

II/2011

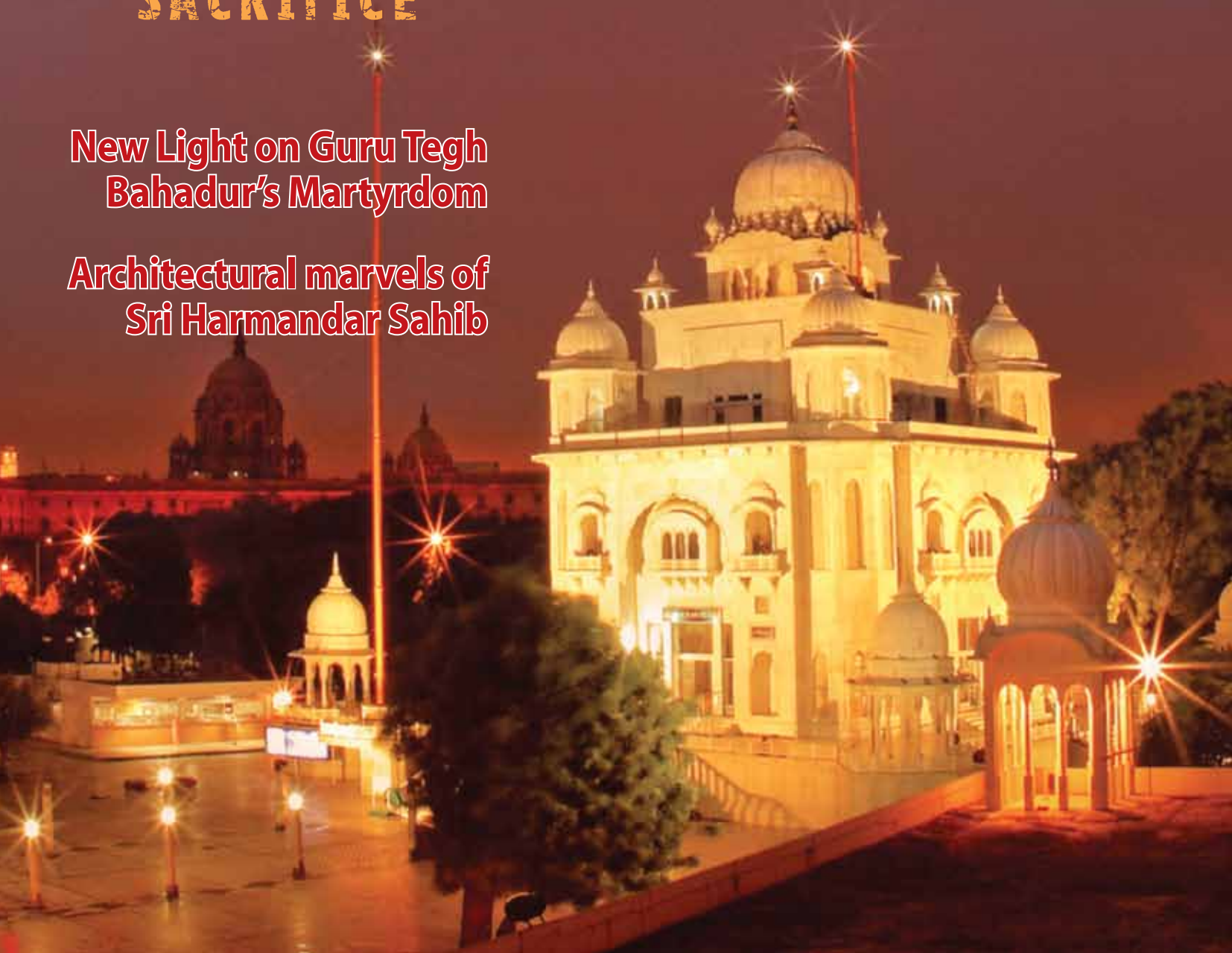
NISHAAN

NAGAARA

SUPREME SACRIFICE

**New Light on Guru Tegh
Bahadur's Martyrdom**

**Architectural marvels of
Sri Harmandar Sahib**



Contents

Issue II/2011

2 Editorial:
Guru Tegh Bahadur (1621-1675)
Dr. I.J. Singh



4 Guru Tegh Bahadur: Epitome of
Forgiveness and Fearlessness
Harpreet Kaur Bains

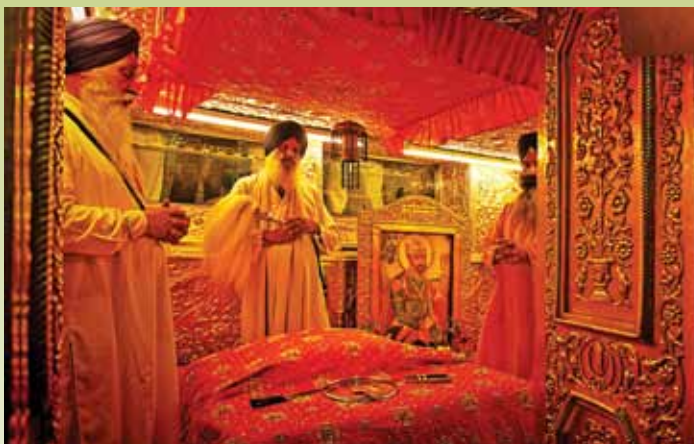
7 Martyrdom in Sikhism
Dharam Singh



11 New Light on Guru Tegh
Bahadur's Martyrdom
Dr. Trilochan Singh



17 "Hind ki Chaddar"
The Guru Tegh Bahadur Memorial



18 SUPREME SACRIFICE
Photo story by Malkiat Singh



43 Architectural marvels of Sri
Harmandar Sahib
Dr S S Bhatti



49 Return to Jallianwala Bagh

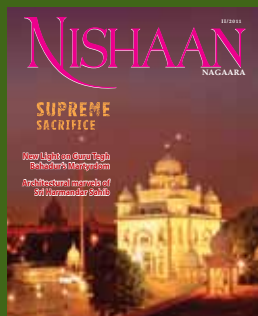


53 Historic Gurdwaras in Bangladesh
Harbans Singh, IAS

58 Guru Granth Sahib: A Model for
Interfaith Understanding
Dr. Kazi Nurul Islam



62 Paintings by Sidharth
on Barahmasa



Cover : Gurdwara Rakab Ganj Sahib
(Photograph by Malkiat Singh)

Editorial Director
Dr Jaswant Singh Neki

Executive Editor
Pushpinder Singh

Joint Editor
Bhayee Sikander Singh

Editorial Board
Inni Kaur
Dr I.J. Singh
Dr Gurpreet Maini
Malkiat Singh
Monica Arora

Distributors
Himalayan Books, New Delhi

Editorial Office

D-43, Sujan Singh Park
New Delhi 110 003, India
Tel: (91-11) 24617234
Fax: (91-11) 24628615

e-mail : nishaan@lycos.com
: nishaan.nagaara@gmail.com
website : www.nishaan.in

Published by

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

Printed by

Agean Offset
B-220, ECOTECH-III
Udyog Kendra-I
Greater Noida Ind. Area

Please visit us at:
www.nishaan.in

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

Editorial

Guru Tegh Bahadur (1621-1675)

*N*ishaan dedicates this issue to the sacrifice of Guru Tegh Bahadur. Why? And what do his life and sacrifice say to us today?

India and the South Asian region stands at the crossroads again as it did then.

If it was religious intolerance that pushed India to the brink then, it is a combination of corruption run amok and something akin to fanaticism along with the curse of caste and religious upmanship. The citizenry is divided. The minorities – and there are many, not just Sikhs alone – are unsure of their position in the world’s largest democracy. The majority is at times less than reassuring.

Our institutions – religious and secular – are less concerned with service and the greater good and more obsessed with their own coffers and filling their own bellies.

The life and death of Guru Tegh Bahadur provides a timely but a different roadmap. He was a prophet and martyr who put his head on the line not so much for his own people or needs but for those of others. He died to protect the principle that freedom of religion and belief is a fundamental right of all people.

True, that no man hates war more than the soldier who knows its brutality. An unequalled man of peace who had earned his name Tegh Bahadur – master of the sword – was the teenaged Tyag Mull in war.

Tegh Bahadur’s ascendancy as Guru is marked by an unequalled single-minded dedication to the pursuit of peace and reconciliation. Born in Amritsar in 1621, Tegh Bahadur was the fifth and youngest son of the sixth Sikh Master, Guru Hargobind. From childhood he was of a contemplative, meditative and mystic bent, attracted to music and poetry. His retiring nature was in keeping with the meaning of his name at birth, Tyag Mull.

Two renowned Sikhs of that time tutored the young Tyag Mull: Bhai Buddha imparted skills in arms, archery and horsemanship; Bhai Gurdas taught him the depths of Sikhi as well as the religious texts of other Indic religions.

From the time of Guru Hargobind, the sixth Nanak, Sikhs had maintained a standing militia, including a cavalry. Guru Hargobind and the Mughals, who then ruled India, engaged in four pitched battles and some skirmishes in 1634 and 1635. Chronicles record that Tyag Mull, though barely 13, fully participated in this warfare and acquitted himself most honorably, earning the title by which he is known – Tegh Bahadur, “Master of the Sword.”

When his father, the sixth Guru Hargobind, passed away in 1644, the 23 year old young man, Tegh Bahadur, retired to a small village, Bakala, with his mother and wife to spend his time in meditation and cultivation of spiritual discipline. But he had not withdrawn from the world, only from its distractions; he still enjoyed riding and hunting.

During the time of the seventh Master, Guru Har Rai, and the eighth, Guru Harkishen, the Sikh world was at peace and Islamic imperialism in India had briefly pulled in its sharp fangs; it was time for stock-taking, reorganisation and refurbishment, some rest from the turbulent period of Emperor Jehangir.

After his father Guru Hargobind passed the mantle of Guruship to Har Rai, the seventh Guru, Tegh Bahadur moved to his mother’s ancestral village, Bakala, and spent much of his time on reflection and meditation. Guru Har Rai anointed his young son Harkrishan as the next Guru but who served very briefly. During much of Guru Harkrishan’s short tenure, Tegh Bahadur was away on a lengthy tour of eastern India, far from the Punjab.

After Guru Hargobind there was thus a period of relative peace for Sikhs. This peaceful span meant that the movement grew and prospered – the earlier dangerous times became a hazy memory. The result was predictable: after the eighth Guru as many as 20 pretenders surfaced, now that the pickings were easy and the government no longer quite as hostile. Their task became easier still because Guru Harkishan had given only an ambiguous direction to the identity of the next Guru.

Tegh Bahadur, as was his wont, did not press his claim, but stayed quiet and meditative, withdrawn from all the jockeying for the position of Guru. His chief rival, his own nephew Dhir Mull, plundered Tegh Bahadur’s house and mounted an attack on his person. Dhir Mull’s men also took with them the only copy of the Adi Granth available to the Guru. Note that this Adi Granth, with the addition of Guru Tegh Bahadur’s, writings was anointed as the Guru Granth in 1708 by Guru Gobind Singh.

When Sikhs heard of it they pillaged Dhir Mull’s house, recovered everything stolen and brought it back. Guru Tegh Bahadur responded forgivingly. He returned everything including the copy of the Adi Granth to Dhir Mull. He counseled Sikhs on the virtues of forgiveness, according to Santokh Singh in *Sri Gurpartap Suraj Granth*. Said the Guru: “Forgiveness is the supreme virtue that transcends all the pilgrimages and absolutions.”

But the schism that had almost derailed his ascension to Guruship in the house of Nanak was not so easily healed.

This divide between the followers of Dhir Mull and the House of Nanak was neither forgotten nor healed. It persists even today. The *pujaris* who were in control of the Harmandir Sahib in Amritsar locked the doors and did not allow Guru Tegh Bahadur access to the historical gurdwara that his great grandfather, Guru Arjan, had built.

Tegh Bahadur was formally anointed Guru on 11 August 1664. He set out to knit the far flung pockets of Sikh communities into a whole by his travels, teachings and practices. He was in Assam when news reached him that his wife, who was awaiting him in Patna, had given birth to their son, Gobind Rai, who was later to become the tenth Guru, Gobind Singh. Some chronicles give his name at birth as Gobind Das.

On one of his trips, the Dowager Rani Champa of Bilaspur offered the Guru a tract of land in her state that Guru Tegh Bahadur bought on payment of 500 Rupees. The Guru founded a township 'Chakk Nanki' named after his mother that later, by the time of the tenth Master Guru Gobind Singh, had become the historical city of Anandpur. (I ask you to compare this to the price early settlers paid the Native Americans for Manhattan Island in New York City. It was only \$24 plus some trinkets.)

The Guru and his family returned to their home at Chakk Nanki that soon became the site for a history making, life changing event. History tells us that on 25 May 1675, a representative group of Brahmins from Kashmir appeared at the Guru's door. Their tale of woe was heart-rending. The Mughal Governor, Iftikhar Khan, consistent with Emperor Aurangzeb's desires and directives, was forcing Kashmiri Hindus to convert to Islam - or face death. They entreated the Guru to intercede.

According to Kuir Singh (*Gurbilas Patshahi X*, reprinted 1968), when the Guru's son, Gobind, who was only nine years old at that time asked his father why he looked so thoughtful; Guru Tegh Bahadur's response was mind-blowing then and appears equally so today when he said, "Such are the times and their burdens. This matter would be redeemed only if a truly good person comes forward to lay his head on the line." "Father, who could be worthier than you?" spontaneously asked young Gobind.

Soon, orders were issued for the Guru's arrest by Emperor Aurangzeb. The Guru traveled out of Punjab towards Delhi to court arrest. History affirms that on 12 July 1675 he was arrested at Agra, though Kesar Singh Chhibber and Mohammed Ehsan Ijad suggest that he might have been arrested near Chakk Nanki on that day. Four days earlier, on 8 July, he had nominated Gobind to succeed him as Guru.

For over three months, Guru Tegh Bahadur suffered harsh treatment in jail; he was then transported in an iron cage to Delhi, where he reached on 4 November 1675. He was tortured and repeatedly asked to accept Islam. Neither physical torture nor the promise of worldly pleasures would budge him. He was asked to perform a miracle to prove his divine powers and he declined.

On 11 November 1675, Guru Tegh Bahadur was publicly beheaded in *Chandni Chowk*, a bustling central market of Old Delhi. Gurdwara *Sees Gunj* stands at that spot today as a

prominent reminder of his sacrifice for the rights of Hindus to practice their faith as they saw fit. The Guru was not a Hindu but the principle of "freedom of religion" was at stake here. In larger terms, this was a matter of human rights and freedom of conscience. His body and head were left lying in the public square as a warning to others. At nightfall, Lakhi Shah Lubhana smuggled his headless body, hid it in his bullock cart and rushed home with it. Open cremation would have looked suspicious to the rulers, so he set fire to his house with the Guru's body in it. Gurdwara *Rakabganj* now marks the spot. The head was similarly lifted by Bhai Jaita who secretly carried it to Anandpur where the new Guru, Gobind, cremated his father's head on 16 November 1675 and honoured Jaita.

Thus did the seeds of speaking truth to power planted by Guru Nanak take root, mature and bloom into open rebellion against religious intolerance and despotic governments of the day.

Nearly five centuries later, Guru Tegh Bahadur continues to be remembered all over India as '*Hind di Chadar*' or protector of dharma and the weak.

Guru Tegh Bahadur's contribution to Guru Granth is focussed and was likely entered into it by Guru Gobind Singh. He wrote 59 Shabds in 15 Raagas and 57 shlokas; Guru Tegh Bahadur is the only Guru to have composed shabds in Raaga *Jaijanti*.

Guru Tegh Bahadur's writings remind one of the stoic attitudes to life on how to deal with the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune. When I see the stoic view of life based on what they term as "natural law" and their idea of Cosmopolis or universal city leading to the concept of the brotherhood of man, to my mind come parallel and equivalent ideas in Sikh thought of *Hukum* and *Be-gham pura*.

Two citations from the Guru Granth (page 1427) provide an essence of his views on a productive, meaningful life (translations in English are modified after Trilochan Singh et al):

The first citation:

*Sukh dukh jeh parsai nahi, lobh moh abhiman;
Kaho Nanak sun reh mana, so moorat Bhagwan.*

Not cast down by sorrow, nor over-elated in joy;
Aloof from pride, greed and coveting.
Such a man says Nanak; is the image of God.

Second citation:

*Bhai kahu ko det nahi, nahi bhai maanat aan;
Kaho Nanak sun reh manaa, gyani tahay bakhaan*

He who frightens none, nor himself fears any:
Such a man, says Nanak, set him among the wise.

Several essays by erudite scholars in the rich and variegated life of Guru Tegh Bahadur follow in this Issue. He shows us how to lead a life of service, dedicated to the common good while living fearlessly and honestly a life that sheds its fragrance even today, more than 300 years later.

I. S. Singh

Guru Tegh Bahadur: Epitome of Forgiveness and Fearlessness

Guru Tegh Bahadur, ninth Guru of the Sikhs, was born at Amritsar on 1 April 1621. As his name suggests, he was skilled in the art of wielding the sword and was brave in doing his duty. In fact, he was a multi-faceted personality and commanded great respect, even during his time, not only among the Sikhs, but also among the people of other communities and religions. To them he was a source of great courage, determination and strength on whom they could depend in the hour of crises. The great Guru was indeed a man of very high stature, whom believers of all faiths and creeds approached for advice and refuge.

While some scholars have studied his life in detail and described him as a symbol of peace, friend of the oppressed, defender of religion, unparalleled martyr, *Hind di chadar*, and others, some have examined the various aspects of his philosophy of life reflected in his auspicious poetry. This article aims at studying only two prominent traits of his character, that is readiness to forgive others and fearlessness in thought and action. Thus, it would be relevant to have a close look at his family environment and the contemporary situation which must have contributed a great deal in shaping his personality and thought.

Family Environment

His father was Guru Hargobind, sixth Guru of the Sikhs, whose *miri-piri* gospel must have had a deep influence on the young Tegh Bahadur's impressionable mind. The parents could read his forehead correctly and gave him a befitting name Tegh Bahadur indicative of strength, courage and fearlessness. While still a boy of tender age, he participated in one of the four battles fought by his father and displayed great courage and bravery. His elder brother, Baba Gurditta, was a renowned warrior, who had killed Osman Khan in this very battle, with his arrow. Like Guru Nanak, the ninth Guru had the courage to express what was true. The impact of the personality of the peaceloving Guru Arjan Dev could be easily perceived in him. He had also seen his father Guru Hargobind in action and the ungrateful Painde Khan was killed before his eyes. At the age of eleven, he was married to (Mata) Gujri, daughter of Lal Chand, Khatri by caste and their only

child, Gobind Singh, was born many years after their marriage.

After the death of Guru Hargobind, Gurgadi was given to Shri Hari Rai and Tegh Bahadur went to Baba Bakala in Amritsar where he did *bhagti* for 21 long years in an underground mansion. Guru Hari Krishan died on 30 March 1664 without naming the heir to the Gurgadi and indicated only the place, Baba Bakala, where the next Guru lived. This caused a good deal of confusion because many aspirants started staking their claim to the Gurgadi. Finally because of the efforts and wisdom of Makhan Shah Lubana, inhabitant of Jehlam, the real Guru was discovered and Baba Gurditta, grandson of Baba Buddha, formally declared Guru Tegh Bahadur as the ninth Guru of the Sikhs by applying *tilak* on his forehead on 20 March 1665.

Contemporary Situation

Aurangzeb took control of the Mughal administration in 1658, just six years before Tegh Bahadur became the Guru. He was a Sunni Muslim with strong prejudices and was despicably cruel at heart. So as to achieve power, he treated his father and brothers cruelly and did not even spare his sons. He punished Shia Muslims and Sufis alike. In his book *Life of Guru Tegh Bahadur*, Macauliffe writes, "Aurangzeb kept his father Shah Jahan in jail for many years where he died of thirst. He also had his three elder brothers Dara Shikoh, Murad and Shujah, killed. He ill-treated his eldest son Mauzim and again Bahadur Shah and turned his wife out of the house, all naked." In order to win sympathy of the Muslims, Aurangzeb let loose a reign of terror in which Hindus became the worst victims. He committed many excesses against the Hindus and was in fact crueler than his father Shah Jahan in his treatment of non-Muslims. Soon after capturing power, he took a vow for establishment of an Islamic Empire. Dr SS Bal, a well-known historian, writes, "Aurangzeb had come to the throne as the champion of Sunni orthodoxy in the Empire. He had earned the reputation of being a fit representative of that sect even as a prince. In 1645, soon after his appointment to the Governorship of Gujarat, he had not only converted the temple of Chintamani into a mosque but as if that was not enough, also had a cow



Sri Guru Teg Bahadur
Painting by Sobha Singh, 1975.

slaughtered in the temple precincts. He continued demolishing temples throughout his governorship in the Deccan, in the belief that he was fulfilling a divine duty enjoined upon every true Muslim." He issued proclamations from time to time against the Hindu religion pertaining to dismissing the royal astrologers, compulsory usage of the expression "salaam alekam" instead of "namaste" for greeting, demolishing historic temples at Banaras, Mathura, Jodhpur, Udaipur, Jaipur, Golkunda, etc., imposing jazia and travel tax upon the Hindus, depriving Hindus of jobs in the revenue department, disallowing Hindus to become Heads of Departments in which Muslims worked, stopping the cremation of Hindus on the banks of the river Sabarmati, prohibiting Hindus from riding Turkish horses and elephants, discouraging non-Muslims from keeping weapons at home, and so on. All this led to despair and helplessness among the Hindus. Many Hindus embraced Islam out of fear or greed and those who crossed over to Islam were given many favours or facilities.

Forgiveness

Such were the circumstances under which Tegh Bahadur became the religious Head of the Sikhs. He had to face a lot of opposition at the time of becoming the Guru. Since Guru Hari Krishan could not specify the next Guru, a number of Sodhis including Guru Tegh Bahadur's cousin, Dhir Mal, were anxious to get the Gurgadi. Dhir Mal could not accept the Guruship of Tegh Bahadur and out of jealousy attacked him with the help of a Masand named Sihan. They shot at the Guru but he had a providential escape. Later his men looted the goods belonging to Tegh Bahadur but the Guru remained calm. However, his disciples could not tolerate the assault on their Master and in turn ransacked Dhir Mal's house taking away his goods as well as the unique Adi Granth Sahib. Sihan was brought in shackles to the Guru. But Guru Tegh Bahadur did not like this at all, returned the goods to Dhir Mal and forgave his attacker Sihan and released him. Even the copy of the Adi Granth Sahib was returned to Dhir Mal. The Guru was highly tolerant and forgiving in dealing even with his enemies.

Another instance of Guru's forgiving nature was when he visited Harmandir Sahib at Amritsar. The selfish and pro-government worshippers shut the doors of Darbar Sahib. Since the departure of Guru Hargobind from Amritsar in 1630, these men were looting the money offered there during worship. They were afraid lest the Guru should stay on there depriving them of their ill-taken livelihood. When the doors of Darbar Sahib were closed, his feelings must have been most hurt but he neither protested

nor uttered anything derogatory and came back after having offered his obeisance from outside. These are two examples to show to what extent the Guru could forgive his opponents and adversaries.

Fearless of the Faith

Aurangzeb especially selected Kashmir as focus for the conversion of Hindus to Islam. Sher Afghan, the governor of Kashmir, almost daily put a number of Hindus to death for not changing their religion. Brahmins of Kashmir were terribly scared with these daily murders and went at first to Amarnath temple for prayers and later approached Guru Tegh Bahadur at Anandpur Sahib for protection. The Guru was a supporter of freedom of religion and was ready to make any sacrifice for stopping oppression and cruelty. The proposal which he made to these Brahmins reflects his intelligence and fearless mind. He suggested them to tell Aurangzeb that if he could convert Tegh Bahadur into Islam, they too would embrace Islam as their religion. Aurangzeb accepted this proposal gladly and sent for the Guru.

In 1674, the Guru left Anandpur Sahib and started moving towards Agra. On the way, he met a large number of people and preached them lofty principles of life. Having reached Agra, the Guru offered himself for arrest. The Guru was asked to change his religion and many temptations were offered to him. When he declined everything, his three Sikhs, accompanying him, Divan Mati Dass, Bhai Dial Dass and Bhai Sati Dass, were boiled, one by one, in hot water and were cut into pieces before the Guru. But he remained firm and peaceful. On 11 November 1675, Guru Tegh Bahadur was beheaded at Delhi by Jalal Din of Samana by the orders of Aurangzeb.

Martyrdom of the peaceful and fearless Guru brought about a new turn in the history of India. After peaceful means failed, Guru Gobind Singh established the Khalsa Panth, to fight against oppression and to protect the innocent. The ninth Guru's sacrifice made the Sikhs fearless and they were consequently ready to give up everything for the cause of the weak and the down trodden.

Professor Puran Singh rightly observed, "The Hymns of Tegh Bahadur were composed to infuse the spirit of fearlessness into disciples, as there were times coming when the Sikhs would be called on to embrace death as a bride." Through his speech and actions, Guru Tegh Bahadur proved that those who fought for noble principles could never be inhibited down by threats, torture and finally death.

Harpreet Kaur Bains

Martyrdom in Sikhism

Martyrdom or *shahadat* is the high tragedy of supreme sacrifice one makes for one's faith and thus bears witness to its truth and to one's own passionate adherence to it. Implicitly, a martyr or *shahid* is one who by courting martyrdom bears witness to the truth of his faith and to his own unswerving commitment and allegiance to it. Implicit in martyrdom is one's willingness to withstand aggression or persecution, and meet death or, short of that, suffer privation for upholding a righteous and noble cause.

The term martyrdom has roots in the Greek word 'martyr' which stands for 'witness'. There was, it seems, no synonym of martyr or martyrdom in any of the Indian languages until Sikh tradition adopted the word 'shahadat', borrowed from Arabic, which also means testimony or affirmation. In India there has been no tradition of martyrdom in pre-Sikh days though the tradition of self-inflicted suffering did exist. The latter was with a view to purifying one's own inner self or to awakening the conscience of the oppressor tyrant. There have been numerous instances of self-destruction by many holy men for the purpose of checking the tyrant from committing evil. In fact, the concept of *satyagrah* used as a political weapon by Mahatma Gandhi during the twentieth century also has its seeds in this background. However, this kind of sacrifice cannot be called martyrdom or shahadat in the true sense of the term: it contains some elements of martyrdom, but lacks the major element of suffering persecution and getting killed at the hands of the tyrant.

During and following the Aryan invasions of India, both the invader and the invaded might have felt that their struggle was for a righteous cause and the truth of that cause they were strongly committed to. However, no specific word exists in pre and post-Aryan ancient India to refer to one who might have died for a cause, for certain values. The pre-Vedic and non-Vedic indigenous faiths, the Jains and the Buddhists, also suffered persecution at places at the

hands of Aryans who believed in the Vedas being revelatory. However, suffering in their case was, self-inflicted to put moral pressure on the oppressor. Ancient Indian history is replete with examples of struggles between good and evil, and in all such struggles, divine intervention must always take place on behalf of the good. This minimised significance of human suffering and sacrifice and giving credit for everything to the Divine. That perhaps explains for the absence of any Indian equivalent for *shahid* or *shahadat*.

II

At the time the Sikh religion originated, there were two prominent religions – Hinduism and Islam – prevalent in India. No doubt, in the pre-Aryan India, there existed an organised religious life based on its own philosophy of life as in the Rig Vedic reference to the *sramanas*. The Aryans soon dominated the Indus Valley civilisation but the acculturation between the two ethnic groups gradually gave birth to a world view dominated by the Vedic tradition. This world view favoured life-negation and world-negation, and religion became devoid of any social context. The divorce from social reality reduced religion to a set of arid beliefs and lifeless rituals. The voice of truth got lost in the din of clashes of the mutually contradictory philosophical doctrines expounded by numerous sects and sub-sects that had emerged. The practice of renunciation resulted in moral degeneration at the individual and social levels. The social structure was horizontally divided into four different caste groups. Sexism existed as a system of marginalisation of women. This sexist discrimination against her became all the worse when she happened to belong to the so-called lower class in society.

The doctrine of life-negation and world-negation brought in its wake moral and ethical bankruptcy in socio-religious and subjugation in political life. The Muslims who came to India as traders in the south soon turned invaders in the north-west and then conquerors and rulers of India. It was Babar who

invaded India in 1526 and caused much death and destruction, unleashing inexpressible atrocities and oppression on the natives. During the Guru-period, Akbar has been the sole exception of being a liberal king. The pendulum swung toward bigotry and intolerance, coercion and oppression during all other regimes. As early as the sultanate period, there was an attempt at the complete imposition of the *shariat* rule and the royal chroniclers tried to give Islamic garb to a politically expedient action. In later years, destruction of places of worship and imposition of the protection tax (*jiziya*) on non-Muslims and the forcible conversion into Islam were common features of the rule even though all this distorted the social structure as envisioned by the prophet. Such oppressive policies resulted in persecution of non-Muslims, creating among masses a sense of discrimination and hatred. Even though the Sufis did make attempts, quite feebly though, at creating an atmosphere of inter-religious tolerance and goodwill, the entry of Islam into India has on the whole been marked by an ugly recurrence of religious intolerance and persecution.

III

Guru Nanak, the founder of the Sikh faith, happened to be an eye-witness to Babar's invasion and the suffering caused in its wake. He protests in his hymns, collectively known as *Babar Vani*, against this uncalled for death and destruction. In another of his hymn, Guru Nanak wants those desirous of treading the path of love to be ever ready to sacrifice their head. Thus, from its very infancy, Sikhism has stood for truth, for righteousness and exhorted its followers to fight against those who subvert the truth. The Sikh scripture, on the whole, articulates the general framework of structure within which the ideal of social transformation is to be realised. It is also nominative in that it serves as the basis of the code of conduct and ethics for the followers. The latter together constitute the Sikh way of life, and one such constituent prescribed is that this world being the dwelling-place of God be transformed into *Sacha Khand*, where the values of equality, love, justice and dignity prevail; the devotees must neither put others to fear nor own to anybody's fear, and they must

not shrink from making the supreme sacrifice in a holy cause. The death of heroic men is holy, should they lay down their lives for a righteous cause, says Guru Nanak. At another place in the scripture, Kabir reiterates the same idea in a little different way as he says:

*gagan damama bajio pario nisane ghao.
khet jo mandio surama ab jujhan ko dau;
sura so pahichaniai ju lare din ke het,
purja purja kati marai kabahu na chhade khetu.*

The hero, entering the field,
Fights on without quailing.
Know that man to be a true hero
Who fights in defence of the defenceless;
Hacked limb by limb, he still flee not the field.

- GGS, Kabir, 1005

Guru Gobind Singh, in one of the concluding verses of his *Chandi Charitra Ukti Bilas*, seeks the divine boon to ever do noble deeds and be able to lay down his life for the sake righteousness:

*deh siva baru mohi ihai subh karman te kabahun na taron,
na daro ari so jab jai laron nischai kari apuni jit karon
ar sikhaho apane hi mana ko ih lalach hau gun tau ucharo,
jab av ki audh nidan banai ati hi ran mai tab jujh maron.*

Lord, Grant me this boon:
Never may I turn back from righteousness;
May I never turn back in fear when facing the foe;
May I ever instruct my mind to chant Thy praises;
And when the end arrives,
May I fall fighting on the field of battle.

To stand up to a righteous cause, to stand up in defence of the hapless and defenceless, to be willing to make even the supreme sacrifice for the sake of a cause held dear by a fellow citizen - all this requires courage and fearlessness. The scripture repeatedly exhorts man to be fearless and give up cowardice.

Thus, in Sikhism, one is required to give up all cowardice, be brave and courageous enough to stand up against all kinds of injustice, oppression and highhandedness. One must be willing to suffer privation and even meet death fighting against these and such other evils, with no personal motive or interest attached to that fight. In fact, true martyrdom,

in Sikhism, lies in the willingness to suffer without flinching. Sikhism prefers non-violent resistance to begin with, but if all peaceful means failed to make the oppressor see reason, the resort to sword is also justified. Guru Nanak and his successors prepared their disciples for this with a view to erecting a social setup where values of equality and love, justice and tolerance, compassion and self-respect prevail.

IV

History provided first such opportunity in the Sikh tradition when Jahangir ascended the throne of Delhi. He succeeded Akbar (1542-1605) who was known for his liberal religious policy and the Sikh chronicles also refer to his amicable relations with the Sikh Gurus. However, Jahangir was not as liberal and tolerant, and he soon got alarmed by the growing influence of Guru Arjan as he wrote in his *Tuzk*:

“So many of the simple-minded Hindus, nay, many foolish Muslims too had been fascinated by the Guru’s ways and teaching. For many years the thought had been presenting itself to my mind that either I should put an end to this false traffic or that he be brought into the fold of Islam”.

He goes on to add that

“I fully knew of his heresies, and I ordered that he should be brought into my presence, that his property be confiscated and that he should be put to death with torture”.

Sikhism, the youngest of the major religions of the world, tends to accept the plurality of faiths, acknowledges the validity of all of them, and rejects the claim of monopoly over truth by any particular religion. It states quite unequivocally that revelation is not religion-specific, region-specific or person-specific. It stands for the freedom of man to practice the faith of his choice. This ideology of the Sikh Gurus was contrary to that of religious intolerance and persecution followed by Jahangir and later on by his successor Aurangzeb.

Clearly, this was the time for Guru Arjan (1563-1606) to bear witness to the truth of his faith and to his own unswerving commitment and allegiance to it. Guru Arjan stood for the religious freedom of man and refused to renounce his faith. He willingly

offered himself to suffer any privation and even meet death for upholding his principles. As a contemporary Christian missionary records, this ‘good Pope’ “died, overwhelmed by the sufferings, torments, dishonours” heaped on him by a fanatic ruler. Thus, Guru Arjan became the first martyr of the Sikh faith.

When Guru Tegh Bahadur (1621-1675) assumed the spiritual leadership of the Sikh faith in 1664, India was ruled by Emperor Aurangzeb. A pious man in his personal life, Aurangzeb was an orthodox Muslim who had waded through a river of blood to reach the throne: he had to imprison his father and kill his brothers to get the crown. He followed a fanatical religious policy to appease and please the Muslim orthodoxy. He decreed “to destroy with a willing hand the schools and temples of the infidels and put an entire stop to their religious practices and teachings” (1669) and imposed *jizya*, a tax, non-Muslim population had to pay for permission to live in an Islamic State (1679). There were many more such edicts which aimed at humiliating the non-Muslims. Though Aurangzeb had nothing personal against Guru Tegh Bahadur, yet both of them stood clearly for ideals in stark opposition to each other. Guru Tegh Bahadur could not bear the persecution of others and he seems to have made up his mind to resist the Emperor’s policy of religious persecution and even to lay down his life to redeem the freedom of belief.

The decisive moment came in 1675 when some Kashmiri *pandits* waited upon the Guru at Anandpur. They had come to the Guru to complain against Iftikhar Khan, Aurangzeb’s satrap in Kashmir, who was making en masse conversions to Islam through use of force. The Guru listened to their woes and resolved to take upon himself the onus of defending their right to religious practice and belief. He advised them to tell the authority in Delhi that if the Guru was converted, they would all voluntarily accept Islam.

Resolved to challenge the royal policy of religious exclusivism and intolerance, the Guru of his own set out for Delhi. Although the Guru was himself heading to Delhi, the authorities arrested him on the way, put him in chains and brought him to Delhi. His refusal to renounce his faith resulted in his public execution

in Chandni Chowk on 11 November 1675. However, before beheading him, three of his devoted followers were also tortured to death before his eyes.

Thus, Guru Tegh Bahadur took up cudgels on behalf of the hapless Hindus on his own; it was more for redeeming freedom of faith for people irrespective of the religious tradition they belonged to. In Indian history and folklore, he has always been remembered as the protector of Hindu faith - a unique example of its kind in the history of mankind. Interestingly, there are several Sikh scriptural hymns criticising *janju* and *tilak* which the Brahmanical class had begun to consider an end in themselves, thus giving precedence to form over the spirit of religion, but the Guru stood for freedom of belief and practice for everyone. The religious history of mankind provides no second example of a spiritual leader laying down his life for the people belonging to a religious tradition other than his own. Second, the Sikh Gurus had nothing against Islam as such, and the Sikh scripture unequivocally states that the scriptures of neither the Indian nor Semitic religions can be called false, rather false are those who do not reflect on them. Had the contemporary political situation in India been the other way round, Guru Tegh Bahadur would surely have made the same sacrifice for the sake of Muslims.

The resolution by the Guru to court martyrdom was deliberate and conscious, and the authorities intervened only after he took up the challenge to undo both the evil as evil and the suffering of evil as such: the authorities felt his teachings were strengthening among people the resolve, the determination to suffer hardship and even death rather than give up their faith under coercion. It was a peculiar situation of self-prompted and meaningful suffering for the sake of others but to uphold a cherished ideal. The Guru remained in perfect poise throughout his resolve, and his spiritual state reflecting full faith in God's will can well be imagined from a close reading of the *slokas* he is believed to have composed during the days of his captivity in Delhi. The followers who had accompanied the Guru to Delhi retained their unflinching faith in the Guru and his ideals till they were put to cruel death before the Guru's own eyes.

This was like a true martyr who must meet his end in perfect poise. Interestingly, even the New Testament (John 12) while referring to Jesus' mental state on the eve of his crucifixion says that his heart felt "troubled" and Jesus himself calls it "an hour of suffering."

Thus, Guru Tegh Bahadur and his disciples who courted death along with him became the next martyrs of the Sikh faith. No doubt, the sacrifice made by Guru Tegh Bahadur is without any parallels in human history. Guru Gobind Singh, his son and spiritual successor, in his autobiographical *Bachitra Natak* (V: 14-16), also testifies to it as he refers to the martyrdom of the Guru as an act unparalleled in history:

Their *tilak* and *janju* the Lord saved;
Great deed the Guru performed in the *kaliyuga*;

... ..

For *dharma's* sake he performed this deed;
He gave away his head, but not his resolve;

... ..

Breaking the potsherd of body at Delhi king's head,
Left he for the Realm Celestial;
None else performed the kind of deed
As did Guru Tegh Bahadur.

Guru Gobind Singh, members of his family and numerous of his Sikhs underwent much suffering and privation in their fight against the bigotry of the Mughal government and the fanatical Rajput hill chiefs. Two of his younger sons preferred death to making compromises with the truth of their faith. Their passionate adherence to it even at such a young age makes their martyrdom all the more significant. Soon thereafter, the elder two sons of the Guru laid down their lives fighting against the Mughal hordes at Chamkaur. Like their father and younger brothers, they preferred death to compromising with bigotry and intolerance. The Sikh history thereafter has a long tradition of martyrdom - Sikhs suffered privation and even met death, but remained committed to the truth of their faith, to the values their Gurus stood for.

Dharam Singh

[Re-printed from Nishaan Issue I/2005]

New Light on Guru Tegh Bahadur's Martyrdom



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

There were many Rajput Kshatriyas and scholarly Brahmin families who served as highly competent administrators either in Mughal courts or other Indian states. Those who came into contact with the Sikh Gurus, soon became very devout and dedicated disciples, whose sacrifices and role as leaders of the

Sikh peoples are well known in Sikh history. Bhai Mani Singh and Bhai Mati Das and their children and grand children played conspicuous roles as leaders in the Guru's durbar. Most of them suffered martyrdom for the Sikh Faith. We now have considerable material on these families in early Sikh history.

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

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

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

Prahlad Shah and Moti Shah

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

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

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

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

Mehtab Rai (Mahan Singh)

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

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

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

After sometime Mehtab Rai returned to his fief but soon received orders from Aurangzeb to muster forces and help the Lahore army attack the unruly Ghakhar tribes. The leaders of this tribe were friends of Mehtab Rai, he did not wish that they should be attacked by the Mughal army. So he started negotiations and reached an agreement with them. Aurangzeb was at first disturbed but when he received the details of settlement he was immensely pleased. He asked Mehtab Rai to remain in the Delhi Court where he then served as a highly respected Noble. Mehtab Rai was married

to Kulwanti, daughter of Dilbag Rai of Lahore, who was also known as a good Persian scholar. Kulwanti was a very wise, enlightened and courageous young lady who was quite intimate with the Begams of the Mughal Court.

Guru Tegh Bahadur Imprisoned

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

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

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

Guru Tegh Bahadur disdains miracles

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

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

When Aurangzeb gave the only choice between death or showing *karamat* (miracle) the Sikhs and non-Sikh devotees of Guru Tegh Bahadur were shocked and seriously upset. There was revolutionary fervour. Guru Tegh Bahadur also

learnt about such tense atmosphere and feared that if there was a public protest Aurangzeb would give orders to kill the protesters and burn their houses. About such a situation Mehtab Shah writes in his diary.

“Aurangzeb saw that anger and passionate fury was raging in the minds of the people (Sikhs and non-Sikhs). Raging bitterness was spreading. He feared an uprising and trouble. Guru Tegh Bahadur also felt that his devotees were restless and seriously disturbed, may well express their fury leading to loss of life and damage to property.”

The execution and aftermath

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

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

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

appointed Viceroy of Punjab, he convinced Emperor Aurangzeb that the Shivalik Hill Chiefs were actually mischief mongers: from 1696 to 1699 there was peace and amity in this region which pleased Aurangzeb who was then camped in the South.

Mehtab Rai meets Guru Gobind Singh

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

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

Mehtab Rai in Khalsa Appearance

When Mehtab Rai returned to Delhi everyone was struck by his changed life. He was now a *Munsif* (Judge), attended the court and performed all his duties with greater energy and utmost sincerity. He lived and moved about in the court in his distinctly changed avatar of Khalsa appearance and dress. He stopped attending services in Hindu *mandirs*, stopped performing Hindu ceremonies, gave up idol worship and all that goes with it.

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

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

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

Those who considered Guru Gobind Singh an opponent of the Mughal Empire had by now reported the matter even to Aurangzeb, who asked the Prime Minister to make enquiries and send a factual report. Kulwanti said to her husband, "There is nothing against you so far as official duties are concerned. Everyone praises your honesty and integrity. You are brave, truthful and have such a spirit of sacrifice, you should be proud of being a disciple of Guru Gobind Singh. If

necessary, sacrifice everything to keep your faith. What are wealth and position? The grace and blessings of God and the great Guru is all we need. What harm can come to you if the grace of God is with you. "*Parmatma ki kirpa ho to aap ka kya bigad sakta hain.*"

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

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

Mahan Singh promptly replied, "Guru Gobind Singh and his Sikhs do not believe in any god or goddess, besides the One Absolute Lord; his Sikhs make all offerings in the name of the Guru." The story spread by some Hindus about Guru Gobind Singh being a worshipper of Chandi was absolutely false. Who could know better about that than Mahan Singh who had received Khalsa baptism and its *Rehat Maryada* (code of conduct) from Guru Gobind Singh and who daily recited *Akal Ustat* in his daily prayers (*nitnem*)?

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

give up everything if they can win love of the Guru and seek only his grace’.

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

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

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

Mahan Singh then said with stirring firmness, “It is my duty to obey the Emperor so far as my professional duties are concerned. It is my duty as a Munsif (judge) to safeguard equity and justice (*adal aur insaf*). But for the sake of services of the government I will never tell a lie about religion and faith. I will not stab my own conscience and do anything to harm it (*mulazmat ki khatr jhuth nahi bolun ga aur apne zamir ka khun nahi karun ga*).” I will under no circumstances deny my love and devotion to Guru Gobind Singh and I will never deprive myself of true friendship with this enlightened Apostle of God and a true Friend of God and the people, even if I have to sacrifice my head for

it. My wealth, my ancestral property, my body, I am prepared to offer for the Emperor and the country. All this you can take away, spend all this for improving the lot of my country. I shall not mind. But I will not stand for injustice where to be just is my duty. I will never be shaken by lies and falsehood”.

And then in a deeply moving tone Mahan Singh said, “Guru Gobind Singh is my life and soul (*Gobind Singh mere pran hai*). Gobind Singh is my Faith and Religion. Gobind Singh is the Life of my life. Gobind Singh is my pir and refuge, I have taken asylum at his feet. I shall never deny him. Never, never. Never expect this from me Nawab Sahib”.

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

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

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

Dr. Trilochan Singh

“Hind ki Chaddar”

The Guru Tegh Bahadur Memorial



An architectural marvel, the Guru Tegh Bahadur Memorial, gives an insight into the life and teachings of the ninth Master, Guru Tegh Bahadur, also known as ‘Hind ki Chaddar’ who was martyred in 1675, upholding the rights of all humans and freedom of belief.

On 29 July 2011, a large number of people thronged the memorial when Congress general secretary and member of parliament, Rahul Gandhi, dedicated it to the nation. Lavishing praise on the Sikhs, Rahul Gandhi said Sikhs have made the entire nation proud.

Constructed along the National Highway 1 (Grand Trunk Road) near the Singhu Border of Haryana-Delhi, by Delhi Tourism and Transportation Development Corporation

(DTTDC), the memorial is unique for its architecture, design and world-class illumination.

“It has a unique concept. The central pylon represents Guru Tegh Bahadur while the three semi-arches represent his three disciples. Ten monoliths around it represents ten Sikh Gurus and disseminate their teachings,” stated Chief Minister Sheila Dikshit.

The 24-metre tall central pylon, which is of steel fabrication, along with its three 15-metre tall semi-arches and 11 to 18-metres tall 10 monoliths and the unique lighting, is visible even from a distance of 3 kilometres. The monoliths are inscribed with fundamental tenets of Sikhism translated in four languages - Hindi, English, Punjabi and Urdu. Constructed in an area of 11.87 acre, the project has cost Rs 25.75 crore.



**GURU TEGH BAHADUR
MEMORIAL**

SUPREME SACRIFICE

Martyrdom of Guru Tegh Bahadur

DEDICATION

MALKIAT SINGH HAS ONCE AGAIN DISPLAYED HIS INIMITABLE SPIRIT AND PASSION FOR MEANINGFUL PHOTOGRAPHY AND DEDICATION THROUGH THIS BREATHTAKING PHOTO FEATURE IN REVERENCE TO THE SACRED MEMORY OF GURU TEGH BAHADUR.

THROUGH LONG NIGHTS AND RAINY DELUGES, HE HAS CAPTURED INTENSITY OF THE MOMENT THROUGH THE LENS OF HIS CAMERA, OFFERING NISHAAN READERS AN UNUSUAL INSIGHT INTO THE HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL SIGNIFICANCE OF GURU JI'S SACRIFICE ALONG WITH THOSE OF HIS CLOSEST COMPANIONS. THE APT USAGE OF CRIMSON AND OCHRE IN THE PHOTOS DEPICTING THE PLACES OF GURU JI'S EXECUTION AND CREMATION, ARE VISUALLY STUNNING.

PUSHPINDAR SINGH

EXECUTIVE EDITOR

**GURDWARA
SIS GANJ SAHIB**



**GURDWARA
RAKAB GANJ SAHIB**



DELHI

MAP NOT IN SCALE

H A R Y A N A

DELHI
HARYANA
BORDER

Y
A
M
U
N
A
R
I
V
E
R

OLD DELHI

N E W D E L H I

PARLIAMENT HOUSE





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

GURDWARA SIS GANJ SAHIB
[DELHI]



SUPREME

SACRIFICE

Martyrdom of Guru Tegh Bahadur

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

PHOTO STORY
MALKIAT SINGH

SUPREME
SACRIFICE

Martyrdom of
Guru Tegh Bahadur



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



SUPREME SACRIFICE

Martyrdom of
Guru Tegh Bahadur

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

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



WALL PAINTING

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

ANANDPUR SAHIB [PUNJAB]



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

GURDWARA SIS GANJ SAHIB [DELHI]



SUPREME SACRIFICE

Martyrdom of
Guru Tegh Bahadur



PAINTING OF GURU TEGH BAHADUR

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

GURDWARA SIS GANJ SAHIB
[DELHI]

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

GURDWARA SIS GANJ SAHIB
[DELHI]

ACCORDING TO CONTEMPORARY WRITERS, AURANGZEB REACHED DELHI SOMETIME IN MID-1675. GURU TEGH BAHADUR WENT TO AGRA WHERE HE COURTED ARREST AND WAS THEN BROUGHT TO DELHI. AURANGZEB FAILED TO CONVINCe GURU TEGH BAHADUR THAT IDOLATORS SHOULD BE PHYSICALLY ELIMINATED BY THE RULING POLITICAL POWER. ALTHOUGH GURU TEGH BAHADUR HIMSELF PREACHED AGAINST IDOLATORY AND BRAHMANISM, HE REFUSED TO ACCEPT THAT FORCIBLE CONVERSION IN ANY FORM WAS LEGALLY, MORALLY OR SPIRITUALLY JUSTIFIED. HE CONSIDERED FORCIBLE CONVERSION AS AGAINST BASIC MORAL VALUES WHICH SUPERIOR RELIGIONS PREACH. GURU TEGH BAHADUR ALSO REFUSED TO PERFORM ANY 'MIRACLES' TO SAVE HIS OWN LIFE BECAUSE ANY DISPLAY OF OCCULT POWERS WAS CONSIDERED UNWORTHY OF TRUE SAINTS AND THE PROPHETS OF GOD.



BAOLI SAHIB

THE HISTORIC WELL WHERE GURU TEGH BAHADUR TOOK HIS FINAL BATH JUST BEFORE HIS EXECUTION. NOTE SYMBOLIC OFFERING OF AMRIT BY A SEWADAR TO THE GIRL CHILD.

GURDWARA SIS GANJ SAHIB [DELHI]



AURANGZEB FIRST ORDERED THAT GURU TEGH BAHADUR'S CLOSE APOSTLES AND COMPANIONS IN PRISON BE TORTURED TO DEATH: BHAJ DAYAL DAS WAS THROWN INTO A BOILING CAULDRON, BHAJ MATI DAS WAS SAWN ACROSS FROM HEAD TO LOINS AND BHAJ SATI DAS WAS BURNT ALIVE AT THE STAKE. THE SCENE OF THE HEROIC MARTYRDOM OF HIS DISCIPLES DID NOT DISRUPT GURU TEGH BAHADUR'S TRANQUILITY. FINALLY, THE GURU WAS BEHEADED UNDER A TREE IN THE PRESENCE OF A HUGE CROWD OF HIS FOLLOWERS ON THE FATEFUL THURSDAY OF 11 NOVEMBER 1675 AD.

THE TREE TRUNK IS STILL PRESERVED IN SIS GANJ SAHIB GURDWARA SINCE THEN AND AROUND THE PLACE OF THE GURU'S MARTYRDOM, EMERGED THE TEMPLE, KNOWN AS GURDWARA SIS GANJ SAHIB. A SUITABLE MEMORIAL COMMEMORATING THE MARTYRDOM OF BHAJ MATI DAS AND HIS COMPANIONS HAS ALSO BEEN BUILT IN CHANDNI CHOWK.

SUPREME
SACRIFICE

Martyrdom of
Guru Tegh Bahadur



BHAI MATI DAS CHOWK,

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

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



SUPREME
SACRIFICE

Martyrdom of
Guru Tegh Bahadur



GURDWARA

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



SUPREME SACRIFICE

Martyrdom of
Guru Tegh Bahadur



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



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

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

GURDWARA RAKAB GANJ SAHIB [NEW DELHI]



**SUPREME
SACRIFICE**

Martyrdom of
Guru Tegh Bahadur



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

GURDWARA
RAKAB GANJ SAHIB
[NEW DELHI]

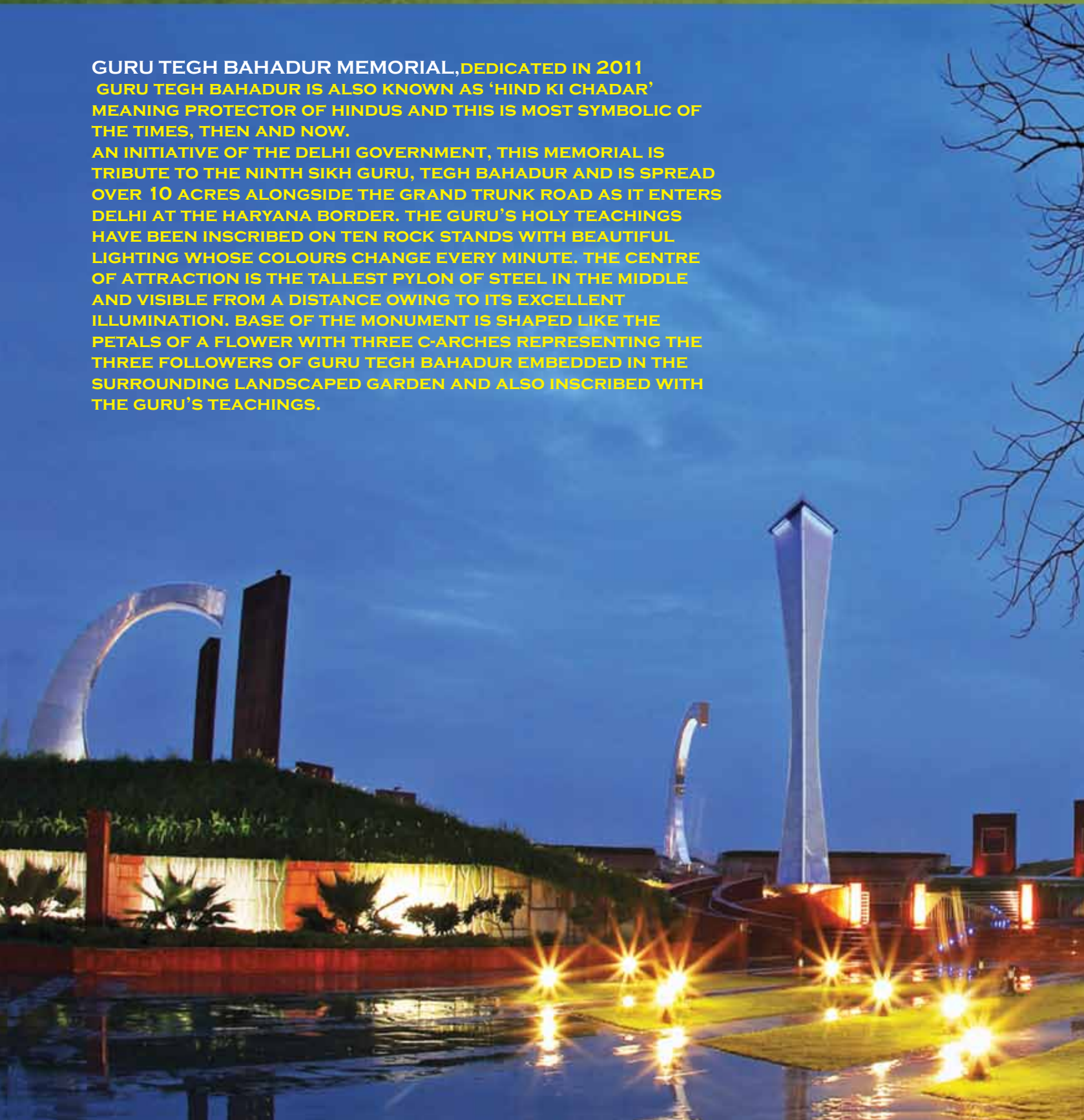


**SUPREME
SACRIFICE**

Martyrdom of
Guru Tegh Bahadur

**GURU TEGH BAHADUR MEMORIAL, DEDICATED IN 2011
GURU TEGH BAHADUR IS ALSO KNOWN AS 'HIND KI CHADAR'
MEANING PROTECTOR OF HINDUS AND THIS IS MOST SYMBOLIC OF
THE TIMES, THEN AND NOW.**

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



GURU TEGH BAHADUR MEMORIAL
GT ROAD, DELHI HARYANA BORDER.

[DELHI]



The Immortal



City: Amritsar





Just like its butter-laden delicacies served with warmth, the disarming geniality of Amritsar makes it truly memorable

We come home to India from the US every few years and each time my emotional response to the changes we encounter comes as a surprise. The roads, the tall buildings, the prosperity, all are a welcome change, but the dust, the congestion on the roads and the blaring of car and scooter-rickshaw horns at all hours of the day and night, make me nostalgic for the quieter days of my childhood.

Unlike our previous visits during the last 35 years, this time there was no wedding to attend nor a reunion of family or friends in mind. At the end of a tour of the various cities of Punjab, I realise that every city we visited was a lovely experience, but the visit to Amritsar was truly different. I'm partial to the place anyway, as it is still 'home' for me. I was born and raised there. My family had to relocate from Okara in Pakistan to Amritsar in India in 1947 and they lived the aftermath of the Partition.

Surprisingly, my initial reaction upon seeing the holy city of the Golden Temple after a couple of years was, to put it mildly, overwhelming. In spite of the nostalgia, the reality of the ever-increasing population, chaotic roads and the escalating noise and air pollution hit me hard visually, emotionally and even physically.

But soon, the warmth of the people and the sacredness of the place once again calmed and comforted me.

On the first morning, my sister, my husband and I planned a visit to Harmandir Sahib, or the Golden Temple as it is universally known, around dawn in order to avoid the cacophonous symphony of city noises that had stunned us the previous day. As we stepped through the main gateway with covered heads and bare feet, it seemed as if we had entered into another world – a safer, more tranquil world.

Upon stepping down to the marble holy premises, years of trained reflexes made us sink to our knees in reverence, like everyone else around us did, as well. After a few moments in quiet prayer and thanksgiving, we sat on the marble platform surrounding the pool, to savour the serenity offered by the resounding recitation of hymns from the Sikh scriptures.

As the first rays of the morning sun crawled up the spires of gold, the reflection of the sacred structure shimmered golden in the blue waters of the holy pool surrounding it. Before the temperatures again became unbearable, we made a slow, clockwise way around the marble platform and entered the causeway to the inner sanctum and the holiest of the holy space for me.

This first visit was in sharp contrast to the second one, which we repeated on the third day with a dear



Langar at the Golden Temple.

friend from Gurgaon. This time, it was Gurburab, the holy day for Sikhs, and it was almost noon when we reached Harmandir Sahib. The heat and the sheer number of pilgrims made it difficult to garner even a semblance of being at peace.

Visiting the inner sanctum seemed impossible, as even the ritual of walking the platform that surrounded the pool took hours of inching slowly toward the causeway, where a mass of pilgrims moved imperceptibly at the pace of the earth moving around the sun. We left reluctantly, without visiting the holy sanctuary inside.

There are four entrances to this gold and white marble gurdwara, signifying that this house of worship is open to all religions and faiths. Anyone who has a need to pay homage to the Supreme Being is welcome to pray inside the Gurdwara. No exceptions. Free food is offered to the pilgrims. Volunteers feed 3,000 people at a time at each sitting. The shifts for *langar* or community dining are run continuously throughout the day, every day, for always.

Besides the Golden Temple, Amritsar is known for its Punjabi cuisine. The Punjabis are known to eat wholesome, butter-enriched food. Several eateries in the inner city are still as popular for their Punjabi food as they were during our parents and grandparents'



One of the famous Dhabas of Amritsar.

times. *Bharavan da Dhaba* and *Kesar da Dhaba* among several others are still very popular eating places. Upon our friend's insistence, we visited these for *sarson ka saag*. But for her, we would have missed an opportunity for a gastronomic delight for our Punjabi palates.

Butter in daal and *sarson ka saag* is a common treat in Amritsar, but what I noticed for the first time was loads of butter served on the *channa-bhaturas*, too. Everything seems to taste better when it swims in butter if one ignores cholesterol. Here, if someone hesitates to eat butter because of health consequences, the hosts steamroll all objections away. "Even grandma can digest this much butter without any harm!" or



Pony-drawn, well laden cart on Amritsar's wide streets.



The iconic Khalsa College building on the Grand Trunk Road.

“Mother can eat roti without daal or vegetables, but not without a big glob of butter!” is the common refrain.

Once when I was afflicted with cancer, the doctor asked me to reduce my fat intake. “Doctor, I grew up in Amritsar, meaning I grew up eating food drowned in butter! So whatever damage butter could do has already been done.” He laughed and patted my hand. “Just keep eating healthy,” he said. I hardly take any butter these days, but often wonder if recovering from cancer had anything to do with globs and globs of homemade butter that I had eaten as a child!

I did not get a chance to see Jallianwala Bagh this time, but it’s a historic place that is a must-see for all travellers. It was at Jallianwala Bagh near the Golden Temple, that British soldiers massacred hundreds of pilgrims, en route to the gurdwara for a religious festival. This ruthlessness committed by General Dyer’s troops galvanised Mahatma Gandhi’s civil disobedience movement in 1919. The bullet holes that still mark the walls around the gardens give testimony to the trauma to the Punjabi psyche that began with the Jallianwala



The Attari-Wagah border on the historic G.T. Road

Bagh massacre and continued through and beyond the partitioning of Punjab in 1947.

One day we went to see the Attari-Wagah border between the two Punjabs – one in India and the other in Pakistan. These border evening ceremonies are interesting and worth braving the traffic and confusion of the roads. As one journalist from the West put it, the ceremony “must be one of the oddest regularly scheduled events on earth”!

Once we reached the border, we were shepherded to a secure area to witness the ‘chnaging of the guard’. Young men waving Indian flags and gun-toting soldiers scanning the grounds below waited for the ceremony to start. Suddenly pop music erupted over loudspeakers and a couple of bystanders walked up to dance a spontaneous jig or two. The Wagah border came into existence at the time of India’s partition into two countries – India and Pakistan – in 1947, when with one stroke of the imperial pen, the British split Punjab, the cradle of the 4000-year-old Indus valley civilisation, into two.

As the music hushed, a mullah’s call of ‘*Allah ho Akbar*’ came over a loud speaker from across the border. Through the ornate gates, one could see the Pakistani side of the border. Tall and handsome troops from the Indian Border Security Force marched into the centre wearing traditional red and gold turbans with starched coxcombs. They marched to the marked line of the border, stopped, turned and marched again giving little shouts, to the loud cheers of spectators.

On the opposite side, equally handsome Pakistan Rangers dressed in black followed a similar pattern, stomping their feet and marching to face the Indian soldiers. After about 10-15 minutes of this elaborate pageantry, one lead soldier from each country saluted his counterpart, and after a quick handshake, retreated. The flags of the two countries were lowered simultaneously and the gates shut for the night.

The show was over and we arose to go home, smiling. The experience seemed worth all the trouble. For me, the Wagah border is especially meaningful. If you are planning a visit to Punjab in your travels, be sure to include Amritsar in your itinerary with the Golden Temple, great food and a border ritual that you will not forget!

Neena Kahlon
(Courtesy Swagat)



Architectural marvels of Sri Harmandar Sahib

An interview with Dr SS Bhatti, former Principal of Chandigarh College of Architecture on the structural concept and the design of Sri Harmandar Sahib at Amritsar.

Kindly trace for us the chronology of events in construction of the Golden Temple - foundation, landmark moments, milestones in building and the inception of Guru Granth Sahib in the Sri Harmandar Sahib.

- Sri Harmandar Sahib was built between 1588 and 1604.
- Excavation for the construction of the Amrit Sarovar began on 6 November 1573 and was completed in 1577.
- The original kucheha pond was turned into a masonry structure in 1584.
- Afghan invader Ahmed Shah Abdali demolished the shrine seven times, the last demolition in 1764.
- It took five years to complete the compilation of the *Adi Granth* and it was installed in Sri Harmandar Sahib (which means *The Adorable Abode of Lord God*), popularly known as the Golden Temple, on 1 September 1604, with Baba Buddha as the first Granthi, or head priest. The foundation of Sri Harmandar Sahib was laid by Hazrat Mian Mir, a Muslim Sufi Saint.
- The story of the Amritsar from its foundation in late-16th century until the establishment of the Sikh Rule (1802-1849) is the story of its foundation and survival. Amritsar is the Vatican City of the Sikh Faith.
- *Kar Seva* [voluntary labour as community service] is a unique feature of the Sikh Faith. The Amrit Sarovar was desilted by Kar Seva in 1923, 1973, and 2004.

Salient Features of Amrit Sarovar

- ❖ The bed of *Amrit Sarovar* being *kuheha*, this is a natural reservoir which contains sulphuric potentialities along the side of the *Dukh Bhanjani Beri* [*Uujube tree*]. The growth of underwater green plants, bacteria and fungi is thus prevented. Other tanks are Ramsar, Bibeksar, Kaulsar and Santokhsar.
- ❖ The material used for lining of the retaining-walls of the tank is claimed to be weed-resistant.
- ❖ Fresh water via the *haansali* (aqueduct) is from the River Ravi and contains minerals and chemicals which provide protection against germs.
- ❖ Varied fish species preserved in the tank consume algae and other micro-organisms and keep its water clean.
- ❖ In the earlier stages of its existence, the tank used to be filled only with rainwater. The tank would dry up during winter and summer if the rainfall was inadequate. The tank became virtually dry in 1783 AD.
- ❖ During the British period, the *haansali* was connected with the Upper Bari Doab canal, but since 1866 water-supply had been taken from a canal from Jethuwal distributory of UBD. This aqueduct was made pucca in 1919.
- ❖ The substructure of the Holy Shrine, as well as the Causeway that connects it with *Darshani Deorhi*, has been built of numerous vaulted-tunnels, with the inner aqueducts being lower than the outer ones. This network of ingeniously-designed tunnels facilitates easy and free flow of the Amrit Sarovar water. The water thrust on the substructure is thus minimised making it considerably more durable.
- ❖ It is hard to figure out how the masons accomplished this task because no research has been done on this aspect so far, but it is nevertheless true that the superstructure of the Holy Shrine is absolutely free from the problem of dampness.

What are the various design styles used in construction of the gurdwara and the main influences from the styles of other religions?

For my third PhD titled "*Sri Harmandar Sahib: A Study of Architecture, Engineering, and Aesthetics*", which I did from the Panjab University in 2008, I

studied Places of Worship of major World Religions spanning over 46 centuries.

- There is only one design style, and that is Sikh Architecture. There are no influences from the styles of other religions. The concept and design of Sri Harmandar Sahib is not a routine architectural creation, neither is it a derivative nor a synthesis of Hindu and Mughal styles of architecture as has hitherto been erroneously believed by various scholars and historians. Sri Harmandar Sahib is a marvel of Sikh Architecture. The source of its concept and design lies in the sacred scripture, the Bani of Guru Nanak Dev, who founded the Sikh Faith as a Religion of Revelation [*Ilhaam*]. The precursor of Sri Harmandar Sahib is *Dharamsaal* [literally, the Resort of Righteousness] that was developed as a community halting-place for pilgrims of the Sikh Faith. Earlier, such structures were called Ramsaals.
- The present design of Sri Harmandar Sahib has been in place since 1764. The causeway and *Darshani Deorhi* [glimpse-catching gateway] were completed in 1776. The greater part of the Holy Shrine's decoration was added in the early years of the nineteenth century as an historic contribution of Maharaja Ranjit Singh who got the shrine copper-gilded. This distinguished feature has made Sri Harmandar Sahib known throughout the world as the 'Golden Temple'. Design of the Holy Shrine has remained by and large unchanged ever since.
- Since Guru Arjan Dev was designing Sri Harmandar Sahib he himself derived the concept of design for the Holy shrine from Gurbani. His is the sole exception, no other Place of Worship in the world had any architect drawn his inspiration from the sacred scripture of the religion he was designing the Place of Worship for. However, there is a cursory mention by Antonio Gaudi, the architect of *Sagrada Familia*, that his design of the stated church in Spain is his humble offering to the Lord God.

I have thus established through an illustrated analysis and the comparative method as Sikh Architecture is an independent historical style of architecture in the same sense as people recognise other architectural styles like Christian, Islamic, Hindu, Buddhist, and others.

Space, Structure and Form

According to the convention of architectural drafting, Space is delineated in the Plan; Structure in Section; and Form in Elevation. Accordingly, Space produces Architecture; Structure develops from Engineering; and Form expresses Aesthetics.

Architecture springs from a distinct concept of 'Space' dictated by the unique requirements of a given Place of Worship and is Community-specific by virtue of its view of Godhood. 'Structure' produced by Engineering is universal because it is based on scientific principles, and is thus exempt from the polemic subjectivity of artistic creation. 'Form' is the enclosing and roofing element and springs from a community's notions of beauty. Thus, Architecture is the 'Soul'; Structure, the 'Skeleton'; and Form, the finished 'Body' of Building Design.

How different are places of worship of other religions?

- ◆ Architecture of a Hindu *temple* is dictated by analogy of the female anatomy, whereby its *sanctum sanctorum* is appropriately called the *garbha-griha* or the womb-room in which the idol of the presiding deity is installed.
- ◆ A Buddhist *stupa* is an earth-mound "where all the Buddhas [and their relics] are abiding. Those beings who don't have the *karma actually* to see Buddha need the holy objects of body, speech and mind: statues, scriptures, stupas – as a field for accumulating merit."
- ◆ A Christian *church* is modelled on a typical basilica, which was a Roman court. Its plan is either a Greek Cross or a Latin Cross. In the former, the intersecting shapes are of equal length whereas in the latter the vertical side is longer than the horizontal.
- ◆ An Islamic *mosque* is developed on the design of courtyard of residence of Prophet Muhammed, the founder of Islam.



- ◆ The church and the mosque are designed for collective worship, but a traditional *mandir* [Hindu temple] admits only individuals to pay their obeisance. In all the three Places of Worship the *sanctum sanctorum* is located towards the end.

The orientation of places of worship distinguishes one building type from one another associated with different religions.

Church: Since the earliest period, the custom of locating the apse and altar in the eastern extremity of the church was the rule.

Mosque: The direction, *qibla*, of the Mecca, meaning the area that surrounded the Ka'ba, is indicated by the *mihrab*, a niche in the wall. Next to the *mihrab* is placed the *mimbar*, a pulpit from which the Friday prayer is held. So wherever a mosque is built the *mihrab* must be towards the Mecca. In India, it is towards the west.

Hindu Temple: must face the rising sun.

In a *stupa* the devotees do not enter the structure. They circumambulate round it following the sun-path. The *stupa* has become a strong symbolic form to be revered so much so that in Rock temples its replica is placed in their interiors invariably



people are not only reflected in the plan but also in the vertical section. Thus the kings were supposed to have buildings of the ground floor and seven and a half storeys; Brahmins, the ground plus six and a half floors; the Kshatriyas ground plus five and a half floors; and the *Shudras* the ground plus two and a half." However, Sri Harmandar Sahib has ground plus one-and-half floors - a size smaller than even that prescribed for the lowest class of the *Shudras*, two-and-a-half floor structure. Thus, the physical built-Form of the Abode of The Formless One (Nirankaar) is closer to that of the *Shudras'* and very distant from a temporal king's. This point too is crucial in understanding the significance of Humility as the Cardinal Principle of the Sikh Faith.

Several design details in the building symbolise spiritual principles contained in Sikhism. For example, the main entrance symbolises humility, the four entry points symbolise the secular nature of Guru Nanak's teachings, the centrality of Sri Darbar Sahib where the Guru Granth Sahib is kept.

Please elaborate and explain other such elements.

Guru Nanak Dev, who founded the Sikh Faith on his Revelation [*Ilhaam*], made Humility cardinal principle of the new religion. Architecturally, this is expressed by the *elliptical* dome that crowns the *sanctum sanctorum*. This dome-shape is unusual because the dome in Mughal architecture is *onion-shaped*, and is raised on supporting structure called the drum so that it can be easily seen without interruption. A Buddhist stupa is a hemisphere. A Hindu temple has a *shikhara*, not a dome. A Christian church has a spire, a tall slender architectural structure tapering to a point.

The tenet of Humility is expressed also in the modest scale of the Holy Shrine. It gains an added significance when seen in the light of the prescriptions in the *Shilpa Shastra* (ancient Hindu treatises on architecture). "In the *Shilpa Shastras*, the social stratification and the sense of belonging to a class of

The four entrance doors express the plain truth that God dwells everywhere, in all directions, and at all times - far beyond secular symbolism. This fact is underscored by the orientation of the Holy Shrine, which faces west unlike a *mandir* or a mosque. This distinguishing architectural feature also points to the respect that the Gurus gave to Ecology of the place. Ecology, in my view, is the pious personality of Great Mother Earth [the Gurus called *Mata Dhart Mahat*].

Dukh Bhanjani Beri marks the original eastern extremity of the pond that existed there, and it was required that the *Amrit Sarovar* be created towards the western side. Also, since the pond was a starting point for environmental planning, the low-lying site was not materially altered and Sri Harmandar Sahib was built on an extremely low plinth in sharp contrast to the high-elevation base of a Hindu temple, or an Islamic mosque, or other Places of Worship.

The central place where *Sri Guru Granth Sahib* resides is about 15-foot square, and the total size of this part of the building on the outside is 40-foot square. Humility as spiritual grandeur is exalted manifold when one sees the soul-stirring shimmer of reflections of Sri Harmandar Sahib in the *Amrit*



Sarovar which is a near-square of about 500-foot side. It is surrounded by 60-foot-wide *parkarma* or circumambulatory of which 10-foot-wide space is covered for use in inclement weather.

An aerial view of the sacred precincts reveals that the Holy Shrine is comparatively very small with respect to the total expanse of the precincts, and its smallness is further minified by its shimmering reflection. This is the most beautiful architectural way of underscoring the primacy of Spirit over Body and Mind, which experience is available only to an individual steeped in Humility as God's most magnificent endowment!

What are the key zones or areas in the layout of the premises? What is their significance?

Akal Takht is a key area in the layout of the premises, and has come to stay as an integral part of the design of Sri Harmandar Sahib, representing as it does the Temporal aspect of human life. This unique tenet of the Sikh Faith makes it a life-affirming religion, exhorting all Sikhs to pursue Spirituality as householders in the thick of workaday existence by following the three-pronged formula: *Kirat Karo* [honest livelihood]; *Vand Chhako* [sharing with the

under-privileged], and *Naam Japo* [Contemplation of the Holy Name].

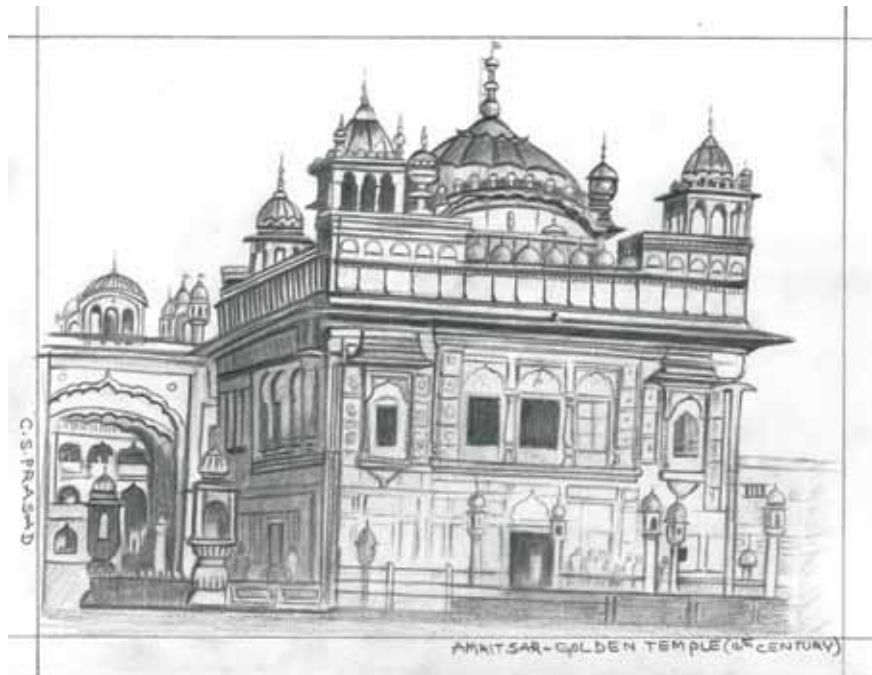
Another noteworthy feature of the layout plan is that Sri Harmandar Sahib is visible from the Akal Takht, but the Akal Takht cannot be seen from Sri Harmandar Sahib. Between the two, *Darshani Deorhi* [gateway from which glimpse of the Holy Shrine can be had] is the intervening structure, which marks the crucial point where you leave the Temporal world of materiality behind to enter the Universe of Spirit that Guru Nanak Dev tersely named *Sach Khand*, the Realm of Truth.

Dukh Bhanjani Beri is very important historically, for it is the sine qua non of the environmental planning and architectural design of the sacred premises. *Ber Baba Buddha* is the historic spot from where Baba Buddha directed and supervised construction of the complex.

Sri Darbar Sahib gives us an idea of the various embellishments within the sanctum sanctorum: the carvings, inlay work, gold leaf plating, golden canopy etc. Various embellishments include fresco paintings, repousse work, inlay-designs, etc. Although fresco paintings are an adaptation of the Hindu, the

Persian, and Mughal motifs yet their distinctive setting and combination of plants, flowers, leaves, human figures, birds and animals bear the impress of originality. Coloured stones, bright colours, and cut-glass have frequently been used. The contribution of Sri Harmandar Sahib to the art of fresco painting lies in the preservation of the native tradition and is an extension of the art of the Kangra and allied schools. Limestone work has also been done with pieces of glass and mirror set therein, and painted in golden and other colours afterwards.

Inlay work [*jaratkaari*] in white marble has been done using semiprecious coloured stones of different colours with motifs of plants, flowers, leaves, etc. Apparently, they resemble the Persian tradition of such art of embellishment but a careful look reveals major differences. Islam forbids the use of natural elements and thus Persian designs are always geometrical, but in the case of Sri Harmandar Sahib natural elements have been used in utter profusion. Repousse work involves the beating of sheet-metal into relief so that the resulting art-form assumes the third dimension. When it is copper-gilded, as in the case of Sri Harmandar Sahib, it becomes a thing of beauty which is a joy for ever! *Jaratkaari* work on the ceiling has been done with mirrors of various shapes and sizes set in plaster of Paris. The embellishments on the interiors, including every nook and corner and jambs of doors and windows, cills, lintel-soffits, ceiling, etc, have been done more profusely and exquisitely than on the exterior walls and panels. In this preferential treatment of decorative work lies the subtle suggestion that the inner life of the Spirit is infinitely richer than the misleading allurements of material existence of the world of forms and colours which lie outside the human body. This interpretation finds support from the fact that the *Parkash Asthan*, where Sri Guru Granth Sahib is installed, has been expressed as an architectural volume with an upward thrust of Space that shoots up across the mezzanine floor towards the ceiling of the *sanctum sanctorum*. This distinction, which goes unnoticed by the untrained eyes, points to the exhilarating upliftment that one experiences by listening to the soulful melodies of Shabad Kirtan.



What are the major renovations and reconstructions that have taken place at the Golden Temple from its inception till now?

Major renovations were carried out during Maharaja Ranjit Singh's reign [1802-1849]. He got the shrine's upper storey copper-gilded and introduced exquisite interior embellishments of the Holy Shrine.

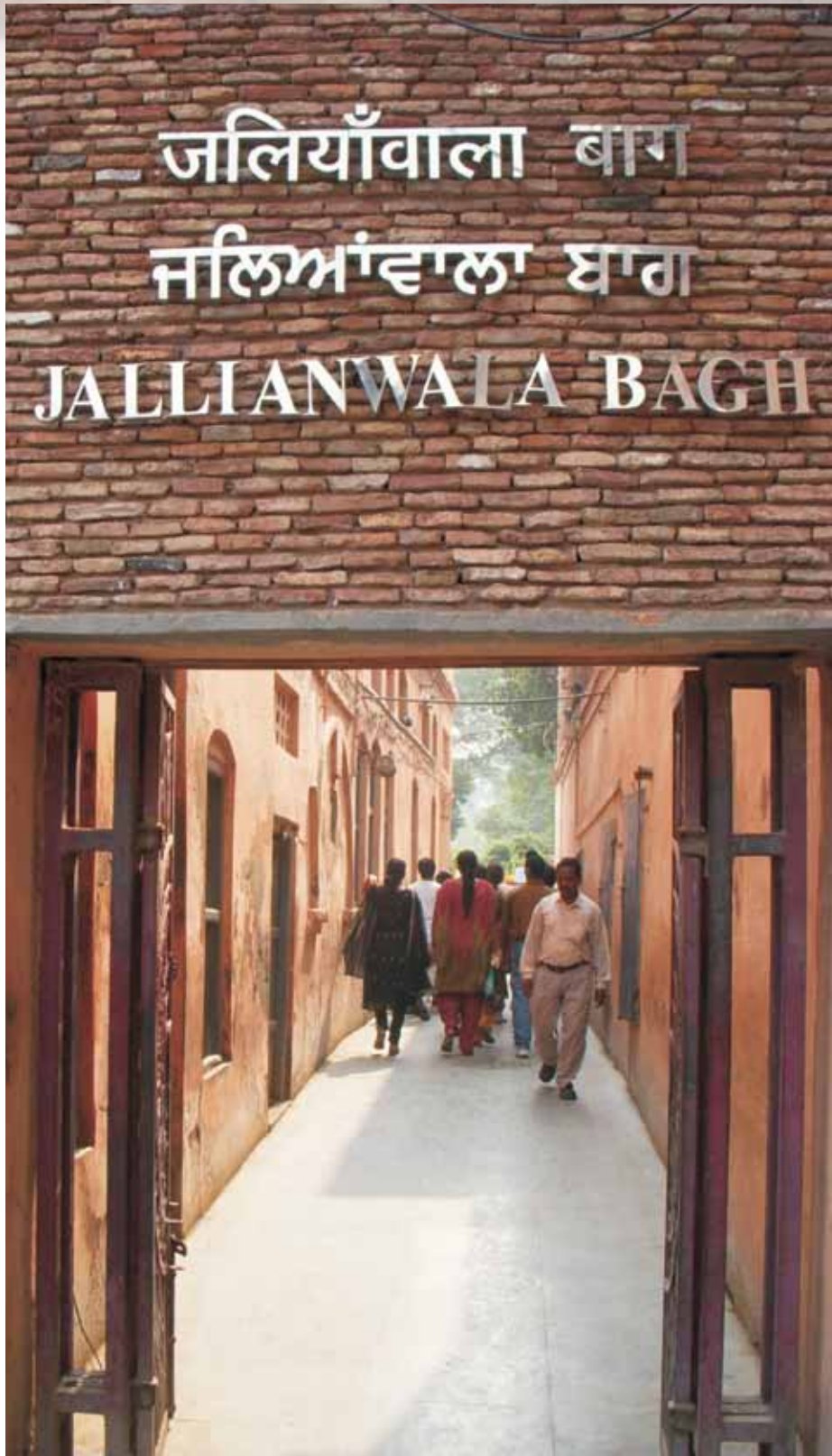
Major reconstruction took place when *Akal Takht*, the Seat of Temporal Power in the Sikh Faith, was destroyed during the infamous *Operation Blue Star* in 1984, and had to be built again.

What space does Sri Harmandar Sahib occupy in the Sikh psyche and on the Sikh landscape?

Sri Harmandar Sahib does not occupy space in the Sikh psyche. It is the Sikh psyche itself: always in *charhdi kala*, spirits in progressive ascendance. The Sikh landscape is a many-splendoured psycho-emotional extension of Sri Harmandar Sahib into the ever-active arena of workaday existence in which a Sikh unrelentingly wages a never ending war against injustice, on dictates of the Cosmic Moral Law called Dharma. Since Humility is an unconditional surrender to the Divine Edict--Fiat [Hukam], a Sikh is constantly engaged in socially-beneficent activities in creative partnership with *Wah-e-Guru* [The Wondrous Lord] in fulfillment of His inscrutable Will [Reza].

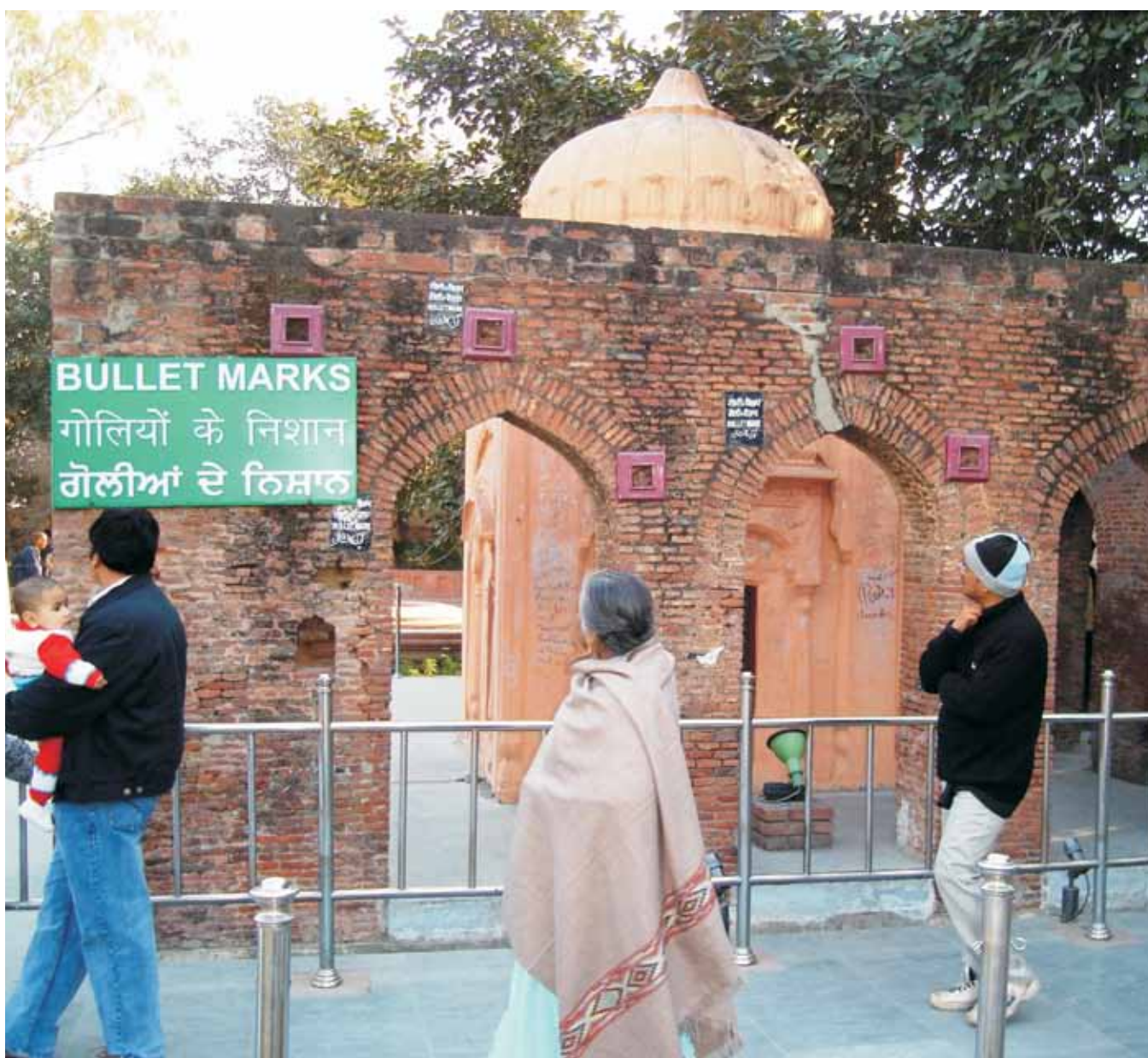
Dr S S Bhatti

Return to Jallianwala Bagh



The massacre of nearly 400 unarmed civilians and the wounding of over 1,000 others in Amritsar's Jallianwala Bagh (a barren enclosure walled in by houses) on the infamous 13 April 1919, has a far greater historical resonance than the incident would seem to merit. This is not to make light of what the Secretary of State for War, Winston Churchill, speaking in the House of Commons, called "an extraordinary event, a monstrous event, an event which stands in sinister isolations," accusing the perpetrator of the deed, Brigadier-General Dyer, of "frightfulness" (a word then redolent of German atrocities in the first world war). It was a heinous crime, but on a much smaller scale than many of the massacres of the terrible 20th Century, not least in the Indian subcontinent itself in the run-up to Partition. What justifies Nigel Collett's exhaustive account of it is its pivotal role in the struggle for Indian independence. It polarised the forces of change and reaction, largely along racial lines. On the Indian side, it turned reformers into revolutionaries and on the British side, it solidified opposition to the Montagu-Chelmsford reforms aimed at the gradual 'Indianisation' of the administration.

Churchill went on to say, "What I mean by frightfulness is the inflicting of great slaughter or massacre upon a particular crowd of people, with the



intention of terrorising not merely the rest of the crowd, but the whole district or country.”

This was the nub of the matter. The role of military in aid of civil power was to defuse rather than exacerbate tensions, and specifically to disperse unruly or threatening crowds with a minimum of force. Though Dyer gave contradictory accounts of his motives and actions, he quite deliberately and without giving any warning opened fire on the unarmed crowd and kept on firing when he knew perfectly well that the crowd was trapped and therefore unable to disperse. Indeed, his aim was not dispersal but punishment.

As Collett puts it, “He believed he was going to strike a blow at a conspiracy which he imagined stretched across India and of which one of the principal centres seemed to be Amritsar.”

In taking such a role upon himself, Dyer was far exceeding his brief as military commander, and in making no provision for treatment of the wounded, he compounded his crime. Yet his superiors failed to condemn him and many of his compatriots hailed him as “the saviour of India”, the man who single-handedly prevented a second Mutiny. For though the Indian Mutiny had happened more than sixty years earlier, it still loomed large in the consciousness of the British and in this respect, Dyer was very much a man of his time – and place. When he went out to India as a young army officer, he wasn’t venturing into a foreign land but returning to the country of his birth and clearly upbringing; his father ran a successful brewery business in Simla. Behind the mask of the stiff soldier was a lonely individual who felt threatened by the prospect of radical change in what he saw as his homeland and lashed out accordingly.



Jallianwala Bagh, "framed" bullet holes

Prior to Amritsar, Dyer's record as an officer was patchy; he had the gift of inspiring loyalty among his subordinates, particularly the Sikhs in his regiment, the 29th Punjabis, with whom he developed a remarkable rapport; but he was awkward with his equals and a prickly and difficult subordinate himself. He was physically brave and had a good enough brain to get him into Staff College. But as Collett shows in a detailed account of his first independent command, on the borders of Persia, Baluchistan and Afghanistan during the first world war he was dangerously ambitious. Instead of confining his activities to neutralising the German agents who were active in the region, in line with his orders, he started an expensive and inconclusive campaign against tribes he perceived as hostile and ended up doing more harm than good – all out of vanity.

Tony Gould

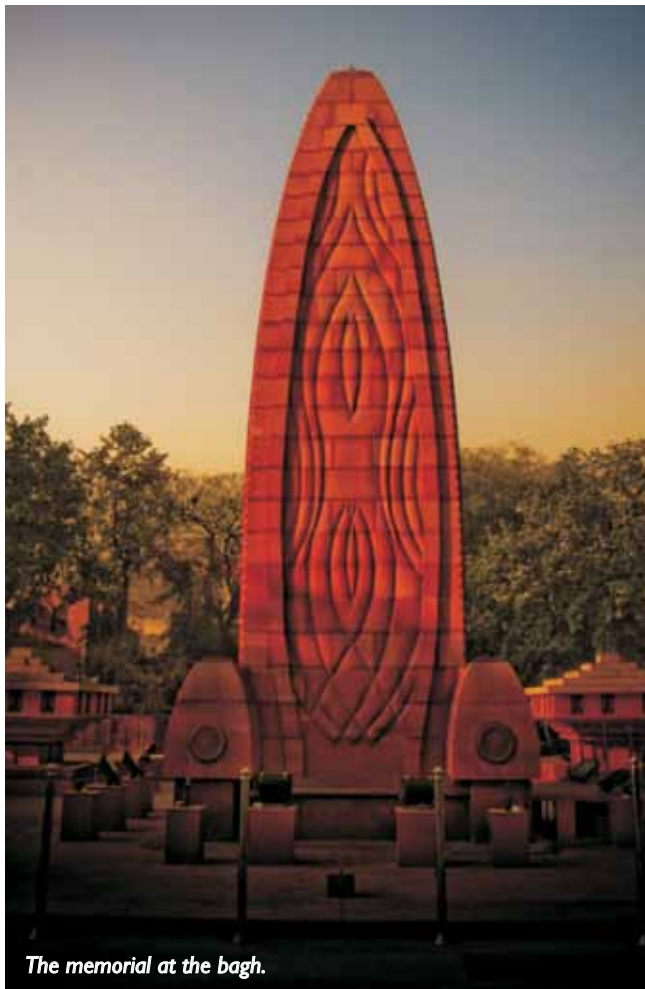
Excerpt from *Massacre at Amritsar*

'I fired and continued to fire until the crowd dispersed, and I consider this is the least amount of firing which would produce the necessary moral and widespread effect it was my duty to produce if I was to justify my action. If more troops had been at hand the casualties would have been greater in proportion. *It was no longer a question of merely dispersing the crowd*, but one of producing a sufficient moral effect from a military point of view not only on those who were present, but more especially throughout the Punjab. There could be no question of undue severity.'

So said General Dyer on 25 August 1919, a statement to which he stuck for the rest of his life, words which branded him in the eyes of millions as an inhuman monster, a British soldier who had

committed an appalling atrocity, one for which he found no adequate excuse necessary.

In 1920 the controversy about General Dyer's action in the Jallianwala Bagh at Amritsar in the Punjab on 13 April 1919, divided England into two angry claques, those who clamoured that, by shooting down 379 natives and wounding 1,200 others, Dyer had taught the 'bloody browns' a lesson, and thereby saved India from a second Mutiny, and those who protested that he had committed an unexampled act of brutality and perpetrated a deliberately calculated massacre, the blackest spot on England's escutcheon since the burning at the stake of Joan of Arc, an act of terrorism which, far from saving India, ignited the spark of Indian nationalism, an act of 'frightfulness' which resulted twenty-eight years later in Britain losing the brightest jewel in her Imperial Crown. A demonstration of Britain's might which boomeranged with a vengeance.



The memorial at the bagh.



The well in the bagh.

Brigadier General Reginald Edward Harry Dyer died in 1927. The British Raj is no more. The White Sahibs are gone from India. Outside India, the Jallianwala Bagh is forgotten, its memory blotted out by more infamous deeds at Lidice, Hiroshima and Sharpeville....those people who supported Dyer were no more callous than he; flag wavers and ultra-patriots, they believed that Britain had been appointed by God to rule natives. A century of the Pax *Britannica* induced the belief; glorious victory over Britain's most formidable foe proved its truth. The retired majors of Cheltenham and the bloodthirsty spinsters of Pimlico were drunk with victory. Dyer became the symbol of their belief in the overwhelming might and righteousness of Britain.

The walls of Jallianwala Bagh bear still the marks of the bullets ordered to be fired, quite unjustifiably, by General Dyer, the strong man who gave India into the keeping of a half-naked saint, the first step in the birth of a new nation. Of the future implication of that transference of power we can surmise only, but we may perhaps recall the example of the Procurator of Judaea who, by an entirely justified act, took the first step which transformed a Jewish Messiah King into a World Saviour.

Historic Gurdwaras in Bangladesh

There is growing interest in the Gurdwaras of Bangladesh. A jatha of 58 recently visited Dhaka to celebrate Guru Nanak's Prakash Divas at Gurudwara Nanak Shahi, Dhaka and to visit other Gurdwaras in Bangladesh. SGPC has announced that it will build accommodation for the stay of pilgrims and undertake maintenance and repair of the Gurdwaras in Bangladesh just as it does for the Gurdwaras in Pakistan.

Gurdwara Nanak Shahi at Dhaka, the main Gurdwara in Bangladesh, as well as the Gurdwaras in Chittagong and Sylhet are older than most Gurdwaras in India and Pakistan, dating back to 1506-7, when Guru Nank Dev ji visited the Kamrup area during his first Udasi. Sangat Tola in Dhaka is revered as a Gurdwara when the ninth Guru Sri Guru Teg Bahadur ji went, stayed and held Sangat there in 1666. Little is known about these Gurdwaras but now that Sikhs in India and elsewhere are getting increasingly interested in and beginning to visit these Gurdwaras, the history and background of these Gurdwaras, the efforts made by devotees to set up, preserve, protect, run and manage these Gurdwaras against heavy odds over five centuries is to be recorded.

The History

Gurdwaras in the present day Bangladesh date back to the year 1506-7, when during his first Udasi, the great Guru Nanak visited Sylhet, Dhaka and Chittagong. He stayed at each of the above places for some months, giving his message of IK-ONKAR and universal brotherhood to Hindus and Muslims alike. By the time he left, a Sangat had grown at each place. Baba Gurditta, the eldest son of the sixth Guru, to whom Baba Sri Chand, the elder son of Guru Nanak Dev ji who founded the Udasi Sect, handed over



Gurdwara Nanakshahi at Dhaka, Bangladesh.



leadership of the Udasi Mission, deputed Baba Almast to look after the Sangat in the East and also to locate the exact places where Guruji stayed. One of his successors, Baba Natha built the first Gurdwara (Nanak Shahi) at Dhaka. The present building (in its original form) was completed in 1830. The Gurdwara at Chittagong was perhaps built even earlier with mention

in Gurdwara literature about Raja Sudhir Sen of Chittagong becoming the Guru's follower and setting up a place of worship and Guruji himself putting Bhai Jhanda in charge. Gurdwara Pathartali, near Chittagong, was built much later by railway men led by S.Sujan Singh, Railway Engineer, on land allotted by the railways in the thirties of the last century. These Gurdwaras were built by the Sangat in Dhaka. Perhaps the very first at Dhaka was the Gurdwara called 'Sikher Mandir', in Rayar Bazar, where Guru Nanak ordained a sweet water well for benefit of the residents. The other one was Gurdwara 'Suthrashahi Sangat' in Urdu Bazar. Suthra was a devotee of the Gurus and had a considerable following but these Gurdwaras are no longer in existence, becoming victims of the partition. The Gurdwara at Mymen Singh was built by a local Bengali devotee and was managed by the family.

Late in 1666 Guru Tegh Bahadur visited Dhaka on way to and back from Assam, where he had gone at the request of Raja Man Singh, a Moghul general and his devotee, to bring about a reconciliation between him and the Asom Raja. His stay here was about two years and it was here that he got the news of the birth of his son Gobind Rai (later Guru Gobind Singh). He stayed in the house of the local Masand and his devotee Baba Balalki Das and held his Sangat there. This is what came to be known as Gurdwara Sangat Tola, a double storeyed residential house, having 4-5 rooms and a sweet water well, which has been preserved to this day. The Diwan Hall attached to Sangat Tola is said to have been built during the Second World War by Sikh soldiers posted in Dhaka and is a relatively new 'structure. After 1971, and the transformation of erstwhile East Pakistan into Bangladesh, a Diwan was held once a month in this Hall.

There are two historic Gurdwaras in Bangladesh connected with the memory of the first Guru Guru Nanak Dev: Gurdwara Nanak Shahi at Dhaka and Gurdwara Chowk Bazar in Chittagong. Gurdwara Sangat Tola is associated with memory of the ninth Guru, Guru Teg Bahadur.

The early history of these Gurdwaras is not adequately documented there are names of individuals, Mahants, Sewadars and devotees who took charge, maintained and managed these Gurdwaras in absence of any permanent Sikh population in the area. The local administration,

most of the time, was hostile or at best indifferent. We must be grateful to them for their perseverance in holding on to the Gurdwara properties and managing the shrines against heavy odds: but for their courage and devotion, such rich heritage would not have been preserved.

Pakistani hostility...

After the creation of Pakistan in 1947, the local administration of East Pakistan, which was headed mostly by Punjabis from West Pakistan, became definitely hostile. I visited Dhaka, then the capital of East Pakistan, in 1956 and again in 1957, as Chief Secretary, Tripura Government, for some conferences. I spoke to most of the local officers in Punjabi. No body even mentioned any Sikh Gurdwaras in Dhaka or elsewhere in East Pakistan, not even the Indian High Commission.

Lands attached to some of the Gurdwaras were taken over without any compensation. For example, much of the land belonging to Gurdwara Nanak Shahi at Dhaka was taken over for the development of the University. The caretaker, Mahant Sarwan Singh carried on a heroic legal battle up to the highest court to establish the right of the Gurdwara to the land and claim compensation, but just as he was expecting the highest justice at court of appeal, civil war broke out and he was killed along with his Muslim friend. We reclaimed some of the documents with the help of a local lawyer in 1987-8. Considering that it would be impractical to get back the land which had become part of the University complex, we prepared a case for compensatory land allotment in the Gulshan diplomatic area and I personally handed over the Memorandum to the Minister of Religious Affairs some time before my departure. I do not know the outcome. Similarly was the case with Gurdwara 'Sikher Mandir'. The Gurdwara land became part of the new fashionable colony of Dhan Mandi where diplomats and important political leaders lived. Land belonging to Gurdwara Suthrashahi Sangat in Urdu Bazar, Dhaka, became part of a road network.

...and change with Bangladesh

With the emergence of Bangladesh, the situation changed. Lt. Gen. Jagjit Singh Aurora, who commanded the Indian forces and accepted surrender of the Pakistani forces in December 1971,

immediately asked prominent Sikhs in India to send a delegation to identify the Sikh Gurdwaras and their properties so that claims could be lodged with the new Government. A delegation led by Captain Bhag Singh, founding Editor of *The Sikh Review* of Calcutta reached Dhaka within days and started work. They went from place to place, searched records in courts and registry offices and met with individuals, Hindus and Muslims, who were in the know of things and listed nine Gurdwaras in Bangladesh. The details, their history and background were later published in a brochure by the Bangladesh Gurdwara Management Board, which had its Head Office in Calcutta. Captain Bhag Singh told me that this was a most arduous task. There was no Sikh to help or lead them. Local people, both Muslims and Hindus, were helpful and co-operative, but for their help the various sites of the Gurdwaras could not be located or identified. They met the new owners of the Gurdwara lands and negotiated for their return. The owner in Dhan Mandi agreed to return the land if he was compensated. But then the question arose what to do with the land? The Gurdwara had become extinct. Would it be worthwhile to set up a new Gurdwara in a place where there was no Sikh community and it was difficult to take care even of the Gurdwaras which had survived? And how to get back the Suthrashai Sangat land which was already a part of the road network?

Resumption of Gurdwara services

Captain Bhag Singh and his colleagues wisely first decided to take possession of the Gurdwara buildings and lands which they could identify and deal with the other questions later. They met Sheikh Mujibur-Rehman, along with Gen. Jagjit Singh Aurora, who assured them all help in the restoration of the Gurdwaras and freedom to practice their religion. Help came from the Gurdwara Board at Patna Saheb, who deputed Granthis for the Gurdwaras at Dhaka and Chittagong, which were, in effect, the only functioning historical Gurdwaras. Weekly kirtan and path began. But there were no Ragis to do kirtan, so local Muslims and Hindus were trained to do Kirtan. Some Sikh members of the Indian High Commission staff played an important role in this effort. They would get audio tapes of Kirtan by famous Ragis from India, which the local volunteers would emulate. By the time I went to

Dhaka in 1986, there were quite a few such Ragis, the most notable among them Fazlu and his wife Sultana whose marriage was arranged by Captain Bhag Singh himself and provided living accommodation in the Gurdwara compound itself. Kiran, a Hindu singer, who sang Gurbani in classical style also lived in the Gurdwara campus. While we were still there quite a few others started participating in Kirtan. Particular mention may be made of Papu who would sing shabads of Bhagat Ravidas ji with great devotion. He was always accompanied by a good number of people from his locality. Contribution of the late Sardar D.S. Bhutiani, an officer of the Indian High Commission, and his family in training Ragis is worth remembering. An old Muslim singer, Abdullah, a Bhutiani trainee, would always sing Kabir ji's shabad 'Awal Allah Noor Upaya' Visitors from India and other countries greatly appreciated the Kirtan in the peaceful atmosphere of Nanak Shahi Gurdwara. The audio tapes of Kirtan in Gurdwara Nanak Shahi that were sent out and much appreciated by Sangats abroad.

Langar was prepared in the Gurdwara premises by the Sikh families and served to all, which more people and was highly appreciated.

Renovation

The buildings of the historical Gurdwaras needed urgent repairs. The Chittagong Gurdwara had for some years been looked after by a local committee headed by the District Judge. India's Assistant High Commissioner at Chittagong was also a member, besides, an Ahmedia Muslim also on the Committee. They were quite devoted to their task and thanks to the Committee, condition of the Chittagong Gurdwara was not as bad as that of the other Gurdwaras. Chittagong being a port and a commercial centre, did attract Sikh businessmen from India and some Far Eastern countries, who contributed for its maintenance. Later, Sardar Inderjit Singh (Skylark) Chadha, a Sikh originally from Chandigarh, but who had acquired Swedish nationality, became a frequent visitor as a UN expert, and almost single handedly undertook Kar Sewa of the Gurdwara. Years later, he decided to write a history of the Bangladesh Gurdwaras and started collecting material. Unfortunately, he passed away soon after he began his work.

Nanak Shahi Gurdwara at Dhaka required immediate attention. Built in 1830 it had suffered from neglect. Its location next to the University made the building vulnerable to frequent disturbances. The Gurdwara Management Board undertook immediate repair and maintenance work, but could not undertake its renovation since all its members were based in India and there would be no arrangement for local supervision.

In 1986-87, a number of Sikhs (Keshadharis and non-Keshadharis) got posted to Dhaka, some in the Indian High Commission and others with various U.N. and international organisations. Sardar Inderjit Singh Chadha became the Indian High Commissioner. There were three Sikh officers under him. I joined the International Jute Organisation for a three year term. Two Sikh U.N. experts, Dr. Gian Singh Sahota and Dr. Surjit Singh Sandhu were appointed Advisors to the Bangladesh Government, the number of Sikhs visiting from India and other countries, also went up. It was felt that the task of repair and renovation of the Nanak Shahi Gurdwara should be taken up without any delay. A local committee was set up for the purpose. The High Commissioner was requested to chair the Committee. He expressed his inability to do so because of official and political reasons. At his suggestion, I was nominated as its Chairman. The Committee received lots of help and co-operation from the High Commissioner.

For the renovation work, we immediately got help from an un-expected quarter. A Muslim architect, who was associated with the construction of Baiit-ul-Mukkam Mosque, in Dhaka, volunteered to help, surveyed the existing structure, prepared plans for modification, selected the contractor and gave an immediate start to the work. And all this without any remuneration. The plans were discussed by the local committee and displayed in the Gurdwara for general information and comments. Finally, they were approved by the Bangladesh Gurdwara Management Board at Calcutta. In fact, one of the members of the Board came over to Dhaka for discussions with the Committee and the Architect. The basic idea was not to build a new Gurdwara, but to preserve the existing building, to strengthen its structure, re-lay the roof, repair and re-plaster the walls and then build a Parikarma type veranda around the building, not only to give added

protection to the existing building but also provide additional space. Other constructions in the first phase included, regular accommodation for the two Ragis (Fazlu-Sultana and Kiran), a room for the Granthi (Bhai Kartar Singh, deputed by the Patna Saheb Board), visitor's room and toilet facilities for the complex. In the second phase it was proposed to build a regular Langar Hall, kitchen and accommodation for visitors.

Initially, finding posed a big problem as there was hardly any local community support. Our request for funds to SGPC, Delhi Gurdwara Management Committee and Patna Saheb Board did not evoke any response. We did receive contributions from the local Sangat and also from some Muslim businessmen, but then decided to explore sources in other countries. Most of the funds were raised from Sikh Sangats in London, Bangkok and Thailand in response to appeals made at the weekly Diwans in the local Gurdwaras. The late Sardar Mehrban Singh, a prominent Sikh social worker from Singapore, came to know about our needs and on his own started collecting funds and made remittances to us. Soon, we had more funds than we needed for the first phase. Having decided not to take up the second phase immediately, since most of the Committee members were expecting to leave Dhaka, we wrote to the donors not to send any more funds until they received a specific request from us for the second phase. The Guru's work was completed by the Great Guru himself.

My successor, Dr Gian Singh Sahota, had laid at his own expense, a beautiful garden in the Gurdwara compound, as also took steps to preserve the sacred relics which had been recovered from Gurdwara Sangat Tola, but were kept in Gurdwara Nanak Shahi. These included an old hand written Bir, Guru Teg Bahadur's 'Kharavan' and a copy of the water colour portrait of Guru Tegh Bahadur, to which, it was said, the finishing touches had been given by Guruji himself. (The original was handed over by Captain Bhag Singh to the Victoria Museum in Calcutta for safe custody. It is still there.) His successor, Dr. Surjit Singh Sidhu arranged the first ever pilgrimage to Gurdwara Nanak Shahi Dhaka. He invited a number of people he knew in different countries to visit Dhaka and arranged their stay with the families of local Sikhs. This was a unique effort indeed and must have been the precursor to subsequent pilgrimages to Dhaka.

We find that during the last few years much work has been done at Gurdwara Nanak Sahi, Further construction has been made and the facilities we had intended to provide under the second phase have already been built - and perhaps more. All those who took interest in the Gurdwara affairs deserve our thanks and gratitude. Now that SGPC has stepped in, certainly more and more facilities will become available to the visiting Sangat.

The Future

We have often discussed, with some of the members of Bangladesh Gurdwara Management Board, as what should be done for proper administration and up keep of the Gurdwaras in Bangladesh. Though nine Gurdwaras had been identified by the Bangladesh Gurdwara Management Board, only three historic Gurdwara (Nanakshahi and Sangat Tola at Dhaka and Chowk Bazar at Chittagong) needed to be maintained as such. Others were either 'extinct' or mere locations where no Sewa or Maryada was being maintained. We felt that a separate Board of Management for the Bangladesh Gurdwaras should be sent up with headquarters at Dhaka, which should include, besides the local Sangat representatives from India, UK, USA, Singapore and Thailand. The Bangladesh Government should also be associated. Nanak Shahi Gurdwara and the Chittagong Gurdwara should be run as full fledged Gurdwaras with all the services, Sewa and Maryada.

About Gurdwara Sangat Tola, there was a proposal from the Calcutta Board that it should be demolished and a shopping centre built there to generate income for other Gurdwaras, but the local Committee was opposed to this view. Its counter proposal was that the Gurdwara should be declared as a 'protected monument', managed by a Special Committee which should include representatives of the Dhaka Board and Bangladesh Government and thrown open to tourists and visitors.

Properties of other Gurdwaras should be secured and protected. In due course when adequate finances could be raised some socially useful projects like schools or dispensaries bearing Guru Nanak's Name should be run there. I am sure

these and other such issues will receive attention of those in charge of the Gurdwaras.

Sewadars

The biggest problem is the staffing of the Gurdwaras. Carefully selected Granthis will have to be provided from outside, mostly from India. There should be separate granthis for Dhaka and Chittagong. In my time, there was only one Granthi who used to shuttle between Dhaka and Chittagong.

They should know Bengali so that they can explain Gurbani to the local people who attend the weekly Diwan in good numbers. They should live in Dhaka with their families. It is important that they are paid well so that they do not have to follow objectionable practices to make both ends meet.

It must be borne in mind that unlike Gurdwaras in India, the Granthis would have no other sources of income, like Path, Ardas etc. It will be useful to have a competent and devoted person as Manager of the Gurdwaras in Bangladesh. Again, selection has to be made carefully. A person of integrity should be deputed. In our time we had a bad experience.

There will be problems galore. But, the satisfaction is that we are on the right path. With interest being taken by the SGPC and greater interaction with Sikhs from outside, I am sure all the problems will be taken care of and Gurdwaras in Bangladesh will be looked after as well as other historical Gurdwaras and they will attract pilgrims from all over the world.

Harbans Singh, IAS



Guru Granth Sahib: A Model for Interfaith Understanding

Dr. Kazi Nurul Islam of Bangladesh

Though all the religions of the world teach love, preach sympathy for others and encourage Man to exercise utmost self-restraint and have most profoundly been a source of inspiration for the highest good of mankind, the world today is torn by conflicts, enmity and religious hatred.

In this predicament, a lasting and peaceful society is impossible unless different faiths are understood in their proper perspectives. Therefore, it is necessary that people belonging to different faiths understand each other better. This necessitates a constant dialogue and effort to generate moral and hearty religious thinking.

The advocates of all the religions of the world emphasise the importance of certain virtues and moral values. Only these can foster unity and cohesion of mankind. But the moral and religious values cannot be invoked by force. This can be achieved through the exchange of words, kind words, sincere words and loving words that can reach the deepest fathoms of the heart.

There is no religion without peace and no peace without religion. We must admit that peace and religion are complementary to each other. When the good of all is desired with an undivided mind peace will definitely be ours. But people belonging to different faiths, in most cases, have betrayed religious ideals and commitment to peace. The time has come when this betrayal must be corrected. And this can be and should be done through knowledge, dialogue and demonstration of the fact that love, compassion, selflessness and the inner force of truthfulness have ultimately greater power than hatred, enmity and self-interest.

There was a time when various religions, precisely because of their own convictions, were unable to cooperate and were even antagonistic to each other. But the times have changed to a great extent. Improvement in the means of transportation has made the earth smaller. Now religions, in spite of historic differences, must seek to unite all men for the attainment of world peace. Unless the peoples

of faith come closer to each other the irreligious and antireligious forces will gain the upper hand. And this may lead to the further breaking up of the moral fibre of human society. Thus at all cost we must preserve the moral aspect of the texture of human society.

Religious people represent a vast majority of the peoples of the world. But unfortunately, we are a confused, divided and silent majority. The religious people of the world have been quite silent for long, and their silence has worked against human welfare. Our division, our timidity, and our silence left the mighty forces of terrorism, fanaticism, racism, poverty, and war unchallenged. Our silence has been paid for by the suffering of millions, for whom we should have been advocates, friends, and spokespersons.

The time has come when religionists, instead of antagonising each other because of what we once thought was a religious conviction, should cooperate with each other in order to contribute to the cause of peace for mankind.

Before I explain my own position as to what makes me feel that Guru Granth Sahib is a model for inter-religious understanding in today's world, let me speak a few words about the attitude of Islam towards other religions. I believe, this will help us to understand Guru Granth Sahib's attitude towards other traditions better.

Islam seeks to bring about reconciliation between the followers of different faiths and establish a basis of respect and honour among them. Islam can claim uniqueness in that for a person to be a Muslim it is mandatory that he/she must have respect for the people of others' faiths, must believe in all the prophets and in all the revealed texts. The Qur'an teaches us that God has sent His revelation to all the people from time to time and no section of mankind has been left without Divine guidance. Many of the prophets of the Old Testament have been mentioned by name in the Qur'an, and so also is Jesus, who along with other prophets, is highly revered and honoured by the Muslims all over the world.

It is stated in the Qur'an : "Say (O Muslims): We believe in Allah and that which is revealed unto us and that which was revealed unto Abraham and Ismael, and Isaac, and Jacob and the tribes, and that which the Moses and Jesus received, and that which the Prophets received from their Lord. We make no distinction between any one of them, and unto Him we have surrendered."

If a man believes any one of them, he believes all and if a man confirms and believes in one of them he must and ought to confirm all. "One who does not believe in any one of the Prophets, would be a *kafir*, though he must believe in all the Prophets raised in India, China, Persia, Egypt, Africa, Europe and any other countries of the world." But a Muslim cannot definitely say about a particular person outside the list of the prophets named in the Qur'an, whether he was or was not a Prophet. Muslims are also not permitted to say anything against the holy men of other religions.

Sikhism goes one step further in its attitude towards other religions and in its world view.

Sikhism is a religion which was founded on the principles of interfaith understanding, mutual respect and harmony. From the very beginning the leaders and the followers of this tradition preached the principles of interfaith respect, dialogue and understanding. To be a Sikh it is mandatory that he/she must respect and accept all other religions of the world and at the same time must protect, guard and allow the free-practice of the customs and rituals of others. The Guru Granth Sahib teaches its followers to love all creation as God's own manifestation. Acceptance of all faiths, and interfaith tolerance and understanding are basic to the teachings of Guru Granth Sahib.

History of the Sikh tradition shows remarkable consistency in the pursuit of these ideals and in the defence of the right to free worship of peoples of all faiths.

The Sikh Gurus perceived that there was lack of real love among the people and, therefore, they always laid great stress upon spiritual practices and preached the philosophy of One God, the Supreme Reality. They understood that a new strength and vigour had to be imported into the field of religion and religious practices, it had to be brought home to the minds of the people that there really existed no differences in places of worship resorted to men of different faiths.

That is why Guru Gobind Singh, the tenth and the last Guru, states: "The temple and the mosque are the same, the Hindu worship and the Muslim prayer are

the same, all men are the same; it is through erroneous judgment they appear different ... All men have the same eyes, the same ears, the same body, the same build, a compound of earth, air, fire and water ... let no man, even by mistake, suppose there is a difference."

The Sikh Gurus systematised all the past Hindu and Islamic philosophies and brought a confluence in an organised manner for the temporal and spiritual uplift of all humanity without any discrimination. Guru Nanak made friends with both Hindus and Muslims. He never discriminated against any one. He treated the whole world as his own family and all human beings as his brothers and sisters. He raised his voice against injustice anywhere. Like him, all the Sikh Gurus were large-hearted. None of them were parochial or narrow-minded, communal or caste-ridden. They set out for the regeneration of mankind.

The Guru Granth Sahib is a unique sacred text in the history of world religions. The pattern of this text was conceived and worked out in such a way that it can integrate various religions and *varnas* of India, spiritually, religiously and emotionally. Guru Nanak gave the idea of this kind of scripture, his successor Gurus subscribed to it and worked to collect material for most of the Granth.

Guru Arjan collected most of the materials and contributed a major portion of the Granth in the form of his bani and completed editing this sacred text in 1604 C.E. Guru Gobind Singh added the hymns of Guru Tegh Bahadar to the Adi Granth and then installed it as the Guru-Eternal in 1708 C.E., abolishing the personal guruship thereon.

The unique catholicity and egalitarian approach of Guru Arjan is evident in the fact that, other than the hymns of the Sikh Gurus, he incorporated the compositions of as many as thirty men of God, belonging to various castes, creeds, religions and vocations. Among them were Jaidev of Bengal, Surdas of Awadh, Namdev, Pipa, Sain, Kabir, Ravidas and Bhikhan of Uttar Pradesh, Dhannu of Rajasthan and Farid of Multan.

Kabir was a weaver, Sadhna was a butcher, Namdev a seamster, Dhana a farmer, Sain a barber, Ravidas a cobbler, Farid a Muslim Sufi. It may be mentioned here that Guru Gobind Singh hosted fifty two poets in his court to translate various ancient texts of India with the object of unifying the people of the subcontinent through their own literature and culture.

What a wonderful example of catholicity! What a wonderful instance of egalitarianism! And what a remarkable endeavour for interfaith understanding!! I salute all those who made this possible.

Sikhism advocates four kinds of unity: unity of God, unity of mankind, unity of religions and unity of classes. In fact, the Oneness of God and the essential oneness of humanity is the basic teaching of Guru Granth Sahib. Guru Nanak was an advocate for peace and unity. For all the religions of the world, he envisaged a fellowship of faiths. His efforts for creating an atmosphere for world-reconciliation and world-amity were much ahead of his time.

The attitude of the Sikh Gurus towards the leaders or founders of other faiths and their sacred texts is unique and genuinely praiseworthy. For instance, the attitude of Guru Nanak towards Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) was one of unbounded love and respect. In a verse which is given in the Janam Sakhi of Bhai Bala, Guru Nanak is stated to have said:

*ditha nur muhammadi, ditha nabi rasool
Nanak qudrat dekh ke, khudi ghei sab bhool.*

"I have seen the Light of Muhammad (with my mind's eye). I have seen the prophet and the messenger of God, in other words, I have understood his message or imbibed his spirit. After contemplating the glory of God, my ego was completely eliminated."

In the same spirit Guru Gobind Singh said in his *Bacchittar Naatak* ("The Wonderful Drama") that prophet Muhammad was a divine messenger and a great man of religion and faith.

Guru Arjan had profound respect for Mian Mir, a celebrated Muslim Sufi and had the foundation stone of the Darbar Sahib (Golden Temple) laid by him. This instance alone is enough to prove the magnanimity and catholicity of the Sikh Gurus.

It may be mentioned here that Muslim scholars had also tremendous appreciations for the Sikh Gurus. For instance, Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, the founder of the Ahmadiyya sect of Islam, observed in his *Sat Bachan* that Guru Nanak was a treasure-house of divine knowledge and knower of all mysteries. The most famous poet-philosopher of this subcontinent, Dr. Mohammad Iqbal, in one of his immortal verses expressed that Guru Nanak was a perfect human being and awakened India from a dormant, dreamy condition to the realisation of God.

To the Muslims and Christians, Guru Nanak advises: "*Practice within your heart the teachings of the Qur'an and the Bible; restrain the ten sensory organs for straining into evil. Tie up the demons of desire and restore faith, charity and contentment, and you shall be acceptable.*"

Guru Nanak vehemently opposes those who criticise the holy books of other religions. He categorically asks his followers: Do not say that the Vedas, the Bible and the Qur'an are false. Those who do not contemplate them are false. Guru Arjan says :

*"Neither am I Hindu nor Musalman
This body and spirit is of Allah-Rama"*

He also asserts: "*Says Nanak! The Guru removeth delusion, Only Allah is Parbrahma.*"

This indicates he had tremendous respect for God variously seen as Allah, Ram and Parbraham; in other words, he loved both the religious traditions in the same spirit.

The principle which underlies the pattern of Guru Granth Sahib is that every Sikh gives the same reverence to the Sikh Gurus which he gives to the other 30 contributors writers of this sacred text. A Sikh bows to the Guru Granth Sahib in reverence and recites the *bani* of all the writers included with the same devotion and respect. It may be noted here that in the *Darbar Sahib* as well as in all other historical or local gurudwaras, the hymns of all these saints, Gurus and Sufis of India are sung.

The followers of the Guru Granth Sahib pay homage to these Muslim and Hindu saints in addition to the Gurus and recite their writings with equal amount of faith, reverence and devotion.

This is not so and cannot be so in any other religion of the world.

Guru Nanak strongly pleaded for an egalitarian society where all people could be regarded as equals. In order to eradicate caste distinction and the social stratification based on caste system, he created two institutions: *Sangat* and *Pangat*. *Sangat* is the community congregation where all people sit together for divine contemplation and prayer and *Pangat* is the free kitchen where different people irrespective of their caste and creed sit at the same level and dine together.

The distinction between poor and rich is forgotten, because all share the same food at the same place. This was, indeed, a revolution against the inegalitarian society.

A successful revolution!

These *Sangat* and *Pangat* not only promote egalitarianism but also promote and enhance interfaith understanding.

Let me give an example of the gurdwara inside Dhaka University campus. In Bangladesh there is not a single Sikh citizen. Despite that, on every Friday in this gurdwara, hundreds of people belonging to different religious backgrounds attend *Sangat* and join *Pangat* and these are promoting interfaith understating in this country. Not only in Bangladesh where there is a gurdwara, but particularly in Europe and America, the *Sangat* and *Pangat* have enriched the prestige of the Sikh community and helped to promote inter-religious harmony.

Guru Nanak argues that if God is One, then all the souls coming from Him are of the same essence. The natural corollary of monotheism is Oneness of Humanity. All the Gurus regarded the whole of mankind as an organic unity and repudiated the distinction on a mundane plane. They held that the distinction of colour, language or territory cannot and should not form the ground for claims of superiority of one group over the other.

Guru Nanak strongly emphasised the highest common factor in all the religions of his time which were existing side by side but unfortunately clashing with one another. He conceived the idea of a new type of scripture, formed a wholesome approach and attitude towards fellow religions and philosophical schools.

He provided directions for religious co-existence, philosophical accommodation and social integration. As we have already mentioned above, Guru Nanak did not believe in the false barriers of religions and rigidities of caste. Some scholars hold that he was an ideal Muslim among Muslims and a model Hindu among Hindus. He believed in the fatherhood of God and brotherhood of man and he not only propagated this philosophy but also practiced this vigorously in his life.

Universalism is a cardinal value of Sikhism. It is not bracketed with a particular ethnicity or a particular

region. The whole earth has been revered by Guru Nanak as “mother earth” and as a result he did not believe in any promised land or holy land.

Sikhism is universal because its primary essential concerns - social, political, cultural and economic - are of a universal nature, embracing humanity as a whole. Guru Gobind Singh held that God cannot be bound to a particular creed, place or era. He (God) cannot be bracketed with any particular ethnicity. Indeed, He is the Lord of all the peoples of the world. This makes Sikhism a truly universal religion.

In today’s pluralistic world, the teachings of the Guru Granth Sahib can play a vital and constructive role. Sikhism not only acknowledges and appreciates other faiths but also accepts their validity and integrates worldly life with the idea of Divinity. Guru Granth Sahib seeks to unite people belonging to different faiths and holds that the object of religion is not to divide mankind, but to unite it, not to act like scissors and tear asunder the social fabric, but to act like a needle and sew it together.

In today’s world we must feel that we are all members of one great family of beings, having different forms of working. We must remember that we are all marching towards the spiritual realisations of Truth and Love.

Some in ignorance say, ‘*My religion is the only one, my religion is the best*’.

But when his heart is illumined by True Knowledge, he knows that above all these wars of sects and sectarians presides the One Invisible Eternal All-knowing Bliss. In fact, the different faiths are like spokes of a wheel in which God forms the hub. Therefore, let us - all the religionists - radiate towards that hub and find peace and solace.

“Guru Granth Sahib, I am quite confident, can be a guiding force to the world in this regard”.



Dr. Kazi Nurul Islam is Professor and Chairman of the Department of World Religions and Culture at the Dhaka University in Bangladesh.

Paintings by Sidharth on Barahmasa

CHET



Chet (March-April)

Chet basant bhala bhavar suhavde

It is the month of Chet
It is spring. All is seemly,
The beautiful bumble-bees
The woodlands in flower;
But there is a sorrow in my soul
For away is the Lord my Master.

If the husband comes not home, how can a wife
Find peace of mind?
Sorrows of separation waste away her body.

The koel calls in the mango grove,
Her notes are full of joy
But there is a sorrow in my soul.

The bumble-bee hovers about the blossoming bough
(A messenger of life and hope)
But O Mother of mine, 'tis like death to me
For there is a sorrow in my soul.

How shall I banish sorrow and find blessed peace?
Sayeth Nanak: When the Lord her Master comes
home to her
Then is spring seemly because she is fulfilled.

Vaisakh

Vaisakh (April-May)

Vaisakh bhala sakha ves kare

Beauteous Vaisakh, when the bough
adorns itself anew

The wife awaits the coming of her lord
Her eyes fixed on the door.

'My love, who alone can help me cross
The turbulent waters of life,
Have compassion for me and come home,
Without thee I am as worthless as a shell.
Love, look thou upon me with favour
And let our eyes mingle
Then I will become priceless beyond
compare.'

Nanak asks: 'Whither seekest thou the
Lord?

Whom awaitest thou?

Thou hast not far to go, for the Lord
Is within thee, thou art His mansion.

If thy body and soul yearn for the Lord
Is within thee, thou art His mansion.

If thy body and soul yearn for the Lord,
The Lord shall love thee
And Vaisakh will beautiful be.'





Jeth (May-June)

Mah jeth bhala pritam kiu bisrai

Why forget the beloved Lord in the good month of Jeth?

The earth shimmers in the summer's heat
The wife makes obeisance and prays
Let me find favour in Thine eyes O Lord,
Thou art great and good
Truth manifest and unshakable,

Of attachments art Thou free.
And I, lowly, humble, helpless.
How shall I approach Thee?
How find the haven of peace?

In the month of Jeth, says Nanak,
She who knoweth the Lord
Becometh like the Lord.
She knoweth Him
By treading the path of virtue.