupak (gun), Tabar (hatchet), Teer (arrow), Saif (sword), Sarohi and Saihathi, all these are our adorable allies.

Apart from establishing a link between God and weapons, most of the material in the Dasam Granth recounts various tales from earlier mythology, connecting God to well-established myths already present in the cultural framework of India at the time of composition. Included are the ferocious Goddess figures, a variety of *avatāras* (earthly manifestations of the divine) and Yudhiṣṭhira of the Mahābhārata epic:

(14, L5 - *Caritropakhyān*) With you the dread of war increases. The great rulers pray to you and, with the swords and arrows, annihilate their armies. Guising as Narsing, the Sphinx, you smashed Harnakash. And incarnating as Varah in the form of a boar, You bore the weight of the earth.

195, L6 (*Caṇḍī Caritr*) The mighty goddess manifested herself and in great rage, she engrossed her mind in thoughts of war.

(379, L7-8 - *Gyān Prabodh*) On the other side Yudhishtar was bound by Kshatriya discipline, and was performing wonderful and holy Karmas.

441, L1 (*Caubīs Avatār*) All warriors appeared absorbed in warfare in the battlefield, and Vishnu caused the death and fall of the enemy.

The text's connection between God and militant figures reinforces a powerful societal norm and demonstrates the militant concerns behind the text's composition. The text has much to say about the violent actions of human beings:

(19-20, L47 - *Caritropakhyān*) ...In the Kal-age one can only depend on the sword, the faculty and self determination.

(125, L6 - *Bacitra Nāṭak*)... All the fighters engaged in war against their enemies, ultimately fell as martyrs.

(273, L12-13-*Caṇḍī Caritr*) With the use of weapons and arms, the winsome armours were being cut; And the warriors performed their religious duties in great manner.

(18-19, L45-50 - *Hikāyats*) 'He treads upon the enemy eliminating him in the dust. 'He remains alert throughout the battle, And uses hands and feet to throw arrows and shoots guns. 'To do the justice, he always girds up his [loins], And remains meek in the company of the meek. 'Neither he depicts any hesitation during the war, Nor he gets scared while facing gigantic enemies. 'If there has been such a dauntless person, Who remains prepared for war remaining domesticated, 'And his operations are approved by people, He is revered as the saviour king.'

The above quotes demonstrate the perception that at least some military actions have divine sanction. Not only is martyrdom a glorified reality (as in the second quote above), but fighting in battle is described as a religious duty. The sword is listed alongside 'the faculty' (probably intellectual ability) and self-determination. This implies that force is permissible, but by no means as a first resort. Since God is just, humans are expected to uphold a sense of justice too; the extract from the *Hikāyats* (last of the quote above) describes an ideal king who subscribes to a moral code but is always ready to go to battle, so long as his subjects consent to the operation's legitimacy.

Further elaboration can be found in the sections of the Dasam Granth written in the first person from the perspective of Gurū Gobind Singh:

(138, L10-14 - *Bacitra Nāṭak*) The Lord asked me to spread Dharma, and vanquish the tyrants and evil-minded persons. I have taken birth of this purpose, the saints should comprehend this in their minds. (I have been born) to spread Dharma,

and protect saints, and root out tyrants and evil-minded persons. All the earlier incarnations caused only their names to be remembered. They did not strike the tyrants and did not make them follow the path of Dharma.

(148, L3 - *Bacitra Nāṭak*) He aimed and shot the second arrow towards me, the Lord protected me, his arrow only grazed my ear.

(L14) I gained victory through the favour of the Eternal Lord.

(1355, L8-9 - *Khālse dī Mehimā*) By the kindness of these Sikhs, I have conquered in wars and also by their kindness, I have bestowed charities; by their kindness the clusters on sins have been destroyed and by their kindness my house is full of wealth and materials;

(1467, L14 - *Kabayo Bāc Bentī Caupaī*) O Lord! keep me now under Thy protection; protect my disciples and destroy my enemies;

(1471, L8 - *Zafarnāma*) When all other methods fail, it is proper to hold the sword in hand.

(1477, L6 - *Zafarnāma*) When one man is attacked by lakhs the Generous Lord gives him protection.

Two important dimensions arise from these extracts. Firstly, Gurū Gobind Singh highlights his own unique role as the Gurū who has come to inspire



change in the Sikh *panth* (community). He has come to combat injustice and spread *dharmā* ('dharam' in Punjabi), roughly defined as righteous or proper conduct. The Gurū states that he has the favour of God and is under God's protection. He appeals to God so that his followers may succeed and his enemies may perish. Secondly, he makes explicit statements about the use of force. The second-last quote, often cited, asserts that force should be a last resort. He decries dishonourable tactics on the battlefield, God himself finding such actions repugnant. The author has forged space not only for the unique position of Gurū Gobind Singh, but for distinct regulations imbued with human and divine backing.

The Dasam Granth is therefore quite distinct in its message when compared with the Adi Granth. It is worldlier in its coverage, dealing with subjects such as political relationships between human beings and the use of physical weapons. It reflects developments which have continued throughout Sikh history.

History and Community

Contemporary Sikh notions of armed force and violence have been strongly shaped by historical developments. Various schools of thought have come, clashed and gone over time. About four centuries after Gurū Nanak (1469-1539) began to preach, the *Singh Sabha* movement achieved an ideological victory over *Sanātan* Sikhs. This early twentieth century development had a significant impact in fostering 'Sikhism' as a static, codified and defined system of beliefs. The status of being an *amritdhari* (initiated) *Khālsā* Sikh became the standard life goal. Martyrdom was widely idealised alongside martial concepts such as the *dharmayuddh*, and Sikh history came to be viewed from a new emboldened perspective. 'Hindu' influences and practices were identified and purged as much as possible.

Interpretation of the Adi Granth has, for many, settled on literal readings of the passages containing violent imagery. This is a direct consequence of the modern views of martyrs and the *sant sipāhī* (saint soldier) ideal. The large majority see a clear place for righteous violence within religious boundaries even if it is not explicitly endorsed in the principal scripture. Historical examples and precedents set by figures using armed force have had a clear impact on the approach many take to their scripture.

Background

In the two centuries between Gurū Gobind Singh's passing in 1708 and the success of the reform movement in the early 20th century, Sikhism lacked a single group which dominated ideologically or defined a prevailing Orthodoxy. According to scholar Harjot Oberoi, the borders of Sikhism became especially blurred during the early 19th century, coinciding with the creation of the multiethnic and pluralistic Punjabi state of Maharaja Ranjit Singh (1780-1839). Political pragmatism meant that *Khālsā* and non-*Khālsā* Sikhs aligned with one another rather than debated theological differences. At the folk level, Punjabis continued to pay reverence to a variety of Hindu and Muslim saints. Nature spirits and various ghosts also played a prominent role in popular religion, as did caste-based discrimination. Many modern Sikhs look back at this period of history as a time of religious degradation and doctrinal laxity.

As an educated Sikh middle class began to grow in the Punjab at the time of the British colonial administration, Sikhs began to reflect increasingly on their religion's development. Many were not happy with the course Sikhism had taken since the passing of Gurū Gobind Singh. The 'Singh Sabhas' were local organisations comprised of educated Sikhs who worked towards the study of Sikhism and the advancement of Sikh interests. Two of the most notable include the Amritsar and the Lahore Singh Sabhas—the former adhering to the nineteenth century Sikh worldview (*Sanātan Sikhism*, or 'eternal Sikhism'), and the latter engaged in the developing unrest against Hindu, Muslim and popular religious influences. The latter called themselves the *Tatt* (true) *Khālsā*.

The ideological tug-of-war between the *Sanātan* Sikhs and the *Tatt Khālsā* gradually moved towards the side of the latter. That group was successful for a variety of reasons, notably the re-evaluation and promotion of Sikh history. Strong rhetoric emerged surrounding the *Khālsā* and the history of Sikh martyrdom. Those who had died to uphold the Sikh faith were posited as being true, ideal Sikhs who put their lives on the line to uphold religious integrity. The martyrdom rhetoric was used to inspire Sikhs to reject 'Hindu' influences which had crept into Sikhism and to emulate the fervour of the warrior Sikhs of the past. The early decades of the twentieth century saw the dominance of the *Tatt Khālsā* ideology as other forms of Sikhism fell out of the new sphere of orthodoxy.

Popular Sikh opinion on violence correspondingly underwent a clear shift. With the promotion of the *Khālsā* and the martyr figures as ideals, violence to defend against tyranny (particularly that of the despot Mughals) was thoroughly endorsed. This viewpoint extends beyond persecution of the Sikhs to humanity on the whole—Sikhs are to be the guardians of righteousness and goodness in this world, though they are to use military force only when absolutely necessary. The traditional account attributing the ninth Gurū Tegh Bahadur's death to his support for Hindu (religious) freedom served as the ideal example of the Sikh's role as protector of all humans, not just other Sikhs. One theological concept illustrating this point is that of *Degh* and *Tegh*, the fusion of spiritual living and ethically-informed physical prowess. Scholar Harbans Singh offers an analysis of *tegh* as a symbol of justice and freedom. Meaning sword, weapon, ray or beam in Persian, *tegh* represents Gurū Gobind Singh's defiance of the Mughals in support of justice for all (ibid.: 112). Singh also identifies the sword with true knowledge, it being the means by which one can destroy ignorance. The necessity of its fusion with *deg* is of prime importance, also reflected by the aforementioned *sant sipāhī* concept.

Tatt Khālsā Sikhs were not 'inventing' a new tradition *per se*. As devoted members of the Sikh tradition, they were simply laying stress on those dimensions of the large tapestry making up the Sikh identity at the time which they considered to be of crucial and prime importance. As shown, Sikh militancy was not a nineteenth century phenomenon - the *Khālsā* had been an organisation involved in armed resistance against the Mughals and Afghans in the eighteenth century, and these strains in the Sikh community can be traced back to Gurū Hargobind (1595-1644). The British also recognised the martial qualities of the *Khālsā* identity in initial encounters with the Sikhs, and extensively recruited them into the military whilst promoting *Khālsā* initiation.

Historical examples of Sikh militant concerns can be found in *rahitnāmā* literature written in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. These are basic manuals of conduct which often reiterate the vigorous themes of the Dasam Granth and wider *Khālsā* narrative. *Rahitnāmās* are not considered 'scripture', nor do they treat violence and armed force in a way any more systematic than in the *Zafarnāma* of the Dasam Granth. This is in stark

contrast to their detailed instructions on religious ceremonies, proper preparation of meat and many other topics. The most prominent modern successor of the *rahitnāmās* is the 'Sikh Reht Maryada', which details proper modes of worship and how to perform ceremonial functions. No mention is made of the ethics surrounding the use of armed force, and killing is only explicitly mentioned in the condemnation of female infanticide. Thus, the *rahitnāmā* genre of literature omits a detailed discussion of armed force. And its passages hold far less theological importance than the *Adi Granth* and *Dasam Granth*, though it does provide insight into the historical development of the Sikh community.

One prominent scholar of Sikhism suggests that that militancy within the Sikh community was initially connected with Jatt culture, the Jatts always having been an independent and rural ethnic group. Though the Jatts make up the majority of the *panth* (community of believers) today, this was not the case in early Sikh history. Jatt cultural traits continue to exert a great deal of influence on the minds of many in the Punjab, regardless of religious affiliation. *Izzat*, a shared cultural sense of honour, interacts intensively with religious sentiments. When one Sikh sect leader committed acts deemed religiously offensive, members of the wider community protested vigorously. Lionel Baixas and Charlene Simon attribute this response to *izzat*: "this notion of *izzat* ... not only implies a number of concerns such as power, reciprocity, protection of one's social status but also a constant judgment from the other members of the Sikh community. Thus, when Sikh individuals were called by members of their relational networks to join the demonstration in order to defend the Sikh sense of honour, they had no other choice but to get involved, in order to preserve their own social status. In this case, the *izzat* worked all the more as a driving force for the protesters as it was not only a matter of preserving the honour of one's family but also to restore the honour of the entire Sikh community."

Balbinder Singh Bhogal challenges the assumptions underlying the above reading of Sikh history, namely the implication that the Sikh community was transformed from a largely pacifistic group at the time of Nanak into a martial one later on. He argues that both the Gurū Granth Sāhib (*Adi Granth*) and the *Dasam Granth* allow for militant and religious interpretations, the dichotomy between 'love' and

violence having roots in Western-biased readings of the Sikh tradition.

Whatever the source of militant attitudes within the community, the justified use of force, the *dharamyuddh*, emerged as a cornerstone of Sikh identity. This impact extended into the realm of scriptural interpretation. For example, with propensity of the *Khālsā* and Gurū Gobind Singh's martial image, the Dasam Granth came under renewed scrutiny. On the one hand, it was said to be the work of the tenth Gurū himself, someone who had taken on a new and powerful role for Sikhs everywhere. Conversely, parts of the works contained within it are clearly laced with rewritings from mythological Hindu literature, causing clear friction with those reformists discussed above who reject such influences. The issue is complicated by the fact that some passages of the Dasam Granth are recited in daily prayers whilst others have been used historically to rouse the fighting spirit before battle. These factors combined led to the emergence of a plethora of viewpoints regarding which sections of the text can be understood as legitimate. Some accept the Dasam Granth in its entirety; some accept only the portions not drawn from Hindu mythological

literature; others reject the book altogether. The controversy over the authenticity of the work continues into the modern day. The *Akāl Takht* (the political centre of the Sikh community) itself has repeatedly ordered an end to the debate for the good of the community.

Interpretation of the Adi Granth

Not only was the Dasam Granth re-evaluated but passages from the Adi Granth (Gurū Granth Sāhib) were interpreted as applying to outer battle and martyrdom. Consider the following:

(1412) *...If you desire to play this game of love with Me, then step onto My path with your head in hand. When you place your feet on this path, Give Me your head, and do not pay any attention to public opinion.*

This passage quote is central to those Sikhs who believe it refers to martyrdom. Stepping onto the path with 'head in hand' is taken to signify the necessity for a willingness to go to the extreme of death for religion, if necessary.

(1105) *...The battle-drum beats in the sky of the mind; aim is taken, and the wound is inflicted. The spiritual warriors enter the field of battle; now is the time to fight!*



He alone is known as a spiritual hero, who fights in defence of religion. He may be cut apart, piece by piece, but he never leaves the field of battle.

This passage, also discussed above, is commonly used in relation to martyrdom. Though the passage begins with a reference to the mind, the battlefield and the fight are frequently interpreted as physical.

(338) ...O people, O victims of this Maya, abandon your doubts and dance out in the open. What sort of a hero is one who is afraid to face the battle? ... Now that you have taken up the challenge of death, let yourself burn and die, and attain perfection...

The possible metaphor for spiritual or mental struggle has been used in discussions of martyrdom in 'taking up the challenge of death'.

(579) ...death would not be called bad, O' people, if one knew how to truly die. The death of brave heroes is blessed, if it is approved by God. They alone are proclaimed as brave warriors in the world hereafter, who receive true honor in the Court of the Lord.

Though Louis Fenech's previously-discussed analysis of the quote above demonstrates that it is to be interpreted as a hymn of mourning, to many it is a blatant endorsement of martyrdom.

Martyrdom and Hardship

Historical martyrs feature prominently in modern Sikhism, acting as inspirational figures and reminders of the armed struggles faced by Sikhs throughout history. Amongst these martyrs are several of the ten Gurūs and their family members, as well as famous heroes from the battlefield. Ordinary Sikhs who are victims of persecution are also included. Those who died for their faith and the hardships which they had endured are acknowledged in the *Ardās*, the Sikh invocation-prayer recited at regular intervals. The recognition of martyrdom is not without a political dimension; sections of the community consider as martyrs Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale and those associated with the Punjab insurgency in the last two decades of the 20th century.

The first Sikh martyr is also one of the most important. Gurū Arjan, the fifth Gurū, was brutally killed by the Mughal government for refusing to renounce his religion. Remembrance of his sacrifice is therefore especially important to those who are facing religious persecution or under pressure to renounce aspects of their faith. A key feature of martyr examples, like Gurū Arjan, is explicit mention of the painful ways in which they died. Gurū Arjan is said to have been



forced to sit on a burning hot plate before hot sand and water were poured over his body. He then died due to the blisters on his body when entering a river to bathe. The ninth Gurū, Tegh Bahadur, also features as an important martyr, as he was publically beheaded for standing up for the religious rights of Kashmiri Hindus. His sacrifice features in Sikh discussions of the religion's open nature and its defence of egalitarianism. His son, Gurū Gobind Singh, is also considered a martyr, assassinated on the order of a regional Mughal leader. His four sons were martyred even before his death; the eldest two were killed in battle against the Mughals whilst the youngest were captured, bricked alive to the shoulders and beheaded for refusing to convert to Islam. Three of the ten Sikh Gurūs therefore feature as martyrs, as well as four members of the tenth Gurū's family. The profound respect held by Sikhs for their religious leaders ensures that the stories of their martyrdom are particularly resonant, demonstrating the virtue of holding to one's religious convictions and protecting the rights of others who wish to do the same.

Perhaps the most potent example in Sikh history of the importance of life-risking devotion to one's personal faith can be found in the traditional story of

the founding of the Khālsā. Gathered at Anandpur Sahib in 1699, Gurū Gobind Singh asked his crowd of followers which of them would be willing to die for their faith. Disappearing into his tent with a man who volunteered, he re-emerged with a blood-soaked sword and asked for a second volunteer. This continued until five men had disappeared into his tent, the implication to his crowd of followers being that each had died. Finally, they all exited the tent perfectly alive and Gurū Gobind Singh announced the founding of the Khālsā. The men were baptised and said to have adopted the 'Five K's', marks of membership which begin with K in the Punjabi. These are unshorn hair, a small comb, a loose pair of shorts worn under the trousers, a steel bracelet, and a sword (kirpān). The meaning of these symbols is open to interpretation and flexible, though many agree that the kirpān is symbolic of the Sikh's constant vigilance against tyranny and willingness to stand up for the innocent. Many baptized Sikh men consider it their duty to carry the kirpān and the other articles of faith at all times. Sikhs today who are baptised into the Khālsā are done so by the 'Panj Piare', or five beloved ones, patterning after those who stood up for their beliefs in 1699.



The Kirpan, symbolic of vigilance against tyranny.

Warrior-heroes who died fighting tyranny are also treated with reverence by many Sikhs. Banda Singh Bahadur was a military commander who played an important role in leading anti-Mughal resistance, beginning after he met with Gurū Gobind Singh shortly before the Gurū's death. In 1710 he successfully sacked Sirhind, the capital of the Mughals in Punjab, and briefly set up state mechanisms. Captured during further combat with the empire, he was put to death by means of torture, his body parts removed one after the other and his body being cut up into pieces. Another revered hero is Baba Deep Singh, who led a raid against Afghans who had earlier invaded Punjab and destroyed the Golden Temple. Whilst fighting, it is said that Baba Deep Singh was decapitated, picked up his head and continued to fight before collapsing upon reaching the temple. These two figures, amongst many others, inspire Sikhs to maintain the courage and commitment which is demanded of members of the Khālsā.

In addition to the persecution suffered by their Gurūs and warrior ancestors, Sikhs are keenly aware of the hardships endured by the community as a whole throughout history. The eighteenth century was particularly difficult for the Sikhs as they dealt with both the Mughals and the Afghans. A particularly ruthless governor in the Punjab, Mir Mannu, who served under both, is described as having made a particular effort to target the Sikhs. Men, women and children were all massacred and forced to retreat into the countryside to escape persecution. Many women were made prisoners or forced workers. In addition to this, tradition maintains that babies were killed, mutilated and made into garlands which were forced around their mothers' necks. Though this period was particularly brutal, there is more immediate emotional investment in the events surrounding the contemporary life and death of Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale and the Punjab insurgency which ran into the 1990s.

To recall, Bhindranwale was a preacher who built up a large following in Punjab from the 1970s into the early 1980s by preaching a simple, orthodox version of Sikhism with the brave Khālsā warrior as the ideal. Many Punjabis had grievances with the central Indian government for failing to follow through with the commitments made to Sikhs and the state, some of these extending back to before the creation of the present Pakistan and India in 1947.

Bhindranwale's movement adopted both religious and political dimensions due to the communal nature of Indian politics. As his followers armed themselves, they took up residence in the Golden Temple complex of Amritsar, also the location of the Akāl Takht. Fearing a complete revolt against the government and the declaration of an independent 'Khalistan', Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi ordered the army into the complex to root out the militants and Bhindranwale himself. This military action was codenamed 'Operation Bluestar'.

The attack began on the night of 5 June 1984, after the period of commemoration of Gurū Arjan's martyrdom. For this reason, many remaining pilgrims were killed in the battle between Bhindranwale's followers and the military. By morning, Bhindranwale had been killed, the Akāl Takht critically damaged and thousands had died, including civilians, militants and members of the military. The outcry by Sikhs around the world was immediate; their most holy shrine had been defiled and partially destroyed and the community felt as if it were under personal attack by the Indian government. Matters were made worse when Indira Gandhi was assassinated on 31 October 1984 by two Sikh bodyguards, followed by a genocide, and the killing of innocent Sikhs, most notably in Delhi.

The combined shock of these events heavily impacted the Sikhs, made powerfully aware for the first time in recent history that their status as a minority community made them highly vulnerable. The movement for an independent Khalistan was heavily reinforced by the Indian government's violent actions. Though ideological support came from some members of the world diaspora, violent resistance against the state took place almost exclusively in Punjab itself. To combat this insurgency, the government heavily backed the Punjab police force, headed by K.P.S. Gill. Numerous human rights abuses by the police have been documented during this period, including torture, rape and 'false encounters' in which the police executed prisoners after falsely reporting an engagement in armed combat. The severity of this crackdown and growing resentment by Punjabi villagers against violent militants meant that the movement lost its mass appeal by the mid-1990s. The Indian government also engaged in a series of measures aimed at reconciliation. The situation in

the twenty-first century is one of mere ideological support of separatism by certain members of the diaspora, but negligible support within India itself. Sikh participation in active militant groups working towards the goal of independence is almost non-existent.

Those who continue to support the movement for Khalistan are vocal in their identification of key members of the movement as martyrs. Bhindranwale himself continues to enjoy a high level of appeal, even amongst some who are not supporters of Khalistan. The assassins of Indira Gandhi are also popular within some circles, many viewing their actions as being justified by the Prime Minister's decision to attack Sikhism's most sacred shrine on a holy day with many civilians present. The 'rhetoric of martyrdom', to quote Louis Fenech, is almost inseparable at times from Sikh politics in its modern context. It has the effect of extending a passionate level of religious legitimacy to those involved in a modern political struggle, such as the Khalistan movement of Bhindranwale and others.

Rich tradition and historical precedence

Sikh stances on war and violence are heavily reverential towards martyrs. The community's self-perception relies on the ideal of Sikhs as self-sacrificing defenders as well as caregivers in the world, two of the concepts around which any theory of Sikh military ethics would revolve. Scriptural interpretation has also come under the influence of martial factors, as demonstrated by the recitation of certain passages in violent contexts. However, support of Bhindranwale's militant actions and the Khalistan movement is by no means universal within the Sikh community, both today and even during the period in which the above events were unfolding. Those who do support these figures legitimise the violent action in part through use of scripture, but primarily through association with historical martyrs and the rhetoric surrounding the duties of members of the Khālsā. The historical dimension of this justification is crucial, demonstrating that an analysis of scripture is inadequate in explaining Sikh views on violence, as scriptural interpretation has long been coloured by external factors. Historical precedence, especially regarding martyrdom, has had a profound influence on Sikh views of the utility of armed force.



When the Sikhs 'took' Delhi

Despite the modern importance of armed force to the Sikhs, with its foundation in both scripture and history, there has been no codified approach to its proper application as a *dharamyuddh*, i.e., ethical or righteous war. Surprisingly, the code of behaviour published by the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC), the authoritative voice from Amritsar, makes no mention of the justified uses of force. Furthermore, no theological works were found that provide an in-depth discussion, as can be found in the just war writings of Christian figures such as Saint Augustine, Thomas Aquinas and others. The present authors have attempted to compare just war theory with Sikh perspectives in other work but there is a dearth of such scholarship by Sikh studies scholars and by Sikh writers themselves. One exception is Kanwarjit Singh's work (1989) on the political philosophy of the Sikhs. He postulated eleven 'laws of war' by combining historical precedent with the *Zafarnama* and general moral trends made evident in scripture. Unfortunately, his treatment of these ideas is brief; a detailed investigation remains to be conducted and cannot occur until the Sikh community itself begins to elaborate upon those themes.

The Sikhs have a rich tradition with much historical precedence, and important sacred texts on which to build a theory for the justified use of armed force and for military ethics more generally.

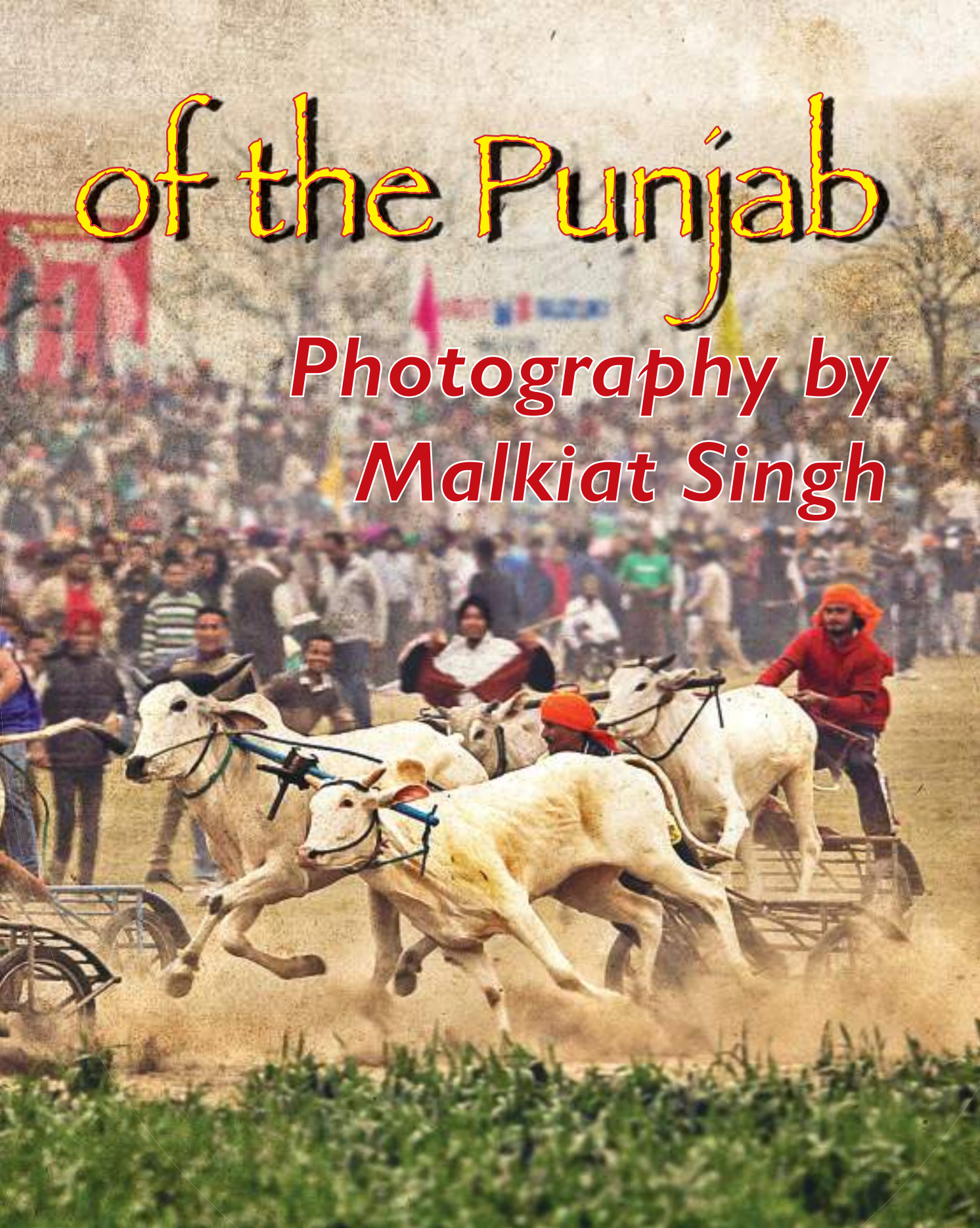
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Rural Olympics



of the Punjab

**Photography by
Malkiat Singh**



The Kila Raipur Sports Festival, which is virtually Rural Olympics of the Punjab, is held annually at Kila Raipur near Ludhiana. The competition encompasses most major Punjabi rural sports, including a cart-race, tug-of-war and so much else !

In February each year, Ludhiana becomes destination for thousands of sports enthusiasts, including an increasing number from abroad. They come to Kila Raipur to also see the special breed of bullocks, camels, dogs, mules and other animals competing in competitive events, which is verily a 'Rural Olympics'. During the year of the Olympics (2008), Hakam and Naib Singh Dhaliwal from village Kalsian, Punjab took the 1st prize. They also were first in *gujjaral* and *phalewal*, and have become legendry in the Punjab as the men with the greatest passion for sport.

Rural sports with cultural and social importance

In early villages, which were the first habitation of civilised man, rural sports grew out of sheer necessity. The need for cultivating individual strength for labour in the fields, interdependence within the community and need for joint defence against onslaughts of a common foe – as also dangerous animals – were impetus sports like wrestling, long distance running, jumping, weightlifting and such performing arts as measuring strength by holding of wrists, twisting of hands. Kabaddi, which is a manifestation of the same spirit, has become the “mother of all games” in the Punjab.

In order to toughen the bodies and steel the minds of his followers, Guru Hargobind Sahib began the tradition of holding wrestling bouts within the precincts of Akal Takht Sahib in Amritsar and it is mostly because of the lead that he took, and the seal of ethics that he put on them, that sports become a proud facet of life in the Punjab. On the common grounds of villages, at fairs, during many festivals, at the hermitages of pirs and graves of preceptors, wrestling soon became a part of high recreation. Villages adopted and fed wrestlers and gave prizes to them as a matter of honour. This tradition continues in the Punjab of today.



Handicaps overcome ! A participant at the Kila Raipur Sports Festival.



During the Hola Mohalla celebrations at Anandpur Sahib, tent pegging, archery, fencing and horse riding competitions, gymnastics and acrobatic displays (which the Nihangs excel in) and the tournaments held at Diwali, have a hoary history. To the Punjabis goes the distinction of transforming rural games into competitive tournaments.

The Grewals

Some sixty years back, when the Grewal Sports Association began to hold competitions in rural sports at Village Kila Raipur, few would have imagined that this tournament would become a virtual movement in Punjab. Today in almost 7000 villages of the Punjab, rural sports competitions are held in one form or the other. Rural folk organise these and extend generous hospitality to all competitors. These village sports have actually opened the floodgates for village development.

As a matter of fact, before Independence (partition) in 1947, major importance was given to kabaddi and wrestling, but later, the spectrum of rural sports got wider. The rustic '*khido khoondi*' (literally played with a ball made out of cloth cuttings and a stick twisted at the end like a flat hockey blade) was replaced by proper hockey equipment and players from villages having no facilities beyond uneven grounds to play

on, began to dominate the game. Twelve of India's greatest hockey players have come from a single village, Sansarpur in Jalandhar District.

Not only have revival of sports fairs taken place in the Punjab but their number has also increased tremendously. Few decades back, these were limited to

- Babehali-di-Chhinj
- Bhaggowal-di-Chhinj
- Shikar-Macchian di-Parewi
- Jaura-Chhatra-di-Parewi
- Bhomey-Wadaley-di-Chhinj
- Shanker-di-Chhinj
- Munun-honey-di-Chhinj and
- Kila Raipur's sports

Today, sporting meets are held in almost every significant village of the Punjab.

Rivalling the Kila Raipur Rural Sports meet is the Kalgidhar Tournament of Kamalpur which has also completed half-a-century. Dhudike's *Lala Lajpat Rai Memorial Sports Fair* has completed three decades while those at Gujarwal, Mullanpur, Sahnewal, Ghungali, Rajputtana, Hambla, Dhamto are flourishing. The 'mini sports meets' of Lalto Kalan, Dhurkot, Rauni, Dyalpur, Rurka Kalan, Bhinder Kalan, Duareana are gaining stature all the time.

Three main types of competition are held during rural meets, including purely 'rural games' like kabaddi, wrestling, weight-lifting etc. Gradually, modern sports have been introduced, such as athletics, hockey, football, volleyball, cycling, handball etc. Thereafter have come 'performing sports' like acrobatics, circus-like acts including bending of steel rods, having tractors driven over chests, etc. Now yet another exotic add-on to sports fairs is the advent of folk singing at sunset. After the day's sport competitions, the notes of music begin to emanate and singing continues, sometimes late into the night. The music contest held between Karamjit Dhuri and Jagmohan Kaur at Kila Raipur is vividly remembered. At the Gujarwal meet, the singing of Parminder Sandhu, Hans Raj Hans and Surinder Chhinda and at fairs in the Majha region, the *Toombi* (one-stringed instrument) of Amarjit remain firmly etched in collective memory.

Rural Sports are certainly personification of the Virility of the Punjab.

Villagers are not just fond of human competitions, they also like to assess the skill and power of their animals including bulls, horses, dogs, on the sports ground. Bullock cart racing has become a passion in the Punjab. Because of a ban on hunting, hound-races



There are many Fauja Singhs in the Punjab !

are held in Punjab by dangling a bait of fake hare before the dogs. At some places, cock-fights are held and pigeon fights contested. In some parts of Punjab, people indulge in the dangerous game of wrestling with a bull.



The prowess of Nihangs on horse is legendary

One of the most popular organised forms of village pastime, as also entertainment for young girls, is Tirinjen where the girls even spin as they sing. Tirinjen is a kind of social club which can be organised at any home where there is place for spinning of wheels and where the girls spend long and happy hours. The girls sing and dance, express their sorrow and happiness, pangs of separation and joy on re-meeting of friends. The spinning wheel plays a significant role in the lives of women, as a "companion, counselor in distress, friend and guide". Here is an example of a song sung by a married girl during Tirinjen:

Charkha mera rangla, vich sone dian mekhan,

Ni mai tenu yaad karan, jad charkhe wal dekhan.

"My spinning wheel is multi coloured, inlaid with nails of gold, I think of you whenever I see my spinning wheel".

Har charkhe de ger yad awen toon mitra

"Each circle of the wheel, brings your sweet memories to my mind".

Teej or Teeans, which is celebrated in the month of Sawan (July) is also a time of entertainment for the ladies. The Teej festival starts on the third day of Sawan and continues for about thirteen days, a period when the rainy season is at its peak, having overwhelmed the scorching heat, with people now out to enjoy the rains. It is also the time for sowing. The atmosphere is relaxed and people heave sighs of relief. The girls celebrate this, literally swinging away! One sees girls on swings all over the villages during this season, they wear new clothes, eat special food and sing special songs at the time. This festival has also made inroads into urban society, with songs sung pertaining to various aspects of social life.

*Ral auo sahio ni, Sabh tian khedan jaiye Hun aya sawan
ni Pinghan piplin ja ke paiye Pai ku ku kardi ni, Sahio koel
Hanju dolhe Papiha wekho ni, Bherha pee-pee kar ke bole.
Paye pailan pande ni, Bagi moran shor machaya. Arhio khil
khil phaulan ne, Sanu mahia yad kariya.*

"Come on friends! Let's go and play 'teean', Sawan heartens us, let us hang swings on the peepal. Swinging ku-ku o' friends! The cuckoo sheds its tears And behold this papiha which goes on singing pia-pia. The peacock dances gleefully, filling the garden with its crowing ; these wretched blossoming flowers remind us of our Ranjan".







Kikli

Kikli kleeer di, Pagg mere vir de, Daupatta mere bhai da, Phitte mun jawai da

This is another game, basically for ladies. Two girls clasp their hands and go around in circles, played by two or four girls, in multiples of two.

Gheeta Pathar

Pebbles, stones or broken earthenware are further broken into smaller pieces and used for playing a game which does not involve running or jumping but is played while sitting on the floor.

Khidu

The girls sing along with bouncing a khidu (ball) ; in fact such rhymes and games are suitable for children: a first round, then the second and third till the finale, reached by counting till ten and singing of the tenth song.



**Kaleidoscope of events at
the Rural sports**



Sports on wheels – motor cyclists at the finale.



Kokla chhapaki

This game is popular even today amongst village children who sit in circles while one, with cloth in hand, goes around the circle singing, a kind of 'warning' for children sitting not to look back. The cloth is then dropped randomly behind a child. If discovered before the running child completes the round, the other would run behind to touch him unless he has sat down at the vacated place.

Ghaggar phissi

This is a game for the boys. One kneels and the others in turn leap on top of him ; if he bears the weight, he wins but if not, he loses. Simple !

Kabbadi

This games' popularity is increasing and has, in fact, become officially included in the Asian Games, now popular all over South Asia. A line is drawn on ground between the opposing teams and each sends

a player across the line, who, if able to touch a rival player and came back without being caught, a point is added. The key factor : this crossing of the line and back has to be performed muttering 'kabadi-kabadi' without releasing one's breath. Phew!

Rasa kashi (tug of war)

A line is drawn between the two teams, each holding one end of the rope in their hands. The team which is able to drag the other team over on to its side, wins !

Akharas

These have been traditionally popular : played near a well in the village or sometimes near the temple, these were places where boys learnt the masculine sport of wrestling from a Guru or Pehlwan (wrestler).

Martial arts

This was also part of teaching at Akharas but where the use of weapons was learnt. Nihangs have kept up these martial arts – and so the tradition.

Kite flying (patang bazi)

This has gradually become an urban game but also remains popular with rural folks. More so, it has assumed an international character (virtually a cult in parts of Pakistani Punjab).

Apart from the games mentioned, *Chaupat*, *Shatranj* (Chess), *camel* and *bullock-cart* races, *cock fights* in addition to *kabutar bazi*, *chakore bazi* and *bater bazi* are popular.



Guli Danda (Lippa)



Painting by Deep Nimana

Gilli-danda or guli danda is an universal sport, played by rural youth across the Indian subcontinent. It is called *chinni-dandu* in Kannada, *kuttiyum-kolum* in Malayalam, *viti-dandu* in Marathi, *kitti-pullu* in Tamil, *gooti-billa* in Telugu, and *lappa duggi* in Pashto.

There is no record of the game's origin in the South Asian subcontinent or of its existence before the arrival of Europeans. However a similar game known as Lippa has a history of being played in Italy and southern Europe.

Gilli-danda is played with a 'gilli' or 'guli' and a danda, both being wooden sticks. The *danda* is longer and swung by the player to hit the *gilli* which is tapered on both sides. The *gilli* is analogous to a cricket ball and the *danda* to a cricket bat. There is no standard length defined for the *danda* or the *gilli*.

There are many regional variations to the manner of scoring. The *gilli* is airborne after being struck and should a fielder from the opposing team catch the *gilli*, the striker is out. If the *gilli* lands on the ground, the fielder closest to the *gilli* has one chance to hit the *danda* with a throw (similar to a run out in cricket). If the fielder is successful, the striker is out; if not, the striker gets one score and gets another opportunity to strike. The team (or individual) with the most points wins the game. If the striker fails to hit *gilli* in three tries, the striker is out (similar to a strikeout in baseball). There is no official limit to the number of players or teams. *Gilli-danda* can be played where each individual plays for themselves – or between two teams.

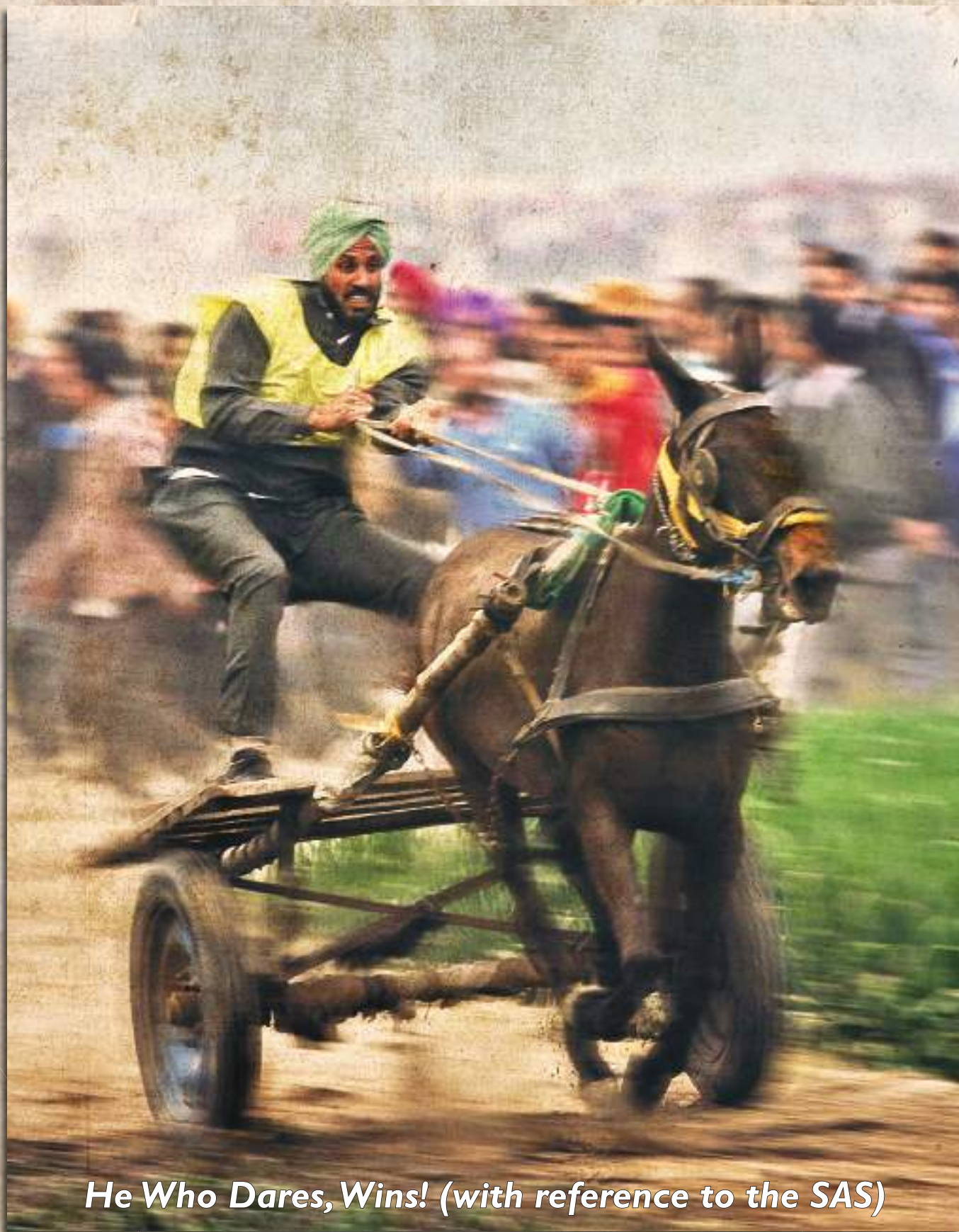
An early form, but nevertheless this has some kinship to cricket, arguably national sport of the Indian sub continent !

For the record : the two Punjabs continue to exchange teams for sporting events, particularly kabaddi,



some as recently as in late 2012. The photos on these pages are, of course, from the past.





He Who Dares, Wins! (with reference to the SAS)