

NISHAAN

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NAGAARA

**Wonderstruck! The Marvel of Creation
The Clash of Civilisations
– And Sikh Values
An Illustrated Janamsakhi**

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Anand Karaj From counter-ritual to legislative act

In Sikhism, the householder's way of life has been recognised as socially the most plausible and spiritually the most beneficial approach in life. The emphasis that it has received in the Sikh religion is unmatched by what obtains in most other religious communities.

Right from the times of Guru Nanak Dev (1469-1539), the founder of the Sikh faith, Brahmanical rituals have been deprecated as "spiritually purposeless", only serving the exploitative designs of the priestly class. Yet, the ritualistic ceremony connected with Hindu marriage continued to serve even the Sikhs for a long time. This ritual was characterised by chanting of Vedic mantras by the Brahmins while the couple went around the sacrificial fire a specific number of times.

Towards the end of the pontificate of the third Guru, Amar Das (1469-1574), his sublime spiritual composition *Anand* in *Rakali Raga*, became very popular and began to be recited at the close of every congregational session of the Sikhs. It has been common belief among the Sikhs that regular chanting of that holy text generates the experience of celestial bliss—for that is what Anand literally means. It is not improbable that this text would have come to be chanted by Sikhs also as either preamble or prologue affixed to the Vedic marriage ceremony. As a result, the ceremony could have begun to be referred to as the Anand ceremony.

First of all, the text *Lavan* composed by Guru Ram Das (1534-1581) was not composed for the purpose of solemnising a worldly marriage. It metaphorically describes how the soul bride can realise the Divine Groom. The stages of spiritual ascent have been symbolised through the four circumambulations of the marriage ceremony.

The first stage has been described as one of responsible participation in the worldly affairs: shunning evil and observing righteousness, dwelling upon the Lord's Name, adoring the Guru and longing

for celestial bliss.

The second stage is characterised by practicing the presence of God, and living in His Holy Fear thereby losing all worldly fears and the filth of ego.

The *Unstruck Melody* then begins to vibrate within.

In the third stage, the mind, filled with Divine Love, discovers the Lord, receives the Word revealed by Him and becomes able to describe the un-describable Lord.

In the fourth stage, one meets the Lord with intuitive ease, remains absorbed in Him day and night, his desire is fulfilled, and he becomes identified with the mellifluous Lord.

The symbol of marriage has been made use of as an appropriate metaphor. This was a composition of spiritual import and so had not been put to mundane use by the early Sikhs. There is evidence that even up to the time of the 6th Guru (1597-1644), the ceremony of Anand Karaj as prevalent today had not come into practice. This is apparent from the following verse of Bhar Gurdas (1551-1636).

The Guru-oriented Sikh resides ever in the house of peace

Even if he has to observe Vedic rituals as aliens practice.
Var 16.7

At that time there weren't available even sufficient number of copies of Guru Granth Sahib around which the couples could physically circumambulate. The Pothi had yet not become this Guru Granth.

Anand Karaj ceremony is not even prescribed or described in any of the *Rahitnamas*. Only Daya Singh's *Rahitnama* mentions that a Sikh 'must not marry except through Anand.' However, Anand, here, seems to refer to Guru Amar Das's above-mentioned composition which, by then, had become a part of almost all ceremonial occasions.

Bhai Mani Singh in *Bhagat Ratnavali*, records that in response to a petition 'Wajab-ul-Arz by Sahijdhari

Sikhs, Guru Gobind Singh (1666-1708) gave them the following instruction relating to how they may get their marriages solemnised.

“You should first recite Anand, then Ardas and after that you may invite the Brahmins to perform the (Vedic) marriage ceremony. You need not have any reservations about it”.

The distinction between Sahijdhari and Amritdhari Sikhs could not have started before the Baisakhi of 1699 AD. So until then, there was no indication that the Anand Karaj ceremony, as practiced now, had come into vogue.

Even during the times of Maharaja Ranjit Singh (1780-1839) no specifically distinct Sikh marriage ceremony seems to have come into being. Not a single marriage in Ranjit Singh’s family was held through any such ceremony.

Sir Baba Khem Singh Bedi (1832-1905), the founder of the Singh Sabha at Amritsar, is known to have informed his followers that there was no special matrimonial ceremony prescribed for the Sikhs. They could sing kirtan of holy hymns and follow that with the Vedic ritual to solemnise their marriages.

The Singh Sabha movement of late 19th century, however, created a political climate that stimulated and compelled the Sikhs to forge a distinct cultural identity for themselves. One way to do that was to create counter-rituals to the prevalent Brahmanical rituals. This movement resulted in attempts to replace recitation of Vedic mantras with serviceable Gurbani texts for all ceremonial occasions such as birth, naming, betrothal, marriage and death.

The *lavan* shabads were not the earliest that came to be employed for marriage ceremonies. As noted above, it was Anand, popularly called Anand Sahib that came first to be employed first. Then came the following hymn:

Whatever work you wish to accomplish, make it known to the Lord.

He will, then, resolve your affairs; the True Guru truly guarantees this Truth.

With the Saints, you shall taste the treasured Ambrosial Nectar.

The Merciful Lord destroys fear; preserves and protests His slaves.


Says Nanak, by singing the praises of the Lord, you’ll perceive the Un-perceivable Lord.

It was later, in the year 1808, that the recitation or singing of *lavan* came to be employed as an accompaniment of the four circumambulations performed around the holy Guru Granth Sahib. This practice, as vouched by Dr Man Singh Nirankari, was introduced by Baba Sahib Dayal, founder of the Nirankari sect. Followed up by his successor, Shri Darbara Singh from 1855 on, he started an inspired movement for the popularisation of what came to be called the Anand Karaj ceremony.

This movement, however, encountered much initial opposition from Sikhs and Hindus especially of the Dhan Pothohar region. Prominent opponents were Sir Baba Khem Singh Bedi, Sir Nihal Singh Chhachhi and Divan Taurti Rai. At one stage, the Jathedar of Akal Takht as also the Head Granthi of Harmandir Sahib at Amritsar, declined to permit Anand Karaj to be performed in the compound facing the said Takht.

In spite of early opposition, however, the distinctive Anand Karaj ceremony started gaining ground and quickly became more and more popular. By 1909, its popularity became so obvious and the cry for its recognition so strong, that it almost assumed the status of an edict of the Guru Panth. As a result, the Viceroy’s Imperial Legislative Council had to give it official recognition by legislating. *The Anand Marriage Act*. That is how what started as a counter-ritual became a legislative act.

The purpose of this Act was simply to provide legal recognition to this distinctive marriage-ceremony of the Sikhs. It did not legislate on other aspects relating to marriage, such as registration, divorce etc. In respect of all such supplementary aspects, the Sikhs have been subjugated to the Hindi Marriage Act.

However, need has now been expressed by a section of the Sikhs that the Anand Marriage Act should be updated to incorporate in it legislative concerns about all the supplementary issues relating to marriage. A senior Sikh advocate of the Supreme Court has already voiced this view in the media. However, a convincing case has yet to be built to show how the Hindi Marriage Act fails to serve the needs of the Sikh community about the aforesaid sundry issues connected with marriage. 

WONDERSTRUCK!



In the spiritual tradition of Guru Nanak, 'wonder' is a sentiment of extraordinary significance. He has employed a variety of expressions to signify 'wonder'. These include *vismad*, *vidan*, *achraj*, *hairat*, *hairan* and so on. Of these, *vismad* has been used far oftener than others. That is why, the persuasion that he established has often been called *Vismad Marg*.

The sentiment of wonder is a spectacular sentiment - dramatic and overpowering. It comes

to seize one's attention forcefully. It is not just a sentiment; it is, in fact, a window to a new, higher world. True wonder is often associated with some form of revelation - as though we come to have new eyes. Wonder does not have an end. However far we might have advanced intellectually, however great might be the information that we have gathered, there would still be room for wonder to sprout.

Wonder seems to have two aspects. One is an intellectual aspect generated in response to quest; the

THE MARVEL OF CREATION



A view from space: north-western India stretching across the horizon, as it has for millennia.

other is an emotional aspect, a seismic astonishment that makes us gape with admiration and awe. Both these elements form the woof and warp of wonder.

Wonder meets us with a million faces. The first wonder that man encounters is the liminal wonder.

Liminal wonder

Liminal wonder is the one that man encounters at the threshold of his life. It signifies the primal astonishment of human intellect seen in infants and

children who become surprised with every new discovery. New shapes, new colours, new contours, new textures, new tastes, new scents all amaze them. Little children shortly after they have started to talk, start pointing towards one thing after another and ask the adults, "What is this? What is that?" and marvel at the variety that surrounds them. Everything is mysterious for them. They want to touch everything, taste everything, smell everything and marvel at the new experiences they thus encounter.

I am reminded of an event in my own childhood that reflects one of my own experiences of primal wonder. I must, then, have been around three years. I happened to come by a standard weight of metal weighing half *chhatank* (equal, roughly to 30 gm.). I had never seen such a thing before. Its perfectly round contour indented at the margins, its obverse side with some writing on it that I could not cognize and the other side with a smooth pit in it, all intrigued me. The weightiness of that little thing also amazed me and the variable textures on its two sides bewitched me. At that age, I often tried to taste everything that came into my hands. So I put that weight into my mouth. It was devoid of any taste whatsoever. However, as I rolled it about in my mouth with my tongue, it struck against the back of my teeth producing a clicking sound. I was enjoying that sound, when my grandmother saw me in that act. She shouted, "bring it out lest it gets swallowed and goes into your tummy." However, instead of bringing it out, I actually swallowed it just for the heck of it. I was amazed at the hue and cry that my innocent act created among the family members. I was simply intrigued. I was rushed to a hospital where the doctor who saw me called me naughty and told my parents to watch for a day or two. He said, "The weight might get expelled from the child's lower end spontaneously. If that happens, nothing further need be done; if it does not, we might have to open his tummy and take it out." I did not understand how he will open my tummy. May be there is a secret inlet to it, I thought, or my navel can be stretched to let the doctor's hand into the tummy.

However, when that metallic object got expelled on its own after two days, I triumphantly announced it to my parents. Every part of this event was, for me, tinged with wonder that I can still recall.

Liminal wonder soon tends to become leveled out and ceases to arouse any more curiosity. Very many individuals do not go beyond preliminary curiosity at all. However those whose curiosity remains alive are urged to explore supraliminal wonders.

Supraliminal wonder

Supraliminal wonder has a variety of levels that depend on the evolutionary planes that a given mind has attained. The quality of the light distinguishes one plane of consciousness from another.

The ordinary mind appears as a sort of greyness with occasional obscure dots. It has a thick and sticky

ground of neutrality that discolours everything. If ever a flicker of a light happens to appear in it, it is too small and quickly extinguished. A life with such commonplace consciousness mostly lives at the sensual level alone. Basic appetites rule its behaviour. Such individuals pursue no doctrines. They do not understand any art or elegance, muse or verse, virtue and vice. They are not blessed with much knowledge, understanding or intuition. They are able to use some common words, but do not **know** the secret of the Word.

Such lives are lived insipidly in the form of a dull routine. I am here reminded of a couplet from the Urdu poet Akbar Allahabadi who wrote

Kia kahen ahbab kiaa kare numayan kar gaye.

B.A.kia, naukar huye, pension millee, phir mar gaye.

Such minds wade through life without experiencing much wonder. At best a rare and fleeting sense of surprise may come to them which seldom amounts to wonder. An example of such a surprise is the one that is experienced, say, while watching a juggler's tricks.

The elevated consciousness

At this level, the mind is less opaque and more released. It is no longer gray but verges on a bluish tinge. It is also more intense. In it light descends more frequently and more brightly, and survives somewhat longer. Yet, the light is cold and a little hard. This level appears in thinkers and scientists. It is yet a single pointed light.

Scientific wonder

A wonder of science flashes as the sudden discovery that provides the solution of a problem. Archimedes' exclamation, 'Eureka' (I have found) is its prototype. Such discovery often happens with the immediacy of an accident. It thrills the discoverer beyond measure.

Scientific discoveries have given mankind cumulative wonders of tremendous magnitude.

Matter, commonly regarded as concrete has now become abstract. Through erosion, metabolism and other forces, its atoms and molecules get replaced by other atoms and molecules leaving merely an abstract pattern to persist. One sometimes wonders if the entire world is just a hologram image, which can be electronically turned over to be looked at from all sides. In that case, it would obviously be an 'object' in the abstract. The universe not only abounds in abstract objects but a lot of

“emptiness” not only surrounds these objects, but also pervades within them.

Subatomic ‘particles’ are being discovered at great speed. Quarks, antiquarks, unitons and others far too many to name have been discovered by the hundreds. Are they things at all? They resonate like musical notes, behave like waves, observe strange laws of symmetry but cannot be visualised without such analogies as the ‘quantum string’. Interestingly, neither space nor time can be determined much below the magnitude of the atom and at that point great uncertainty prevails as postulated by Heisenberg’s Uncertainty Principle. Yet, these uncertain entities are at the centre of the universe.

The universe is also as abstract as the atom. It has been calculated that the galaxies and the super galaxies are receding at enormous speeds proportional to their distances from us. Just imagine those that are receding at the speed of light and at a range of billions of light years. They are practically unknowable. Then, how about those that are even farther beyond them? Scientific cosmology has assumed bewildering concepts such as black holes and white holes, universe and anti-universe, matter and anti-matter. They simply leave us gaping.

Light that travels at the stupendous speed of 186,282 miles a second appears to be the absolute ultimate for the propagation of material influence anywhere. Interestingly, light can be twisted like a cable. It can also be pumped like a gas, as if through valves. Some scientists have posited a generalisation that “the velocity of light may be a kind of seam in the universe where space meets time, where body meets mind or even, in a sense, where finitude transcends into infinitude”.

The Gene, independent of the atoms, is a kind of message that moves in a wave of meaning through life. That is how an acorn harbours an oak, or an egg generates feathers and contains songs and a map of the stars.

The Mind is unlimited by space and time. Everyone must have asked oneself: where do dreams reside? Does consciousness begin in the atom? Do rocks have their own type of awareness? During the process of procreation, does consciousness divide or merge or altogether renew itself? Where is located the storehouse of memory - in the brain or out in the universe? These questions themselves generate a great sense of wonder.

Evolution in the cosmos progresses from the circle to the helix in ever new dimensions,

creating genes, muscles, rivers, ocean-currents, suns and galaxies. It also creates cycles of fermentation from cells to worlds and further to meta-worlds, bringing about the spiral design of the universe.

It may also be noted here that whatever phenomenon science seeks to explore and research is already present. The wonder that science produces sprouts from the discovery of any of its qualities, characteristics or laws that bind that phenomenon. Scientific research can only deal with testable hypotheses. Whenever science looks beyond that domain, it becomes acutely aware of its limitations.

Scientific wonder, when it sprouts, often creates public impact especially on account of its applications that open up new avenues of technology. The discovery of electricity, as also of the electron, has revolutionised the whole world. Their ever-widening application in communication and information technology seems every day to bewilder the world more and more. However, even the most stupendous discoveries of science and their most dramatic applications tend to become commonplace very soon.

Philosophical Wonder

Like scientific discovery, this level of consciousness may even create new philosophies. In fact, even science itself leads us into some deep philosophies. All the philosophies are founded upon a single point of light from which a philosopher starts. That is why there are so many philosophies.

Every philosophical system is logically perfect because generations of logicians have worked on it. Hence one philosophy does not differ from another philosophy in its logical excellence. They differ in the a priori assumptions with which they start. But these are just flashes of wisdom that can neither be proved nor disproved. Yet, about them philosophers can endlessly wrangle with one another. Such wrangling is always counterproductive and often destructive. The Guru reminds us in this context that

ਖੋਜੀ ਉਪਜੈ ਥਾਦੀ ਬਿਲੈ...

Searching is creative, wrangling is destructive.

SGGS 1244

That is why the Guru admonishes the philosopher and the scholar that they must first understand what they want others to believe.

ਪੰਡਿਤ ਵਾਚਹਿ ਧੋਬੀਆ ਨਾ ਬੂਝਹਿ ਵੀਚਾਰੁ ।
ਅਨ ਕਉ ਮਤੀ ਦੇ ਚਲਹਿ ਮਾਇਆ ਕਾ ਵਾਪਾਰੁ ।

... ..

ਕੇਤੇ ਪੰਡਿਤ ਜੋਤਕੀ ਬੇਦਾ ਕਰਹਿ ਥੀਚਾਰੁ ।

ਵਾਦ ਵਿਰੋਧ ਸਲਾਹਣੇ ਵਾਦੇ ਆਵਣੁ ਜਾਣੁ ।

The Pundits peruse their books but miss their essence.
Instruct they others, but themselves commerce in *Maya*.

.....
So many Pundits and astrologers ponder over the Vedas;
They revel in disputations and continue their controversies
So they come and go.

SGGS 46

The wonder that science or philosophy generates soon expends itself. The wonder of today becomes the commonplace of tomorrow divested of the initial thrill.

The Illumined Consciousness

As the elevated mind turns inwards into its own silence, it attains spiritual ease upon which aesthetic consciousness comes into play. In this state, the mind is flooded with light, as if invaded by it. There is a sudden awakening, an alerted enthusiasm. New relief of experience emerges. The being begins to throb with rhythms. Images sprout along with mysterious correspondences. There is a sudden poetic opening, spontaneous blossoming of creative capacities. The mind is both silenced as well as opened to the Word that is trying to find expression. A marvel occurs; unexpected creativity takes place. Art of such levels unfolds itself of which the ordinary mind of the artist is not capable.

In art, the sentiment of wonder is a spectacular one having demonstrative and dramatic qualities. It produces a domineering effect on its spectators or audience, because it has the power of claiming undivided attention. One can't imagine any system of aesthetics that can ignore this. However, surprisingly in Sanskrit, aesthetics seems to have received only scant attention. At one time, in that system, the sentiment of wonder had been relegated to the subaltern position of an ancillary sentiment. That seems to have sealed its fate for a long time.

It was Bharata, who in his pioneering work *Natya Shastra*, recognised wonder to be a consummate part of his system of eight sentiments that held great influence in the field of aesthetics. He assigned *vismaya* (surprise) as *its sthayibhava*. He not only recognised the general importance of wonder but said further that the presentation of a story should be such as would generate *ashcharya* (surprise, wonder).

Abhinavagupta legislated mainly for the kind of wonder generated by the uniqueness purveyed by miracles. He emphasised that surprise is generated

by a display of the impossible: *asambhavadvastupradarshan*.

Acharya Narayana, it appears, wrote a book on aesthetics in which he seems to have given an original concept of wonder. However, that work has become extinct. All we know about it is from a quotation that his great great grandson, Vishvanath gives in his works. The Acharya seems to have identified *chamatkara* (miraculous wonder of high competence) as the basic ingredient of all *rasas*. Such a quality as *chamatkara* generates the sentiment of wonder. The Acharya therefore concludes that the sentiment of wonder is the chief or perhaps the only aesthetic sentiment there is. Unfortunately, nothing is known about his views on this sentiment apart from the three lines quoted by Vishvanatha. Even he did not develop this concept any further.

The one characteristic of 'wonder' in the context of literature that is universally considered essential is its unexpectedness. However, if the 'unexpected' comes to be anticipated, wonder simply does not arise. The 'unexpected', in fact, includes the miraculous as well as the supernatural occurrences.

In literature, wonder may well be of a contrived nature. This can be created, for example, by giving surprising twists to the plot of a story, or by caricaturing a character. In poetry, *alankars* not only embellish the verse, but also inject into it some ancillary wonder as well. However, wonder as a major sentiment caused by poetry is simply because of its overall excellence (*atishya*).

In Sanskrit aesthetics, then, this debate, whether wonder is only an ancillary sentiment or a major sentiment in its own right, still continues to prevail. Hence some aestheticians consider wonder (*adbhut*) as an independent *rasa*, while others believe that it can be ancillary to any of the other *rasas*.

In the field of literature, it may be said, then, that wonder may be created through the use of techniques and contrivances that tend to inject some kind of novelty in that work. However, wonder sprouts naturally and forcefully if the particular work exhibits unexpected excellence. Such work might well subsume any of the other *rasas*. Where a work generates not just praise, but also a kind of awe, wonder as a major category of aesthetic sentiment is generated.

The Mystical Consciousness

Clear transparency, rapid dynamism and an all-encompassing quality characterise this level of consciousness. Knowledge flashes from the depths of silence. Everything is there waiting for us to perceive. All is happening with terrible rapidity. No direction can be discerned. No time can be perceived. An eternal instant seems to reign. In a single point or a drop of light, a whole cosmos can burst forth. All duality disappears.

Illumination no longer comes from outside. One is one in a point of light. One recognises oneself as light - not just light but also shadow. One is actually shocked by experiencing this identity. All knowledge and cognition gets transmuted in some new way depending on one's preoccupation at the particular moment. One doesn't discover anything outside; one only discovers oneself.

The entire experience is ineffable. The rapidity is too much for memory to grasp anything. What little it may be able to capture, is instantly inhibited by whatever else is happening alongside or what immediately follows it. There is no space except for the space of truth. The mind makes at once too little and too much of it.

Whatever little of this revelation the mind can grab it coats with a layer of thought of its own. It may not be a thought, may well be an image, a poetic expression, a mathematical formula or a religious formulation. Then, it is understood as intellectual, artistic or religious revelation. Such a revelation is formidably powerful. To be 'understood', it has to be diluted or fragmented. It can't be explained. Should one attempt to do so one regrets because one miserably fails. As the Guru reminds us:

ਜੇ ਕੋ ਕਹੈ ਪਛੈ ਪਿਛੁੜਾਇ ।

If one talks about it, one only regrets.

(SGGS p.3)

With patience, however, a new vision begins to emerge and a holistic consciousness begins to take shape. That generates levels of experience characterised by:

- * Feeling of reverence, awe and wonder.
- * A high value of the experience
- * Feeling of a more direct perception of reality
- * Feeling that it is an intuitive experience and
- * Feeling of joy and sensory enhancement.

This experience then transforms even one's usual sensibility according to the new perception of reality.

Mystical Wonder in Guru Granth Sahib

Guru Nanak gives us evidence of this kind of transformed perception of reality. For him every object assumes a new meaning. Nothing is an ordinary object. The Cosmic Person appears to pervade everything. That generates great wonder:

ਆਪੇ ਰਹਿਆ ਸਮਾਇ ਸੋ ਵਿਸਮਾਦੁ ਭਇਆ ।

He Himself is permeating everywhere;
And this is amazing and wonderful.

(SGGS p.753)

ਨਾਨਕ ਸੁਣਿ ਵੇਖਿ ਰਹਿਆ ਵਿਸਮਾਦੁ ਮੇਰਾ ਪ੍ਰਭੁ ਰਹਿਆ ਸਮਾਈ ।

Nanak is wonder-struck, hearing and seeing his God
pervading everywhere.

(SGGS p.912)

Wherever he casts his glance he perceives the wonder of the Lord's Creation:

ਪਰਪੰਚ ਵੇਖਿ ਰਹਿਆ ਵਿਸਮਾਦੁ ।

Gazing upon the Wonder of God's Creation,
I am struck with Wonder.

SGGS p. 11 74

ਬਿਸਮ ਭਏ ਬਿਸਮਾਦ ਦੇਖਿ ਕੁਦਰਤਿ ਤੇਰੀਆ ।

I am wonder-struck beholding Your
created Nature.

SGGS p. 521

He does not only behold the presence of God everywhere, he also perceives His Creation chanting His Name and singing His praises. He finds a sparrow chirping or a grasshopper producing his vociferation and he perceives they are chanting the Name of God:

ਅਧੁ ਗੁਲਾ ਚਿੜੀ ਕਾ ਚੁਗਣੁ ਰੈਣਿ ਚੜੀ ਬਿਲਲਾਇ ॥

ਖਸਮੈ ਭਾਵੈ ਓਹਾ ਚੰਗੀ ਜਿ ਕਰੇ ਖੁਦਾਇ ਖੁਦਾਇ ॥

The sparrow eats only half a grain, then it flies
through the sky and chirps.

The good sparrow is pleasing to her Lord and
Master, if she chirps the Name of the Lord.

ਅਕ ਸਿਉ ਪ੍ਰੀਤਿ ਕਰੇ ਅਕ ਤਿਡਾ ਅਕ ਡਾਲੀ ਥਹਿ ਖਾਇ ॥

ਖਸਮੈ ਭਾਵੈ ਓਹੋ ਚੰਗਾ ਜਿ ਕਰੇ ਖੁਦਾਇ ਖੁਦਾਇ ॥

The grass-hopper loves the milkweed plant;
Perched on its branch, and eats it.

It becomes good and pleasing to its Lord and
Master, if it chirps the Name of the Lord.

SGGS p. 1286

One hymn of Guru Nanak titled *Sodar* is so important that it appears three times in Guru Granth Sahib. In this the

Guru describes how at the Door of the Almighty, the entire creation is singing songs of His praises. In the Guru's court, it was chanted every morning as part of *Japji* and sung every evening as an independent *chauki*. In this hymn, the Guru tries to describe all those that are praising God -men, angels, gods, goddesses, mendicants, saints, scholars, beautiful damsels, heroes, primary elements, scriptures, universes etc. It makes a long list that extend over several lines; and then the Guru says

ਹੋਰਿ ਕੇਤੇ ਗਾਵਨਿ ਸੇ ਮੈ ਚਿਤਿ ਨ ਆਵਨਿ ਨਾਨਕੁ ਕਿਆ ਵੀਚਾਰੇ ।

So many more Your Name exalt, Nanak but
Recollects them not.

SGGS p.6

Guru Nanak is wonder struck at the immense diversity of Creation every item of which generates amazement in him.

ਵਿਸਮਾਦੁ ਪਉਣੁ ਵਿਸਮਾਦੁ ਪਾਣੀ ॥

Wonderful is air, wonderful is water.



ਵਿਸਮਾਦੁ ਅਗਨੀ ਖੇਡਹਿ ਵਿਡਾਣੀ ॥

Wonderful is fire, itself works wonders.

ਵਿਸਮਾਦੁ ਧਰਤੀ ਵਿਸਮਾਦੁ ਖਾਣੀ ॥

Wonderful the earth, wonderful the sources of creation.

ਵਿਸਮਾਦੁ ਸਾਦਿ ਲਗਹਿ ਪਰਾਣੀ ॥

Wonderful are the tastes to which mortals are attached.

ਵਿਸਮਾਦੁ ਸਿਜੋਗੁ ਵਿਸਮਾਦੁ ਵਿਜੋਗੁ ॥

Wonderful is union, and wonderful separation.

ਵਿਸਮਾਦੁ ਭੁਖ ਵਿਸਮਾਦੁ ਭੋਗੁ ॥

Wonderful is hunger, wonderful is satisfaction.

ਵਿਸਮਾਦੁ ਸਿਫਤਿ ਵਿਸਮਾਦੁ ਸਾਲਾਹ ॥

Wonderful is His Praise, wonderful his adoration.

ਵਿਸਮਾਦੁ ਉਝੜ ਵਿਸਮਾਦੁ ਰਾਹ ॥

Wonderful is the wilderness, wonderful the path.

ਵਿਸਮਾਦੁ ਠੇੜੈ ਵਿਸਮਾਦੁ ਦੂਰਿ ॥

Wonderful is closeness, wonderful is distance.

ਵਿਸਮਾਦੁ ਦੇਖੈ ਹਜਰਾ ਹਜੂਰਿ ॥

Wonderful is what is visible right in front..

ਵੇਖਿ ਵਿਡਾਣੁ ਰਹਿਆ ਵਿਸਮਾਦੁ ॥

Beholding His wonders, I am wonder-struck.

ਨਾਨਕ ਬੁਝਣੁ ਪੂਰੈ ਭਾਗਿ ॥੧॥

O Nanak, those who understand this are blessed with
perfect destiny.

SGGS P. 464

After counting many items of the great diversity that evoke wonder, the Guru not just exclaims his amazement, but also says that having such an experience is being blessed with perfect destiny.

The Guru hears His Lord, beholds Him, and fills his own perception with God and marvels at His omnipresence.

The Guru does not experience wonder only from what is located in the outside world. He also delves deep into his inside. There he hears the melody of silence the un-struck melody (*Anahat naad*).

ਸੁੰਨ ਸਮਾਧਿ ਅਨਹਤ ਤਹ ਨਾਦ ।

ਕਹਨੁ ਨ ਜਾਈ ਅਚਰਜ ਬਿਸਮਾਦ ।

There, in deep Samadhi (one hears) the unstruck melody

The wonder and marvel of it cannot be described.

SGGS p.293

This music of the inner silence appears as if five different musical instruments (*panch shabad*) are playing together as an orchestra. And the Guru marvels at what he calls 'the perfect melody'.

ਪੰਚ ਸਬਦ ਤਹ ਪੂਰਨ ਨਾਦ ।

The five primal sound currents *echo* perfect melody.

ਕਹਨੁ ਨ ਜਾਈ ਅਚਰਜ ਬਿਸਮਾਦੁ ।

Vibrations of the wondrous un-struck melody amaze me.

SGGS p.888

ਤਪਤਿ ਬੁਝੀ ਸੀਤਲ ਆਘਾਣੇ ।

The fire within me is quenched

ਸੁਨਿ ਅਲਾਦ ਬਿਸਮ ਭਏ ਬਿਸਮਾਦ ।

Hearing the un-struck melody, I am wonder-struck.

ਅਨਦੁ ਭਇਆ ਨਾਨਕ ਮਨਿ ਸਾਚਾ ।

I am in ecstasy, and my mind imbued with Truth

ਪੂਰਨ ਪੂਰੇ ਨਾਦ ।

Brimming with perfect celestial melody.

SGGS p.1217.

This is a very delicious experience (*rasa*), full of delightful taste (*swaad*). Whoever lives through it, cannot forget its relish:

ਬਿਸਮਨ ਬਿਸਮ ਭਏ ਬਿਸਮਾਦ ।
This stunning wonder fills me with amazement.

ਜਿਨਿ ਬੁਝਿਆ ਤਿਨਿ ਆਣਿਆ ਸਾਦ ।
One who experiences it relishes its state of joy.

SGGS p.285

Wherever one casts one's gaze, outside or inside, one only beholds the Lord. Guru Arjan Dev recounts this experience for us:

ਬਿਸਮੁ ਧੇਏ ਬਿਸਮੁ ਸੁਣੀਐ ਬਿਸਮਾਦੁ ਨਦਰੀ ਆਇਆ ।
ਜਲਿ ਬਲਿ ਮਹੀਅਲਿ ਪੂਰਨ ਸੁਆਮੀ ਘਟਿ ਘਟਿ ਰਹਿਆ ਸਮਾਇਆ ।

I behold the Lord, I hear the Lord and He it is who fills my perception. The Perfect Lord pervades the waters, the land and the skies and permeates every heart.

SGGS p. 778

ਬਿਸਮ ਭਈ ਖੇਖਿ ਬਿਸਮਾਦੀ ਪੂਰਿ ਰਹੇ ਕਿਰਪਾਵਤ ॥
ਪੀਓ ਅੰਮ੍ਰਿਤ ਨਾਮੁ ਅਮੋਲਕ ਜਿਉ ਚਾਖਿ ਗੁੰਗਾ ਮੁਸਕਾਵਤ ॥
ਜੈਸੇ ਪਵਨੁ ਥੰਧ ਕਰਿ ਰਾਖਿਓ ਬੂਝ ਨ ਆਵਤ ਜਾਵਤ ॥
ਜਾ ਕਉ ਰਿਦੈ ਪ੍ਰਗਾਸੁ ਭਇਓ ਹਰਿ ਉਆ ਕੀ ਕਹੀ ਨ ਜਾਇ ਕਹਾਵਤ ॥

I am wonderstruck, gazing upon the Wondrous Lord. The Merciful Lord is All-pervading everywhere.

I drink in the Invaluable Nectar of the Naam, the Name of the Lord. Like the mute, I can only smile
I cannot speak of its flavour.

As the breath is held in bondage, no one can understand its coming in and going out. So is that person, whose heart is enlightened by the Lord
His story cannot be told.

SGGS p. 1205

The Guru, in ecstasy, sings the praises of the Lord, and yearns for His vision. His desire is granted. See! What happens then:

ਹਉ ਢਾਢੀ ਦਰਿ ਗੁਣ ਗਾਵਾ ਜੇ ਹਰਿ ਪ੍ਰਭ ਭਾਵੈ ॥
ਪ੍ਰਭੁ ਮੇਰਾ ਬਿਰ ਥਾਵਰੀ ਹੋਰ ਆਵੈ ਜਾਵੈ ॥
ਸੋ ਮੰਗਾ ਦਾਨੁ ਗੁੰਗਾਈਆ ਜਿਤੁ ਭੁਖ ਲਹਿ ਜਾਵੈ ॥
ਪ੍ਰਭ ਜੀਉ ਦੇਵਹੁ ਦਰਸਨੁ ਆਪਣਾ ਜਿਤੁ ਢਾਢੀ ਤ੍ਰਿਪਤਾਵੈ ॥
ਅਰਦਾਸਿ ਸੁਣੀ ਦਾਤਾਰਿ ਪ੍ਰਭਿ ਢਾਢੀ ਕਉ ਮਹਲਿ ਬੁਲਾਵੈ ॥
ਪ੍ਰਭ ਦੇਖਦਿਆ ਦੁਖ ਭੁਖ ਗਈ ਢਾਢੀ ਕਉ ਮੰਗਣੁ ਚਿਤਿ ਨ ਆਵੈ ॥
ਸਭੇ ਇਛਾ ਪੂਰੀਆ ਲਗਿ ਪ੍ਰਭ ਕੈ ਪਾਵੈ ॥

I am a minstrel at His Door, singing His Glorious Praise, to please my Lord.

My God is eternal and stable; it is others who come and go.
I beg for that one gift from the Lord of the World, which will satisfy my hunger.

Dear God, please bless Your minstrel with Your Gracious Vision, that should satisfy him

God, the Great Giver, hears the prayer, and summons the minstrel to His Presence.

Gazing upon God, the minstrel became rid of all pain and hunger and could not think of asking anything whatever.

All desires were fulfilled, touching the feet of God.

SGGS p. 1097

Blessed by the Vision of God, one is not only fulfilled but also sanctified.

ਦਰਸਨ ਧੇਖਤ ਭਏ ਪੁਨੀਤਾ ।

Beholding His Glorious Vision one is sanctified.

SGGS p. 101

One is then impelled to sing His praises and be amazed as well as enraptured.

ਗੁਨ ਗਾਵਤ ਪ੍ਰਭ ਅਗਮ ਨਾਕੁਰ ਕੇ ਗੁਨ ਗਾਇ ਰਹੇ ਰੈਰਾਨ ।

I sing the Glorious praises of the Transcendent Lord, and



singing His praises I am amazed and enraptured.

SGGS p.1335

One is so enraptured then that one does not want to see anything else.

ਦੇਖਿਓ ਅਚਰਜੁ ਮਹਾ ਮੰਗਲ ਰੂਪ ਕਿਛ ਆਨ ਨਹੀ ਦਿਸਦਾਵੈ ।

I have seen the wonderful Lord, the embodiment of supreme bliss, and now I want to see nothing else.

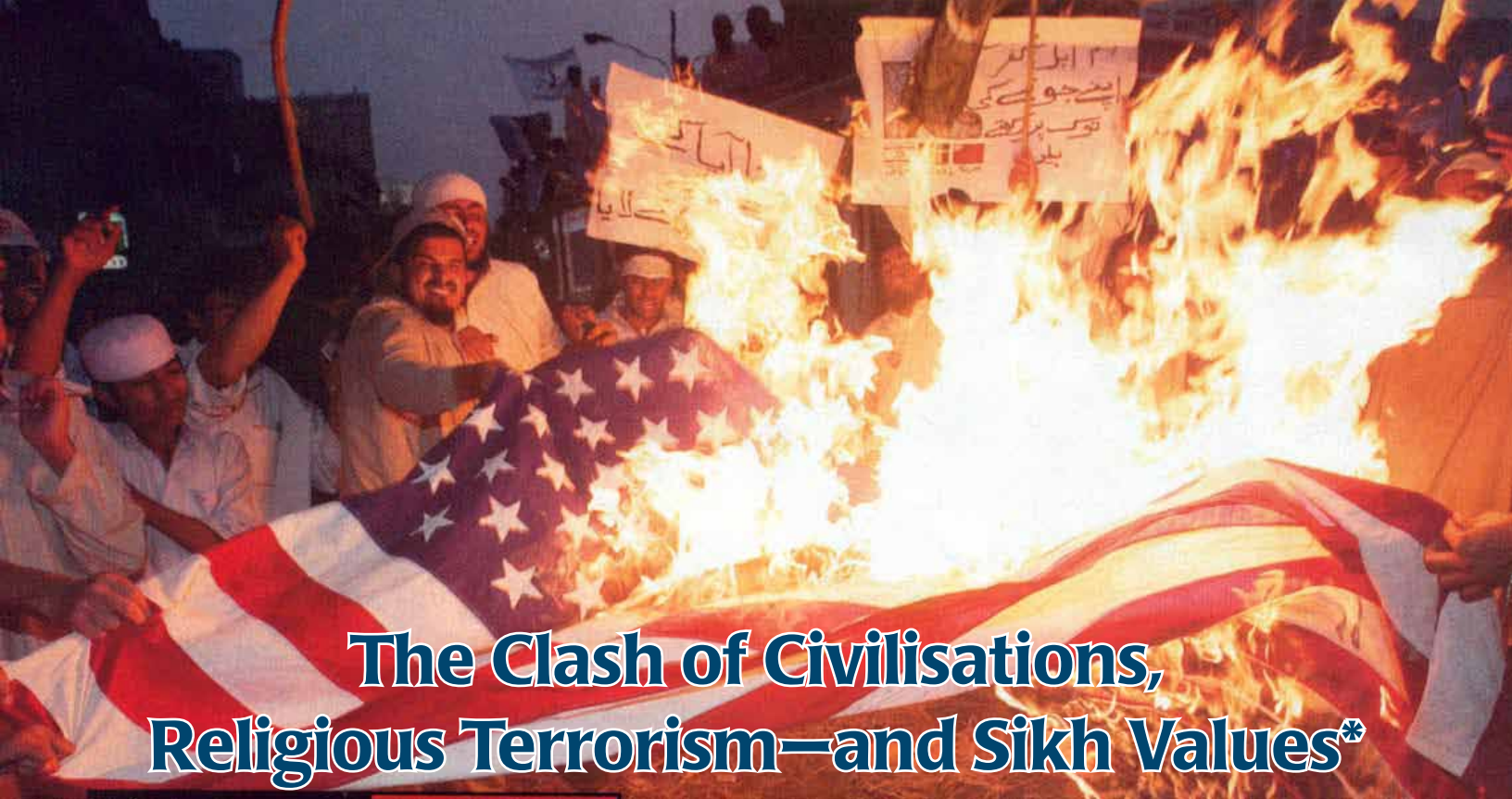
SGGS p.978

This then is the wonder beyond which there is no other wonder. Having experienced it, one can only say:

ਵੇਖਿ ਵਿਛਾਣੁ ਰਹਿਆ ਵਿਸਮਾਦੁ ।

Beholding His marvels, I am simply wonderstruck.

SGGS p.464



The Clash of Civilisations, Religious Terrorism—and Sikh Values*

Human history is in effect, a history of human conflict. Innumerable studies have been undertaken from the dawn of history to understand and explain the nature of conflict and wars interpreted in accordance with understanding of the realistic school, or of those that believe in the intrinsic nature of mankind being responsible for conflict. In reality no single factor adequately explains the reasons why mankind engages itself in conflict and wars largely because the phenomenon is inevitably far more complex than what any single parameter can adequately explain. And it seems that expansion of human civilisation and increasing interdependence in the world has not reduced the scope of human conflict. It is but natural that scholars and policy-makers would focus on the nature and causes of human conflict.

But I must offer a word of explanation why I selected this theme for the Memorial Lecture before I proceed further. Professor Samuel Huntington is a world renowned political scientist and his thesis a decade ago became the subject of international attention and debate. In some ways his prophecy became self-fulfilling. At least, in my view, his thesis actually provided the rationale for some of the conflicts that may or may not have taken place for reasons quite different from those that have been postulated by Professor Huntington. But it is

clear that this thesis triggered an action-reaction phenomenon which has actually increased the polarisation between the West and Islam where specific events, including the terrorist attack on 9/11 were perceived as a manifestation of the thesis on such a clash of civilisations.

My own understanding, limited as it is, throughout has been that fundamental changes that many have seen as a consequence of the end of Cold War appeared different from different perspectives. The Cold War itself was bipolar essentially because of the military confrontation which was also linked to economic and trading polarisation. But progressively these factors had been losing their salience with the passage of time, especially as the decolonising world assumed increasing stake in world affairs. What had been happening well before the end of the Cold War confrontation was the evolution of a more multipolar international systems, but which because of identifiable factors was more in the nature of a polycentric system whose central characteristic was the phenomenon of concurrent cooperation and competition in strategic terms which could break out into a conflict in one area while cooperation in other areas among states would continue. And the fact is that for quite some time to come the international order would continue in a state of transition where major centres of power, both the newly emerging ones

as well as the traditional centres, would continue to try and improve their relative position in terms of their assets and ability to shape the international order. Conflicts, armed or not, would inevitably take place in this process, especially if the world moves toward greater polarisation of multipolarity or even a new bipolarity. But where would the thesis of clash of civilisations fit in this landscape?

Let us therefore, start by looking closely at the Huntington thesis. The essence of this can be found in the opening shots of his *Foreign Affairs* article in 1993 which I would like to quote in full:

“World politics is entering a new phase and intellectuals have not hesitated to proliferate visions of what it will be—the end of history, the return of traditional rivalries between nation states and the decline of the nation state from the conflicting pulls of tribalism and globalism—among others. Each of these visions catches aspects of the emerging reality. Yet they all miss a crucial, indeed a central, aspect of what global politics is likely to be in the coming years.

“It is my hypothesis that the fundamental source of conflict in this new world will not be primarily ideological or primarily economic. The great divisions among humankind and the dominating source of conflict will be cultural. Nation states will remain the most powerful actors in world affairs, but the principal conflicts of global politics will occur between nations and groups of different civilisations. The clash of civilisations will dominate global politics. The fault lines between civilisations will be the battle lines of the future.”

The contradiction in this thesis is obvious. If the nation-state were to remain the “most powerful actors” in world affairs, to which I agree, then how can civilisations, which have complex composition which Huntington admits, dominate global politics? In fact the weight of empirical evidence points to the weakening of the nation state (whether authoritarian or democratic) leading to ethno-sectarian and tribal conflicts and the growth of religious extremism and terrorism. Afghanistan, Cambodia, Somalia, Rwanda Brundi, and even break up of the USSR and Yugoslavia besides numerous examples in the late 1980s and early 1990s are part of that evidence. And the “groups of different civilisations” that he refers to were promoted by the nation-states in pursuit of their national interests rather than by the Western or Christian civilisational imperatives.

Interestingly Professor Huntington cites a number of cases in his book as evidence in support of his point. But during the decade before his book was published, facts point toward a direction different than what he would want us to follow. For example, Najibullah was in power in Afghanistan even as his article was first published. But that war, which brought the Mujahideen into power and finally their replacement by force by even more radical Islamists — the Taliban — supported by the Islamic Republic of Pakistan was all part of the same civilisation in Huntington’s thesis. And the final war by United States in 2001 to dethrone the protégé of its protégé (Pakistan) was anything but a clash of civilisations, fought as it was on the ground essentially by the Northern Alliance (of earlier Mujahideen groups). And so were the Iraq-Iran war, the Iraq-Kuwait war, the Kurdish insurgencies in Turkey, Iraq, Iran etc. all part of the Islamic civilisation. At the other end of Asia, the bitter feud between the Sinic civilisation’s prime members, China and Taiwan was actually in the process of leading to a shooting war in 1996 with China firing hundreds of missiles abeam Taiwan to warn it against independence and even going to the extent of threatening the use of nuclear weapons against the United States if it supported Taiwan in its efforts.

On the other hand, take the case of Indonesia. With the world’s largest Muslim population which was seen (pre-1996) as one of the “economic tigers”, Indonesia, obviously part of the Islamic world, was seriously talked of as a contender for permanent UN Security Council membership, had friendly relations not only with all Southeast Asian states, but also with Australia and New Zealand over a long time. It entered into a security alliance with Australia much to the unhappiness of the Muslim states of the region. Islamic fundamentalism and domestic violence came to Indonesia not in pursuit of any clash of civilisation but as a consequence of the economic crisis of 1996 which raised fundamental questions about nature of the nation-state. The case of collapse of the Soviet Union is instructive, as indeed is that of Yugoslavia which disintegrated in great violence.

As much as the USSR under Gorbachev detached itself from East European countries and its liabilities toward them, Russia finally decided to break away from the USSR primarily to take care of Russian interests. What happened in the near bloodless change was one nation-state separating into a number

of nation-states, many of them (like those in Central Asia) weak states struggling to survive and who are leaning back on Moscow for support while Moscow is forging strategic partnerships with China to keep the US out of the region. While people turned to religion in the former Soviet space when socio-economic crises hit them, anybody who had gone around the Soviet Union even in 1990-91 would not have noticed any religious divide leave alone signs of civilisational clash. Similarly, Yugoslavia broke up, but with violence, essentially because Tito had left behind a fundamentally weak structure which came under severe stress due to national interests of external powers and those of separating powers. Croatia, which witnessed the most serious ethnic cleansing

terms. While the two have a deep inter-relationship, they are not synonymous.*

Intellectual Foundations of Religious Terrorism

All significant changes in human history, benign or destructive, have their roots in belief systems and ideas that shape the actions of people. A historical study of current-day terrorism would indicate that there are identifiable important ideas and events shaping the intellectual foundations and beliefs that have brought us to the current state of violence through terror. Slavery, apartheid, untouchability and other social-political forms of hard and soft violence acquired legitimacy and strength because people started to believe in them as important and even desirable or necessary and when they could finally be abolished, it essentially came about through the force of ideas of people no longer willing to accept them in civilised society. The central idea common to all these phenomenon was the perpetuation of inequality among men and their abolition came from the reinforcement of the value of universalism and the belief in the equality of human beings.

It is, therefore, extremely important for us to focus on the ideas, values and belief systems that have shaped terrorism

in its modern form, where otherwise normal and educated persons like those who flew airliners into the World Trade Centre and the Pentagon on 11 September, 2001, opt for terrorism as a means of

* For example, his representation of post-1990 World of Civilisations is based on four out of nine civilizations in terms of only religion (Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilisations and the Remaking of World Order*, New Delhi, Viking in Penguin Books, 1996, Map 1.3, p. 28-29). Curiously, Pakistan and Bangladesh are depicted as Islamic civilizations in South Asia ignoring the centuries old Indian/Hindu civilization that they are part of.



Sikh organisations in India and from abroad, rushed relief supplies to the earthquake stricken areas of the Kashmir valley, with its Muslim majority.

and conflict is already in the process of receiving back 300,000 Serbs (and Muslims) who had left during the vicious conflict a decade ago.

But it is India that represents the greatest negation of the Huntington thesis. Indians were quite confused when the thesis was propounded a decade ago because of the problem that Professor Huntington has treated religion and civilisation in interchangeable

social-political change, where self-destruction also becomes an integral component of the act of killing innocents.

Terrorism has shifted from its traditional orientation to politico-religious ideology driven violence. Compared to their near absence three decades ago, today religious groups constitute over two-third of the militant/terrorist entities in the world. Ideological reasons had driven the Cold War and its hot segment, the proxy wars. Towards end of the Cold War, religion was increasingly exploited for political and ideological purposes in Afghanistan to provide motivation for war and violence. The nearly two decade war in Afghanistan was fuelled and sustained by ideological factors, domestic, regional and global. Religion is coming to play an increasing role in politics even in states that have pursued liberal democratic or socialist ideologies. International security is consequently affected seriously, because "... the combination of religion and politics is potentially explosive. The combination of religion and nationalism is stronger, but a blend of the three has an extremely destructive potential."

While Islamic terrorism is not the only form of indiscriminate killings, its study provides us with a wide range of indicators of the strategic logic that drives it. We may recall the chemical weapon attack by the Aum Shinrykio group in Tokyo subway in March 1995 where, but for malfunction of the aerosol dispenser, five-digit casualties (compared to two deaths) would have taken place. We also have gone through the phase of terrorism in Punjab rationalised by those who prosecuted it in the name of religion. Terrorism in Jammu & Kashmir on-going now for nearly two decades, prosecuted under an

ideology mix of "liberation struggle" and justified in the name of religion, pursued in terms of Islamic jihad as the core motivator (especially for foreign fighters/terrorists) is not only a classical example of modern religious terrorism, but also one of the major manifestations of global terrorism whose epicentre lies in Pakistan-Afghanistan even four years after a global war on terrorism was declared under US leadership and Afghanistan liberated from the Taliban.

The ideological foundations for radicalism in Islam (a religion whose very term means "peace") were being built in different places with inevitable variations since at least the 1960s if not earlier. We



Core values of the Sikh emphasises "Sarbat da Bhala": the well being of all humanity.

can identify five overlapping periods of identifiable progression as Islam moved in the minds of some people from being a social-ethical ideology toward the rise of political Islam and its violent jihadi manifestations during the second half of twentieth century.

*Broadly, the modernisation processes, socio-economic changes, shift of rural populations to urban regions, transformation of the joint family system into nuclear families and a host of other factors have been at the root of increased need for religion as an emotional anchor in societies across the world.

The beginning of the early phase can be traced to the global revival and resurgence of religion in general. In our part of the world this also saw the exploitation of religion for political purposes and the creation of Pakistan in the process. The rise of ideologues across the Muslim world like Sayyid Qutb in Egypt, Iranian Ayatollah Khomeini who lived for long in Iraq and Maulana Maududi who moved from India to Pakistan clearly promoted the philosophy of radical Islamism which in due course was to acquire a much more militant form. Surprisingly we have so little literature and studies on Maududi's philosophy and the intellectual power of Islamism created by Maududi and its impact on the minds of people in the Islamic Republic of Pakistan beyond knowing that General Zia ul-Haq was a great admirer of Maulana Maududi. What we know is that his influence and power has been misused (as so often happens with power unbounded by reason and restraint) with the attempts to transform Islam into an instrument of violent political change - and in the eyes of some to make it the dominant creed in the world.

The Palestinian cause has provided a major reason for their resort to violent action, though it has also been employed as a tool to promote the concept of jihad among Muslim populations by their leaders in other countries. But it was the 1967 dramatic defeat of Arab countries by Israel in the Six Day War that left a deep sense of humiliation thus aggravating the radicalism that was taking roots. The establishment of the OIC (Organisation of Islamic Conferences) was symptomatic although almost all the interests and concerns of countries party to OIC were similar to those of other non-Muslim developing countries.

Other events combined in the early 1970s to shape the ideology of militant Islam. The thrust for this process came from the Saudi (and other Arab oil producers) decision to raise the price of oil after the Arab-Israeli Yom Kippur War in October 1973. A significant part of the additional revenues started to be used for supporting religious education and activities. Saudi Arabia not only used the large sums available for the propagation of Islam, but also its particular Wahhabism which received a strong boost. Within a decade Islamic educational institutions, ranging from tens of thousands of *madrassas* (religious schools) to international and national Islamic universities had mushroomed in many countries with generous support from Saudi Arabia. Inevitably many thousands of these seminaries started to teach greater

radicalism, extremism and jihadi philosophy (and even weapon training). Since the bulk of funding for religious charities and madrassas was channelled through the clergy, the mullahs and maulvis started to acquire a powerful influence on politics and society unprecedented in Muslim history.

At another plane, Pakistan's national identity had been built on the concept of a two-nation theory which claimed that Muslims constituted a separate nation from non-Muslims and hence the partition of India in 1947. But failure to cater for the legitimate rights and aspirations of its Muslim brethren in East Pakistan ultimately undermined that sense of identity as well as the ideology on the basis of which Pakistan had itself been created. This in turn rebounded by reinforcing the need to strengthen the Islamic ideology as the basis of the state even more toward Islamism.

Smarting from the military defeat of 1971 in a war that erupted from Pakistan domestic instability, especially to evolve a working relationship between its majority and minority population, (with the two-nation theory on which Pakistan was established having dissolved with the majority region of the Muslim country declaring independence and disillusioned by the lack of support from its main allies, the United States and China) the country leaned much more toward Islamism as the panacea for its problems, besides using this as the placebo, as an alternative to development and egalitarianism, in order to keep the exploited masses in the feudal society docile. ZA Bhutto, the flamboyant leader of Pakistan introduced socialism with Islamic characteristics which in reality was simply to preserve the feudal system of society. The Pakistan Army even modified its motto by 1976 now to include "jihad" in the ways of Allah.

Concurrently Pakistan focused its energies to spread its influence, if not control, westwards seeking "strategic depth" by bringing in Muslim countries into a vague cooperative framework where Pakistan could expand its influence, besides pursuing a clandestine nuclear weapon programme, often labelled the "Islamic Bomb." With the military coup of 1977 which brought General Zia ul-Haq to power for the next eleven years, also began a deeper "Islamisation" of Pakistan partly in pursuit of General Zia's personal belief (including his respect for Maulana Maududi and his philosophy) and partly to provide him with the political legitimacy to rule

with the army as his constituency. Pakistanis Army was soon to start claiming that it was not only the defender of the territorial sovereignty of Pakistan, but also its ideological frontiers.

The Afghan War and Jihad

It is in this context that the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan in 1979 (accompanied as it did with Iranian Revolution) and the war that followed it that Islamic jihad found a new rationale as an “instrument of politics by other means.” That it was promoted as such by the most powerful liberal secular democracy supported by developed industrialised democracies provided it a new dimension of legitimacy. Each one of the eight guerrilla resistance groups and their fighters created, funded, armed, trained and directed by CIA through Pakistan as the front-line state (and its ISI as the local manager) with today’s terrorist number one, Osama bin Laden, were proudly referred to in the West as the “Mujahideen.”

In continuation of the intellectual-ideological revival and resurgence of religion, legitimisation of terror in the name of Islam had evolved by the 1980s as a politico-military strategy in pursuit of perceived national interests. Pakistani leadership not only introduced greater Islamisation in society after Bangladesh broke away in 1971, but its military leadership actively sought to rationalise and legitimise the use of terror as being sanctified by religion. General Zia ul-Haq as the head of state and the army encouraged such efforts. In one of the worst known perverse interpretation of the holy book, Brigadier S. K. Malik, then a serving army officer, concluded that the Holy Quran enjoins upon the believers to use terror as a weapon of war.

As Malik wrote:

“The Quranic military strategy thus enjoins us to prepare ourselves for war to the utmost in order to strike terror into the hearts of the enemies, known or hidden, while guarding ourselves from being terror stricken by the enemy” (emphasis in original).

The book teaches that terror must be struck during the preparatory stage, in the run up to war, during war and for war termination. Terror struck into the hearts of the enemies, therefore, “is not only a means, it is the end in itself. Once a condition of terror into the opponent’s heart is obtained, hardly anything is left to be achieved. It is a point where the means and the ends meet and merge.” Later army chief General Aslam Beg and other army leaders inevitably quoted from these

conclusions to exhort military officers and soldiers on the use of terror as sanctioned by religion.

Terrorism as an Instrument of Policy

This was the army (and its extension, the Inter-Service Intelligence agency) which took on the task of training, equipping, organising and directing the Mujahideen covert war which extensively used terror as a weapon against the Soviet Union and Afghan government through the 1980s and fully supported by the United States. In the process it acquired enormous expertise, sophisticated weapons and equipment, and motivation to organise and prosecute religious terrorism as an instrument of state policy.

The Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan in 1989, planned for years, had a unique but unanticipated effect especially since it happened to be followed soon after by the Soviet collapse two years later. While the West led by the US claimed victory in the Cold War, those who reposed faith in the spread of Islamism claimed the “defeat” of a super power by Islamic jihad. To a lot of “Mujahideen” as the new soldiers of fortune, this provided a powerful boost to political Islam and its violent manifestations. Islamic fundamentalism and jihad erupted across the world soon after end of the Afghanistan War ranging from the Balkans on one side to the Caucuss, Chechnya and Central Asia, to Kashmir and on to Southeast Asia. When the Mujahideen government in Kabul



Innocent victim of the employment of terror: aftermath of the serial bombing in Varanasi, March 2006.

refused to follow the dictates from Islamabad, they were replaced a couple of years later by the Taliban, a more radical version of the Mujahideen that provided shelter and help to Al Qaeda.

The result has been to alter the classical Clausewitzian doctrine that war is an extension of politics by other means to a new prescription that “war through terror would be an instrument of politics and foreign policy/military strategy by other (non-diplomatic and non-military) means.” This has to be seen in the context of longer term trends that have legitimised terrorism:

■ Although concerns about civilian casualties have started to emerge, for a variety of reasons targeting of civilians has been increasingly legitimised during the past two centuries. Starting from the Napoleonic Wars to the First World War, populations were not only increasingly incorporated in wars, but also started to become the prime target of it. Released of earlier limitations in having to necessarily destroy the adversary’s military or conquer his territory first, air warfare made it possible to target the adversary nation’s society (and its “will”) directly. The essential target was the enemy nation. So it is in the case of terrorism. Douhet was forthright about inflicting *terror from the skies* when he prophesised that victory “must depend upon smashing the material and moral resources of a people caught in a frightful cataclysm which haunts them everywhere without cease till the final collapse of all social organisation.” As technology advanced and matured, this was manifested in the city busting and fire bombing of population reaching a climax at Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Society had become totally inclusive to war in the total war paradigm. Nuclear strategies, with the potential of mass destruction and nuclear winter, have perpetuated the paradigm since then. The result has been that while trends of the past two centuries had made society inclusive to war, the trends of the past four decades are, in addition, making war inclusive to society. Expansion of war (and violent conflict) in social depth is one of the most serious challenges to democratic principles, society and peace (and hence prosperity, progress and human rights).

■ Afghanistan was the classic example where clandestine warfare under the banner of religious jihad was promoted by the United States (and Pakistan, though for different reasons) encouraging the spread of weapons, narcotics and violence into

society in the name of jihad. The debris of Cold War has further eroded the control of the State over weapons.

■ Distinction between domestic terrorism and international terrorism has been diffusing owing to greater external involvement in internal terrorist violence in a country and the impact of globalisation on trans-national terrorism. Today there is hardly any significant domestic armed conflict that does not actively receive political support, weapons, serious financial assistance and safe havens beyond the borders where terrorist acts are committed.

But the most crucial aspect of the spread of religious terrorism has been the ideology and values that do not believe in the equality of the human beings. The concept of Islamic *Um'mah* has been misinterpreted to propagate religion and that too, a sectarian approach to religion, as the basis of universality. For example, less than liberal Muslim societies, leave alone Islamic fundamentalism, also deny Muslim women equal rights. This reinforces the belief system that seeks to use the force of indiscriminate killing in the name of religion, especially where interpreted in terms of infidels belonging to a different belief system even if in the same religion. In some respects this is the basis of Huntington’s thesis of “Clash of Civilisations.”

Sikh Values

If we were to define the core value of the Sikhs, then perhaps the one value that stands out is that of the equality of human beings. There is no doubt that all men and women are not equal in ability, physical capacity and/or mental acumen while the social assets and situation of different persons would remain different. But the concept of equality of human beings brings with it a set of beliefs and practices that treat them as equal in society and opportunity. This core value provides the fundamental moral principle to regulate human relationships and achievements. The manifestations are obvious: no distinction among persons on the basis of caste, class, creed and gender etc. is sanctioned under the religion and its practice. But the principle of equality does not end with social equality but has been institutionalised under the Sikh religion through various practices.

The core value has been taken toward its logical corollary of universal brotherhood of mankind which must also seek the good of the community. Social

service as an important element of Sikh values finds its rationale in this process. The institution of community service (for example, in the gurudwara and the langar) has been an important component of the belief system of the Sikhs for centuries where no distinction is made on the basis of religion or nationality of an individual. There are no higher or lower castes and hence no privileges for the affluent and powerful or denigration of the poor and discrimination of persons of lower social standing. It may be noticed that the Huntington thesis is in direct contradiction to the Sikh core value of universal brotherhood, especially when it is seen that the Sikh value of universal brotherhood is rooted in many centuries of Indian civilisation. The Indian Muslim League's political agenda based on the idea of separate identity of Muslims had, in contrast, relied on Muslims being different from non-Muslims and hence the need to organise a separate state for them. This philosophy has continued to deepen leading to claims that Kashmir must be part of Pakistan since it is a Muslim majority state. The pursuit of jihadi terrorism in pursuit of this religio-political goal has led to continuing terrorism and the killing of thousands of innocents since 1988.

There are two values that I would like to focus on which epitomise the supreme sacrifice of Colonel Harpratap Singh Dhillon.* The core value of equality intrinsically leads to the principle of justice and respect for the rights of others. Social equality cannot be achieved without social justice and economic opportunities. The duty of a Sikh becomes clear when indiscriminate killing of civilians through terrorism for political and/or religious goals is viewed in context of the Sikh value of human rights and their protection. Sikh values demand that the innocents must be protected and not targeted. But the interpretation of the Quranic concept of war being the use of terror as "total war" as propounded by Pakistani military elites naturally creates a situation where Sikh values must direct the actions of the Sikh community and individuals to protect the innocents and fight against such ideas and actions of a total war through terrorism in the name of religion. The ideology adopted by those who pursue religious terrorism targeting innocents in the name of religion is in total contradiction to Sikh values. On the

contrary a true Sikh must take up arms when all other means of ameliorating oppression and discrimination have failed. This is not unique to the Sikhs and can be traced back to the advice of Lord Krishna to Arjun during the Mahabharata.

At the personal level, as much as at the community level, Sikh values inculcate self control, self-discipline, valour and fortitude. The concepts of *nirbhau* (fearlessness) and *nirvair* (absence of enmity) are applicable to the Creator, but also lay down the ideal that human beings must aspire for as the higher goals. When these are seen in context of the Sikh value of sacrifice (as distinct from suicide terrorism), *qurbani*, that implicitly holds out no reward in the present or a future after-life, what becomes clear is the belief that it is the duty of every Sikh to be prepared to lay down his life to fight oppression of the meek and protect the innocent.

These are some of the values that Colonel Harpratap Singh Dhillon lived and died for, so that the innocents (of whatever faith and community) may live in peace and freedom from fear. That he died fighting for people of Muslim faith targeted by Muslim fighters claiming to kill in the name of Islam itself stands out both as a rejection of Huntington thesis of clash of religions (or culture) and of the ideology of Islamic jihad that Pakistani elites have pursued now for more than two decades. And his sacrifice stands out as the epitome of Sikh values, in the best traditions of Indian civilisation, the Indian Army and the Sikh values.

*Air Commodore
Jasjit Singh,
Padma Bhushan,
AVSM VrC VM (Retd)*



Colonel Harpratap Singh Dhillon was killed in action, gallantly combating terrorists near Srinagar on 21 June 1995. Belonging of a landed family from Patiala, Harpratap was commissioned into the Rajput Regiment and he then raised the 7th RR battalion at the Punjab Regimental Centre at Ramgarh, leading them in counter insurgency operations in the Kashmir valley.

* (Col. Harpratap Singh Memorial Lecture at Panjabi University Patiala)

Martyrdom: Substructure of Sikh Identity

Martyrdom has been derived from the Greek word *marty*, meaning witness. In its implied sense it signifies one who, by his supreme sacrifice for his faith, bears witness to its truth and to his own passionate adherence to it. He must offer himself voluntarily and altruistically. To use the expression of Webster, a martyr must follow “ethics of absolute ends”, which involves pursuit of goals with little attention to the cost. Long before the birth of Christ, the Greek writers’ mind had been deeply influenced by the suffering of the Jewish people at the hands of tyrannical Egyptians, Babylonians and such others and they impassionedly made of the word ‘Martyr’ to denote their sacrifice. Christianity provoked in the early centuries a long series of persecutions resulting in the martyrdom of thousands in Rome and other parts of the Roman Empire. Excruciating torture and death continued for hundreds of years to be the fate of those who stood by the faith of Jesus Christ, till it became the official religion of the Roman Empire and later, of the Eastern (Byzantine) Empire. In the course of its long history, Christianity has seen a long string of martyrs who resisted what they considered to be the wrongs of the powerful establishment, the Papacy, which for several centuries, was a super State, with the zeal to suppress all non-conformity and revolt. These persecutions became particularly frequent from the sixteenth Century onwards, as the challenge to the power and privileges of papacy grew in the protest movements in various countries of Western Europe. In earlier centuries, those who demanded the removal of injustice in society, like the Luddites in England or semi legendary followers of kava, were persecuted and victimised. The Papacy came down with a heavy hand also on new thought in sciences – Galileo and Bruno providing the examples—though the former escaped only by tactfully compromising with the persecutor. The brutal suppression of Protestants in the Netherlands, France and England, the last in the reign of Bloody Mary and the long history of inquisition as the instrument of suppression of dissent provide capital examples of determined persecution and no less determined resistance to it by those whose spirit and temper was essentially that of martyrs. The horrible persecutions by the Puritans, themselves victims of persecutions, in the seventeenth century in the American Colonies of Quakers, enacted a similar scene which world in general has regarded as just. Imam Hussain’s opponents have been branded as tyrants and aggressors. Thus the earliest application of the term “Shaheed” is to

those who fell fighting on the Prophet’s side in the battle of Bād about which Allah says in the Koran that not the Prophet but Allah shot the arrows that brought the victory. To fix further the connotation of the term Hadis, saying attributed to the Prophet: *Manati Mata Babai Muhammad (in) Al-e-Muhammad Mata Shahid*, (one who had died for love of Muhammad and for love of the progeny of Muhammad has died a Martyr).

In the Indian context, the term “Shaheed” came to be applied to those soldiers and others who fell fighting against the Hindus. Strange stories were set afloat regarding the miraculous powers of these Shaheeds. It was believed that always at the midnight hour, the Shaheed would get out of his grave in full panoply and would harm anyone who stood in his way. He was reported to overturn the cot in which an unbeliever might be sleeping and would wreak vengeance for any disrespect shown to his tomb.

While the concept of martyrdom and the term “martyr” continued to be in the integral part of Christian and Muslim religious traditions, it did not seem to have any impact on the Indian mind as a whole.

Turning to the dictionaries of Sanskrit where such a term may be expected to figure, all that one finds are a few coinages to correspond with the English word “martyr”. Apte’s Student English–Sanskrit dictionary has entered against martyr one or two phrase-parallels, such a *Deh-tyagin* (sacrificer or forsaker of one’s life), *Deh-nyasa* (surrender of body). So far this important concept is concerned, all that we find are a few, perhaps inadequate coinages which hardly reflect the great act, redolent of spiritual struggle and sacrifice that is implied in martyrdom.

Such absence of an adequate term, however, should not be supposed to imply that spiritual attitude accompanying martyrdom was unknown to the people of India in ancient times. On the other hand, to meet the challenge posed by tyranny and evil, voluntary sufferings undertaken for self-purification or for arousing the conscience was a common phenomenon. There are instances of Brahmins, rishis and other holy persons, deflecting a tyrant from his evil designs through the resolve of self-immolation. Besides, any infringement of the code of *Dharma* by a tyrant would also draw to his portal, some persons held holy, who would give up food and resolve fast unto death unless the wrong was righted. It would be perfectly legitimate to list such acts as forms of martyrdom, for in all these the elements at

martyrdom are present, except the very last one of dying at the tyrant's hands.

Dying for one's faith and presumably becoming a martyr has, however, scriptural sanction in the Gita. In the Chapter of *Karam Yoga* (the Yoga of action) in the context of the surrender unto God, Lord Krishna says:

"One's own dharma, though imperfect, is better than the dharma of another well-discharged; better death in one's own dharma. The dharma of another is full of fear."

What is implied in the sacred Gita texts is this that Arjun being a Kshatriya must not shun battle. But it has also a wider implicating and inculcates heroic martyrdom in adhering to the duty of sacrifice of life for one's faith. This being so, it cannot be denied that the fact of martyrdom has existed. Only it was not considered that it could be very potent weapon of bringing about the ruin of tyrants as also of the disintegrating forces. Triumph of right over wrong has been anticipated and thought to be inexorable law but such a triumph, instead of fearless sacrifice of life offered by a noble person, was viewed more directly to come through divine intervention in the form of destruction of tyrants and evil-doers. One instance, among others, of such triumph is the steadfast faith of the child-saint Prahlada, who was threatened with death by his demon-atheist who was, however, succoured by the Lord in the form of the Lionman (Narsimha) incarnatio. The story is a household word for Indian people. Prahlada had all the characteristics in respect of his holy resolve, to die for his devotion, of the saint martyr and only through divine intervention, was he spared the last agony and sacrifice of life.

Sikhism has borrowed the term martyr from Islam, as it had done in cases of such terms as Allah, Khuda, Hukam, Khasim, Deg Tegh. One of the major reasons of doing this was the in-depth tendency of Sikhism, from its very inception to chalk out a line of orientation for itself away from Brahmanical orthodoxy and other forms of expression of the religious ideas current among sects which were rooted in Hinduism, howsoever far they might in course of time have strayed from its central path and adopted an electric attitude towards Islam, thereby giving occasion to the urges to adopt such Muslim concepts and terms entered into popular vocabulary of the people.

Yet the concept of Sikhism has its own uniqueness, distinctiveness, novelty and freshness, despite the fact that in a number of ways, it bears similarity with certain facts of Islamic or Christian concepts. As, for instance martyr in semitic tradition displays passionate adherence to the cause, their volunterness and altruisms are like their counterparts in Sikhism. Various strands of thoughts and impulses entered into its evolution and formation. The one which is foremost is polemics of the

progress of society. There is evil and there is suffering. Man has constantly to struggle to defeat this evil. The man of God must not shirk from taking on himself suffering if necessary. In this struggle, God will, of course, be on the side of the righteous and the holy. His purposes must prevail but whereas the traditional Indian mythology, the Rakhshsas symbolising evil are destroyed by miraculous intervention of the deity or the Avtar whose bold stroke smites the head of demon just when he is about perpetuate the most heinous outrage; in the Sikh religious thought the ultimate triumph of God is assured after long travail, suffering and self-sacrifice on the part of the good and the holy.

To the man of God, joy and sorrow are alike and he never loses equitableness in either situation. The experience of suffering is one of the constantly recurring themes of meditation of the Guru.

Guru Nanak says:

The soul hungers after the True name

By such hunger are all sorrows consumed.

S.G.G.S page 9

In another hymn by the fourth Guru, it is said;

If Thou sends me hunger O Lord,

I, feel still fitt, and in suffering too find joy.

The word of Guru Arjan, who was subjected to unbearable torture by the fiendishly sadistic minions of Jehangir is constant anticipation of suffering to be undergone in God's cause. Yet his word is also one constant paeson of joy in God and in submission to His will. What is at the basis of such expression of bliss is not the hope of a miraculous annulment of suffering but the transmutation of inevitable suffering through resignation and submission into the experience of bliss. Some excerpts from the hymns of Guru Arjan illustrate the aforesaid theme;

One who is in the extreme of difficulties,

Without succour and support from anyone.

And is beset by implacable foes and deserted even by kith and kin.

Is bereft of all shelter and hope of finding refuge,

If such a one contemplates the supreme Lord,

Not a breath of hot air shall touch him.

Champions of this type of approach are called mighty and when they have to offer sacrifice of their physical frames, they are called martyrs. Guru Arjan Dev was obviously the first martyr to be followed by Guru Tegh Bahadur and innumerable others. Such people bear with



unruffled peace in human torture at the hands of their persecutors. Bhai Gurdas, a very close associate of Guru Arjun, vouchsafes in the following verses that Guru while undergoing martyrdom was as perfectly placid as the snow-clad tops of mountains.

*As the fish are one the waves of the river,
So was the Guru immersed in the River that is the Lord.
As the moth merges itself at sight into the flame
So was the Guru's light merged with the Divine light.*

*In the hour of intense suffering, he was aware of
nothing except the Divine Lord*

*Like the deer who bears no sound but the beat of the
hunters drum.*

*Like the bee who is wrapped inside the lotus, he
passed the night of his life in a casket of joy.*

*Never did he forget to Lord's name even as the
Chatrik never fails to utter its cry.*

*To the man of God, joy is the fruit of devotion and
meditation with equanimity in holy company.*

May I be a sacrifice unto the Guru Arjan”.

(Bhai Gurdas Var 24)

The theme of resignation lies at the core of the concept of Sikh martyrdom. These should not be considered in terms of retreat for the normal concerns of existence but the sacrifice of inordinate desire and freedom from the five forms of evil enumerated by the traditional ethical philosophy which implies supreme sacrifice for life to be better on this earth. In this respect the concept is existential and certainly not other-worldly. This being so the Sikh Shaheeds are never given any assurance of some sort of Heaven or some other things as Christian as well as Muslim traditions of martyrdom would promise.

The ideal of a crusader also went a long way to shape the lineaments of the concept of martyrdom.

There is repetition of such ideas in the composition of the Gurus who preceded Guru Gobind Singh and of some of the saints whose hymns are included in the Holy Granth. Guru Nanak:

*Shouldst thou cherish the desire to participate in the
play of true love, place thy head on the palm of thy hand;*

Then alone mayst thou enter this quarter;

*Shouldst thou put thy foot forward on this path,
hesitate not to give up thy head.*

The saintly Kabir in words which continue to this day to inspire Sikhs with the zeal and fervour of glory and patriotic war, has made what sounds like a call of a crusader, one in favour of the cause of the humble, the poor and the deedy.

*The sky-resounding kettle-drum (of spiritual
inspiration) is struck, and the heart is pierced with the*

*true passion (for righteousness) the hero is engaged in
battle, now is the time to fight unto the last.*

*He alone is the hero who fights to defend the humble
and helpless who even though hacked limb by limb, will
not flee the field.*

S.G.G.S page 1105

The pervasive theme of heroic endeavour and crusading zeal has been lent poignancy, crispness and vigour, chiseled clarity and forceful diction by Guru Gobind Singh. He brings forth very clearly the crusading character of God:

*He cherishes the humble, protects the righteous and
destroys the evil-doers.*

*Millions of demons such as Sumbha, Nisumbha, He
destroyed in an instant;*

*Dhumar-Lohana, Chanda, Munda and Mahikhasur He
defeated in moment;*

*Demos like Chmara, Rana, Chichura, Rakti Chana he
slaughtered at a stroke*

(Akal Ustat).

And he casts his own role as a crusader and wishes His followers to emulate Him.

At the end of the rendering of the epic of Krishna in which contrary to the usual presentation of this god (Lord Krishna) as enmeshed in dalliance in the idealic surroundings of Braj, the ideal heroic character is thus enunciated in verse marked for sublimity and its flow:

*Praised be he whose tongue is ever uttering the name
of the Lord, and who is constantly contemplating holy war;
this body shall one day turn to dust, but sailing in the ship
of noble endeavour, his fame shall carry him across the
ocean of this world.*

*Abiding in the house of spiritual poise, he shall make
his wisdom shine forth like a lamp and grasping firmly the
broom of divine wisdom, he shall sweep away the filth of
cowardice.*

Dasam Granth.

Towards the close of the stirring epic narrative of the war of Durga in *Chandi Chritar*, the crusading character is defined in words which inspire undying idealism:

Grant me this boon, O Lord,

May I never turn away from righteous action,

*I never know fear as I engage in battle with the foe and
resolve fairly to win.*

*May I ever instruct myself in the passion to utter thy
praises’*

And at the last when the hour of destiny arrives,

*May lay down my life fighting on the field of battle to
the last drop of blood”*

Dasam Granth.

A Sikh martyr is a crusader for the cause and he shall not acquiesce in death like a coward or a passivist, rather he would court and wed it as a last resort exhausting all other noble means that to suffer death is also a means to achieve the goal.

Thus martyrdom in Sikhism is not self-extinction, it is, on the other hand, a sort of affirmation of the faith the martyr holds and a positive projection of the urge of the martyr to uphold virtue and to resist evil.

Martyrdom became a tradition and an attitude in the eighteenth century, and was anchored in the Sikh psyche as an instinct, indeed as a real passion. It was not derived from any other instinct, but is a principal *sui generis*, that is, a specific and necessary form of structural power.

This being so, it began to be represented by symbols, not as a dream, not as a shadow, but as a living and momentary revelation of the inscrutable. It also became the lineaments of myth which is the collective dream of a people. Many stories, some real and some mythical, began to float. Martyrs began to be named “the favoured armies of the Guru” waging war against all types of evil political, moral or social. They were given the status of a saint whose words could ‘become the immutable law of God. Martyrs became an important part of the text of the standard prayer as something to be recalled, admired and virtually worshipped. This is amply borne out by the following excerpts from the Sikh prayer, *Ardaas*:

“Those who for their religion allowed themselves to be cut up limb by limb, had their skulls scraped off, were broken on the wheel, were sawn or flayed alive, think of their sweet resignation and call upon God”.

“Those who, to purge the temples of long-standing evils, suffered themselves to be ruthlessly beaten or imprisoned, to be shot, cut up, or burnt alive but did not make any resistance or utter even a sigh of complaint; think of their faith and call upon God”.

Perusal of the above excerpts of the standard prayer confirms the statement that the phenomenon of martyrdom and the term ‘Shaheed’ are an integral part of Sikh tradition. So great was veneration of the Sikh martyrs and their impact on the Sikh mind that one of the twelve Misl or federating clans came to be known as Misl *Shaheedan* (the clan of martyrs). The Misl was so named the celebrated martyr Baba Deep Singh Shaheed who fell in 1760 defending the holy Harmandir at Amritsar. As a matter of fact, the term ‘Shaheed’ became in a special way part of the Sikh vocabulary to designate fidelity to their faith in a manner which no other non-Muslim group in India or elsewhere had adopted. Martyrdom in course of time became a distinguishing mark of Sikh Identity.

Prior to the period in the eighteenth century, the term must already have gained wide currency among the Sikhs, but it was applied very restrictedly in the cases of Guru

Arjan Dev, Guru Tegh Bahadur, four sons of Guru Gobind Singh and Guru Gobind Singh. Guru Arjan Dev laid down his life but did not swerve his stand. Guru Tegh Bahadur sacrificed his life for upholding the right of people and freedom of conscience and worship. The four sons of the Guru courted martyrdom. To stand witness of the truth of Guru Nanak’s dispensation and to uphold the right of the people to be spiritually autonomous and to be defiant of unjust practices became the dominant themes for martyrdom in the Guru’s times.

After the passing of Guru Gobind Singh and after the execution of Banda Bahadur, the Mughal authorities took all steps to destroy the Sikhs, root and branch, as they had been convinced that Sikh ideology was bound to clash with their interests. Zakariya Khan’s pronounced schedule of rewards to all those who would help the Government in identifying the Sikhs, or actually killing them, brings into sharp focus the attitude of the rules on Sikhs. The persecution of the Sikhs during Yahya Khan, Shah Nawaj Khan and Mir Mannu was rather fiercer, while Lakshpat Rai, the Minister of Yahya Khan wreaked vengeance for the slaying of his brother.

Sikh persecution at the hands of Mir Mannu was marked for its ferocity, bitterness, persistence and concentration. He sent roving columns to every corner of his territory to destroy the Sikhs. His *jezails* combed the villages for Sikhs. The able-bodied were killed fighting; the non-combatants including women and children were brought in chains to Lahore and decapitated at the horse-market. Ahmad Shah Abdali also did his worst to snuff out the Khalsa.

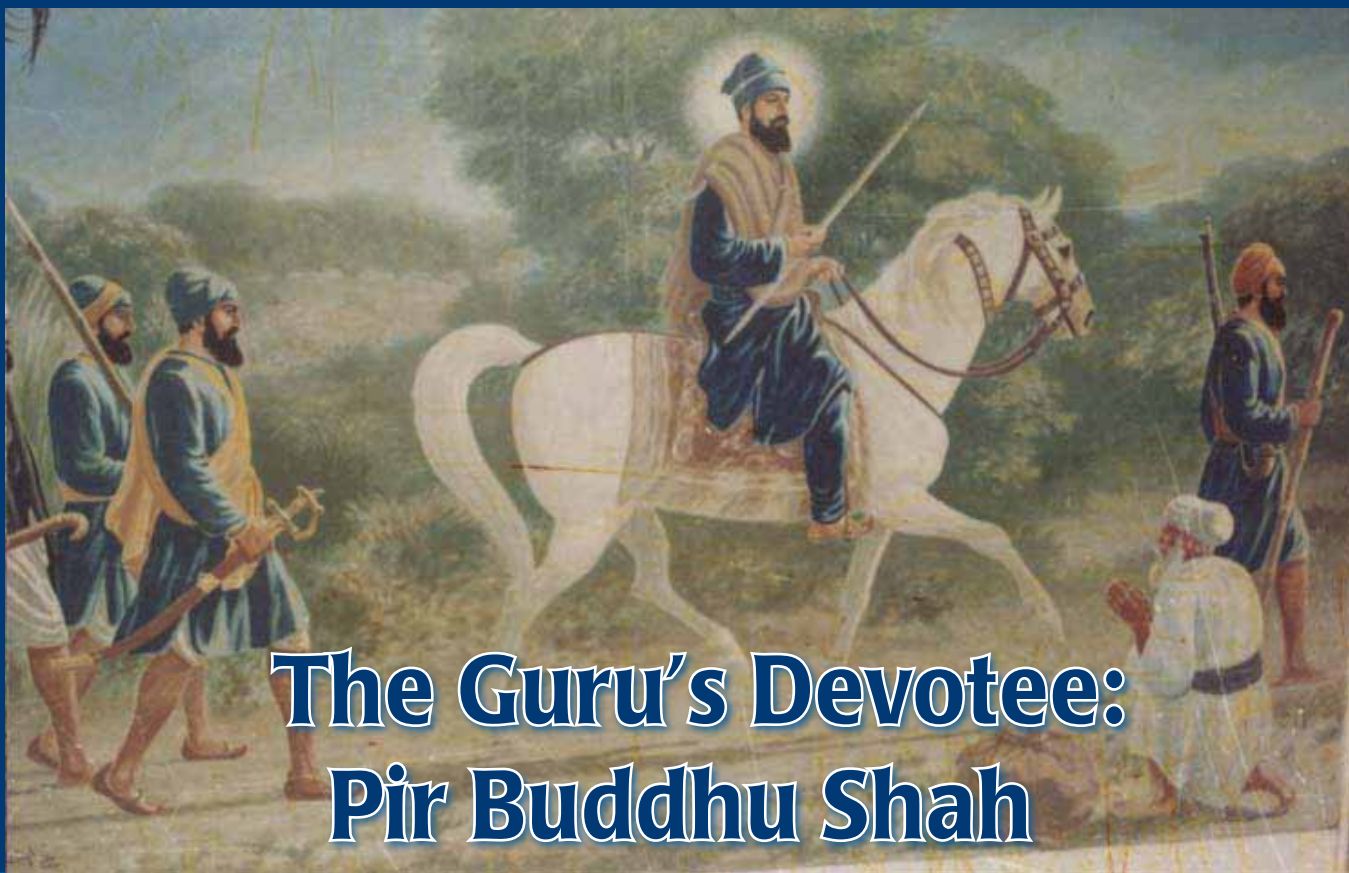
The Sikhs did not lose heart. Firm in their faith like a rock, they resisted the tyranny of the Government and laid down their lives for defence of their faith and those human values which under the despotic rule of the later Mughals, were being trampled.

Besides such persons who met their end while defending their faith being called “Shaheed”, the term was applied also to those who were killed in their struggle for sovereignty. At close of the eighteenth century, the terms “Shaheed” began to be used on a wider scale, overstepped its earlier religious association to cover all who made the supreme sacrifice in pursuit of some ideal. Any kind of sacrifice, voluntary or involuntary, has now indiscriminately been described as Shaheedi, martyrdom.

Etymologically, martyrdom began to be treated as a concept or a systematic structure in the fourth century B. C. when cultural or religious identities began to be considered as independent entities and the evil and goodness were assumed as mutually oppositional poles. The Sikh martyr is a devoted servant of God, promised nothing except bliss springing from the feeling of oneness with God. ☪

Surjit Singh Gandhi





The Guru's Devotee: Pir Buddha Shah

Pir Buddha Shah, whose real name was Sayyed Badruddin, was the scion of a respected Muslim family of Sadhora, in today's District Ambala. Modern researchers have been able to trace his pedigree with the help of some members of his progeny now settled at Akalgarh, in the Gujranwala district of today's Pakistan, where they have migrated. There is a general belief that the forefathers of Pir Buddha Shah had shifted from Samana, District Patiala, to Sadhora and their conglomeration came to be known as Mohalla Sayyeddan, which later changed to Mohalla Samania. Sadhora town which is some 350 years old was Sadhurah in its earlier incarnation, which gradually got corrupted into 'Sahdora'. This was an abode of many a holy and saintly figure for a long time.

Sayyed Badruddin, later known as Pir Buddha Shah was born in 1647 AD in this old town. His family occupied a land endowment made by the Mughal monarchs and they enjoyed deep reverence and respect of the populace. Tradition has it that Emperor Aurangzeb had a lot of esteem for this pious family. In spite of the splendour surrounding his kin, Badruddin was not inclined to worldly wealth, which gave him the synonym for inane, 'Buddhu'. This, however, did not

detract this noble soul, but as he was a member of the Sayyed family, he began to be known as 'Buddhu Shah'. As he continued to tread the path of piety and altruism, the number of his friends, followers and devotees went on increasing. A person considered disinclined to and inept in worldly affairs, started finding a place in the hearts of the masses as a religious leader or a Pir.

Pir Buddha Shah dedicated himself to the service of people, whose welfare he held uppermost in his mind. In return they bestowed their love and devotion on him and so his fame spread far and wide. Rather than studying religious books, he set out in quest of holy men, whose company he craved. He reached the door of a renowned religious teacher, Bhikam Shah, who resided in District Karnal. Bhikam Shah had once bowed towards the East and when questioned by his followers, he had told them that he had seen a new sun rising with the advent of Guru Gobind Singh. He had traveled to Patna, where the child had been born, to behold the halo around the head of the holy being. Bhikam Shah also familiarised Buddha Shah with the philosophy of Guru Nanak, the universal teacher and founder of the Sikh faith. This kindled a keen desire in the mind of Buddha Shah to meet Guru Gobind Singh.

At their first meeting at Lakhanur, Buddha Shah was greatly impressed with the qualities of the Guru and he joined the ranks of numerous devotees of that Divine personality. As Guru Gobind Singh reached Paonta, Buddha Shah in company of a number of his devotees also went there to be with him.

At the age of 18, Buddha Shah tied his nuptial knot with the sister of Sayyed Khan, an officer in Aurangzeb's army. Naseeran, his wife was a comely and pious girl, who soon moulded herself to the saintly ways of her noble husband. She persuaded her brother not to harbour hostile postures towards Guru Gobind Singh. She and Badruddin passed their days in complete harmony and marital bliss and were blessed with four sons, who were named Sayyed Sharaf, Sayyed Mohammad Shah, Sayyed Mohammad Baksh and Sayyed Shah Hussain. Three of these worthy sons of Buddha Shah eventually sacrificed their lives for Guru Gobind Singh. Two fell fighting on his side in the battle of Bhangani and one while protecting him. On one of his visits to Buddha Shah and Naseeran, the latter's brother Sayyed Khan urged them to send him one of their sons so that he could get him suitable appointment in the royal court. But with all earnestness and solicitude, Badruddin declined this offer saying that he had been showered with all blessings of the almighty and he did not need any favour. In fact he wanted his children to give their best in such a court where truth and justice prevailed and everybody was treated with the same consideration and kindness. He was steadfast in his resolve not to accept any royal patronage, which discouraged his brother-in-law from insisting on his proposal and the matter was closed there.

Badruddin undertook deep studies of the Holy Quran and other religious books. He kept company with holy people and refrained from indulging in mundane activities. He was a pious Muslim with humility, broadmindedness and generosity as his intrinsic attributes. He found much in common between Islam and Sikhism. Monotheism and the spirit of human equality in both the faiths appealed to him greatly. Came to be known as Pir Buddha Shah, he rejoiced in the knowledge that the Sikh faith and Islam had so much in common on these counts. He also started realising that by following Guru Gobind Singh's teachings, he could find salvation. It was a happy coincidence that after the martyrdom of his revered father, the Tenth Guru moved to Paonta had made the area of Sadhaura his area of action. As the Guru's mission was to widely spread the teachings

of Guru Nanak, Pir Buddha Shah found it highly compelling to benefit from this noble process.

On the appeal of Raja Medni Parkash (also known as Sat Parkash) of Nahan, Guru Gobind Singh went to Paonta on the banks of the Yamuna river. As the crow flies, Paonta fort was hardly 15 miles from Sadhaura. Pir Buddha Shah developed keen desire to meet Guru Gobind Singh at that salubrious spot and find an opportunity to have extended spiritual discussions with him. According to the redoubtable poet Bhai Santokh Singh, when Pir Buddha Shah found himself face to face with the resplendent personality of the Guru, he asked him to suggest way of quenching his spiritual thirst. How can one have communion with the Almighty, he asked? The Guru told him that wrapped in ignorance and narrow-mindedness, human beings embroil themselves in worldly matters and start considering their families, wealth, property and other belongings as their ultimate goal. This self-centeredness becomes an obstacle between a human being and the Supreme Lord. As we go on falling deeper in the pit of greed and self-indulgence, we move farther from our sacred goal. This discourse left an indelible impression on Pir Buddha Shah's mind and, according to Macaulife, he stayed on with the Guru for some time, his heart filled with utmost respect and affection for him. He confessed that his soul would always enjoy the fragrance of the divine personality of Guru Gobind Singh and that the latter could count him as one of his humble and devoted admirers.

This became possible because both the noble souls were free of parochial thinking on religion and believed in universal brotherhood. The Guru told Pir Buddha Shah that ego and vanity were the real impediments in man's way to reach the Almighty, because conceit and vain glory gave rise to avarice and misdeeds leading man to sin. But when the light of divine love appears, the mist of arrogance and ostentation scatters away. This can be achieved by tearing the veil of falsehood, selfishness and self-glorification. The Guru and Pir Buddha Shah were much above fanaticism and narrow considerations of caste and creed. Both were adherents to the fundamental principles of true religion.

The Pir was truly impressed with the great Guru's catholicity of views and his disarming love for humanity. Without deviating from the faith of his forefathers, the Pir became a devotee of the Guru because of his spiritual loftiness and dazzling personality. The Pir confessed to the Guru that in spite of his best efforts to achieve control over his

senses, he still remained unsuccessful. He was unable to restrain the unbridled horse of worldly desires. The Guru told him not to torture himself with austerities. God was omnipresent and dwelt in the heart of all his creatures. Humans on the other hand were self-centered, steeped in ignorance and negligence and remained incarcerated behind the walls of pretensions, banalities and impurities. When one immerses oneself in the Divine Being, one could feel surrounded by His illimitable light. When asked by the Syyed how could one get past the veil of vanity and conceit, the Guru told him that it was possible only if one took refuge with the spiritual teacher, who should possess a noble soul, a pure heart and a universal compassion, who should mirror the serenity and grace of the supreme Lord and be cast in His image.

The Pir opened his heart to the Guru saying that he considered himself to be a sinner and he would find it difficult to acquit himself on the day of judgement. Therefore he wanted the grace of the Guru to enable himself to answer for his sins on that fateful day. The Guru assured him that all his sins, deficiencies, indiscretions and wrong doings, conscious or unconscious, would be forgiven by the Lord. Guru Nanak himself would intercede on his behalf in the Divine court, evidence that Guru Gobind Singh had no aversion to Islam, with respect for every religion. Though he fought battles against the Mughal kingdom, he also crossed swords with Hindu Pahari chieftains to oppose injustice and cruelty against oppressed people. He was an apostle of human fraternity and love and could not tolerate excesses of the mighty and powerful against vulnerable and the hapless masses.

Pir Buddhu Shah found in the Guru a spiritual guide and a military hero, who would brook no aggression, however mighty the adversary might be. The acceptance by the Pir of the highest qualities of generosity, equity, love and justice as also the spiritual perfection in Guru Gobind Singh gave immense satisfaction to the Pir, who ever dedicated himself to the Guru's cause. The Pir's persona as a pious Muslim achieved after protracted study of the Islamic values and traditions was refurbished by the aura of Guru Gobind Singh's dedication to spiritual pursuits and his determination to combat injustice and avarices of the selfish rulers. The magnetic personality of the Guru cast its strong spell on the being of the noble Pir. When questioned by one of his followers about the propriety of an accomplished Muslim offering his devotion to a non-Muslim spiritual leader, Pir Buddhu Shah advised him to cleanse his

mind of such misguided impressions, because of the unity of the Creator of the universe who has no peer. The persona of Guru Gobind Singh was resplendent with the light of God Himself and he reflected all that was pious, true, pure and divine.

After some time the Pir returned to Sadhaura from Paonta and an unbreakable and eternal bond had been established between the two.

A little while after the return of Pir Buddhu Shah to Sadhaura, about five hundred Pathans relieved from service by the Emperor Aurangzeb came to him. They explained their plight of woe and dismay for having been dismissed from employment by the monarch without any fault of theirs and beseeched him to find them employment in the one avocation they knew well, that of soldiering. Sympathising with them the Pir took them to Paonta pleading to Guru Gobind Singh to take them under his wings. The Guru happily accepted overture of the Pir and employed all those Pathans in his troops with adequate recompense. Their commanders were named Bhikham Khan, Najat Khan and Umar Khan, who were struck with the magnanimity and puissance of the Guru.

Guru Gobind Singh's headquarters were amidst the Shivalik hills, where he built three forts, being Paonta Sahib, Anandpur Sahib and Chamkaur Sahib. He tried to enlist support of the Hindu Rajas against the aggressive and brutal attacks of Mughal forces. But being sceptical about the objectives of the Guru, they instead put roadblocks against all his efforts. According to Professor Indu Bhushan Banerji, Bhim Chand, the Raja of Kahlur regarded Guru Gobind Singh as his major adversary. Alongwith some other hill chieftains he conspired to attack Paonta.

At this juncture the five hundred Pathan soldiers, who had been put in employment of Guru Gobind Singh by Pir Buddhu Shah, became treacherous and their commanders presented themselves before the Guru wanting to go home for participating in various matters relating to births, weddings and deaths, otherwise they ran the risk of being ostracised by their kinsmen. The Guru reminded them of their duty towards their master and to the noble profession of a soldier. In fact, the loyalty of these Pathans had been subverted by the Hindu Rajas and their services bought over with promises of much higher wages and so they insisted on being relieved. The hill chieftains had offered many attractive rewards to the mercenary Pathans, determined as they were to minimise the manpower at disposal of

the Guru. Many of these mercurial soldiers changed sides and joined the troops of Raja Fateh Shah. Only a hundred Pathans under the command of Kale Khan stood steadfast with the Guru.


At this juncture, Guru Gobind Singh wrote to Pir Buddhu Shah telling him of the betrayal of the Pathans, who had been put in his employment at the behest of the Pir and who had now shifted their loyalties to the Rajas because of their insatiable greed. This caused deep grief to Pir Buddhu Shah and he decided, as if to wash away ignominy of treason of the Pathan soldiers, to join ranks with the Guru's forces along with his son's relatives and followers. As he reached the Guru with his troops, the Guru expressed his satisfaction and happiness at his fidelity. In the battle of Bhangani, Pir Buddhu Shah and his companions fought with great courage and bravery. They dispatched many a foe with their swords with lightning speed and swept the enemy away like in a storm. Though ill-equipped and untrained in warfare, the Pir's young sons set an example of their swordsmanship with perseverance and unbounded fervour and they forced the enemy to flee, remnants of a defeated and demoralised mercenary band. Pir Buddhu Shah sacrificed his two sons, a nephew and a number of comrades in this battle. The Guru told Buddhu Shah that he was a real Pir responding to which the latter said that he did not have the least sorrow over the supreme sacrifice made by his kin and was exalted that they laid their lives for the sake of the Guru. In a way ignominy of the treachery of the Pathan soldiers had been partially washed away.

The battle of Bhangani was most significant, the first open strife between the Guru and the hill chieftains. This victory strengthened self-confidence among the Guru's followers. The hill chieftains had lost some of their bravado and overweening self-confidence. The Guru desired to bestow some befitting rewards on the Pir, but the latter accepted with gratitude a *dastar* (turban), a wooden comb (with a few sacred hair of the Guru) and a small sword as a number of the Bhangani battle. After receiving these from the Guru, Pir Buddhu Shah returned to Sadhaura.

Analysing causes of their defeat, the Pahari chieftains reached the conclusion that the reinforcement provided by the Pir had helped Guru Gobind Singh to a great extent. They unanimously drafted a complaint addressed to the Mughal

emperor in which they said that the son of Guru Tegh Bahadur, who was posing grave danger to the Mughal reign had organised a seditionist force, to crush which they waged a fierce battle against him. But Pir Buddhu Shah, a Muslim, instead went to the Guru's aid along with his followers and kinsmen, so deserving exemplary punishment thus others would be discouraged from undesirable activities of subverting the royal government in Delhi. This communication fell in the hands of Sayyed Khan, who was the brother of Naseeran, wife of Pir Buddhu Shah and he helped in resolving the matter without any damage to the Pir, who was immersed in prayers to God telling Naseeran that their sons, who had sacrificed their lives in service of the Guru, would be granted place in paradise by Allah, as they had died for the sake of righteousness represented by the Great Creator himself. The Pir was totally devoted to the philosophy of the Guru, never to tolerate injustice and cruelty, greed and selfishness inflicted by an aggressor on peace-loving, innocent and guileless people.

Aurangzeb deputed his general Usman Khan to apprehend Guru Gobind Singh. The General went to Sadhaura, where the Guru was sojourning at the time and asked Pir Buddhu Shah to surrender the Guru to him. Mohammad Baksh, the son of the Pir promised to hand over Guru Gobind Singh to Usman Khan the next morning, but instead of harming the Guru, he cut his own throat and arranged his own blood to be delivered to the Mughal emissary. Usman Khan was very happy at this achievement, but later, it was determined that it was not the Guru's blood. Horrified at the turn of events, Aurangzeb ordered suitable retribution against Pir Buddhu Shah. Before Usman Khan's arrival at Sadhaura, in consultation with Naseeran, he sent away the families of his two sons to Raja Medni Parkash of Nahan, who was also a great devotee of Guru Gobind Singh and that area, full of thick jungles, was also a safe haven. The Pir was apprehended by Usman Khan, who took him away to an unknown place and killed him in savage manner. His residence at Sadhaura was razed and it was also planned to kill all his surviving relatives and friends. This forced the family to return to the place of their forefathers, Samana.

Pir Buddhu Shah had remained steadfast in his loyalty and devotion to Guru Gobind Singh till the very end. He fought both against the Hill Rajas and defied the Mughal Empire in defence of the Guru. 



GURU GRANTH SAHIB AND RELIGIOUS PLURALISM

Guru Granth Sahib, holy scripture of the Sikhs, is also the Guru-Eternal for them: being revered as their living spiritual mentor but not worshipped as an idol on the altar. First compiled in 1604, it chronologically belongs to medieval times but an in-depth study of the faith reveals its critical attitude towards the medieval spirit and its responsiveness to several of the issues facing mankind today. One such issue is that of religious plurality. During the past hundred years or so, the infotech revolution and development of rapid transportation have transformed this wide world into a small global village. As a result, people with different cultural, religious and racial backgrounds are now virtually next-door neighbours. Different faith-communities inter-penetrate and interact with one another on daily basis.

Attitude towards other Faiths

In such a pluralistic global village, man cannot run away from or wish away the social reality of religious plurality and the social and theological issues arising from it. Gone are the days when one lived in one's own tiny, isolated religious camp blissfully ignorant of who else existed or whatever happened outside. Today's people of different religious denominations

have to live together and interact with one another. However, unfortunately, each faith-community is not necessarily in harmonious relationship with the other. This has been mainly because of the fact that each religious community tends to underrate the ideology and culture of the other. And this usually stems from the way leaders of each religion claim a monopoly of truth for their faith. To them, only their religion, or only their prophet, can lead people on the path to God-realisation and self-realisation. Other religions are taken as fake or not authentic and other faith-communities as pagans. This exclusivist attitude is doing much damage to our social fabric. Religious people and their leaders have the responsibility to address and try to rectify this problem. We must realise that "the religious life of mankind from now on, if it is to be lived at all, will be lived in a context of religious pluralism.... This is true for all of us."

And to achieve this - to enable different faith-communities to live harmoniously and peacefully - we need something like the pluralist model as formulated in the Guru Granth Sahib. In this model, the value and validity of multiple religions are to be duly recognised and appreciated. Such a pluralist perspective of religion holds that all religions share something in

common: they make common reference to, or presume, a single, transcendent reality as creator and preserver of the entire manifest phenomena. Still, they have genuine differences, for each religion is a different historical manifestation of that reality and it presents visions of God, world and humanity from a localised, historically particular perspective. In other words, it can be said that the essence of divine revelation is universal but when shared by the receiver-prophet with humankind in a mundane language in a specific historico-religio-cultural context, it acquires limitations as well as differentiation.

To affirm the fact of diverse religions as finite manifestations of one Infinite is in no way to diminish the significance of any particular religion; rather, such diversity reveals the richness of eternal and infinite truth. One must try to understand and appreciate the religious beliefs and doctrines of one's neighbour. No doubt, one cannot put one's faith in parenthesis while trying to understand and examine the faith of the other and yet, one must listen attentively to the faith of the other as this is witnessed to by the believer, without pre-judging that faith and without abandoning one's own commitment. This is a very delicate undertaking because while doing so, our first task in approaching another people, another culture, another religion is to take off our shoes, for the place we are approaching is "holy". Else we may find ourselves treading on other men's dreams. More serious still, we may forget that God was here - before our arrival.

Religious pluralism cannot be confined to the knowledge of other religious systems and their doctrines and teachings only. This would mean trying to confront a religious truth in the abstract. Pluralism presumes the effort to know and appreciate the historical-cultural context and the people themselves who make up other faith communities. This would involve our discarding the prevalent attitude of considering our neighbours, who are people of different races and religions, as aliens. Discarding this kind of exclusivist attitude and instead adopting a pluralist attitude is essential if we want to lead a meaningful, satisfying and safe life. We must not only live with our religiously diverse neighbours, we must also talk with, work with, and learn from them.

It appears more and more difficult today to hold on to an exclusivist or inclusivist model for leading a peaceful and harmonious social existence. It has to be understood that there can be no one way to the realization of God and that there are many paths and many Saviors to help people in their efforts to pursue

truth and meaning. Further, these many ways cannot exist in isolation from one another, nor can they possibly remain intolerant of or indifferent toward one another. The neighbour can no longer remain a stranger. It is necessary for different religions and faith-communities to meet each other and relate to each other, the objective being not to absorb or obliterate the other but to help and learn from each other. This has become obligatory for humanity today because pluralism is no more just a textbook issue but has become a human existential problem.

Sikhism: A World-affirming Faith

In the modern day pluralistic world, the teachings of Guru Granth Sahib can play a vital and constructive role, mainly because they tend to accept plurality, though this acceptance is not passive; it, rather, is critical. This critical spirit is quite explicit on certain vital points such as sanctions and safeguards favouring hierarchical social structures. In Sikh thought, all humans are equal, no matter how different they may appear externally. They are spiritually one with God and ethnically equal among themselves. Sikhism is also equally critical of certain prevalent religious practices which are contrary to the scriptural spirit of the given faith. The role of clergy, in both Hinduism and Islamic traditions, in misusing religion for the purpose of oppressing certain classes of society receives a severe condemnation in some of the hymns.

The Sikh faith integrates the world and worldly life with the idea of divinity. On the one hand, it rejects asceticism and on the other provides reality, relative reality though, to the mundane world. This world cannot be considered simply to be sinful or mere *maya* (delusion, not real) or primarily a place of suffering; it is, rather, the dwelling-place of the Divine. As the residence of the Lord God, the world need not be renounced; on the contrary, humans must strive to fashion the world into *Sach Khand*. In this process, for Sikhs, the spiritual is socialised, and the secular and social are spiritualised. Ethics, therefore, become central to Sikh belief and practice; the scriptural teachings call upon man for an active and righteous participation in family and social life. The ideal religion, as says the scripture, is one which emphasises upon man to perform concrete good deeds in this world and at the same time to constantly remember the Divine Name.

Sikh Attitude Toward Other Faiths

The lives of the Sikh spiritual teachers, the message of the Sikh scripture and Sikh tradition and history all stand witness to the constructive and

positive Sikh response to interfaith relations. For example, if we look at the life of the founder of the faith Guru Nanak, we learn that after he received the revelation, he undertook four preaching odysseys in four different directions to share this divine message with the world at large. During these odysseys, he seems to have made it a point to visit any place of pilgrimage or importance to both Hindus and Muslims which were on his way and held discourses with the holy men there. The idea was to listen to them and then convey them his own viewpoint. Instead of thrusting his view of truth on anyone, he would listen and also share with them the revelation he had had.

Another exclusivist point negated by Guru Nanak was the denial of validity and authenticity of other traditions, their prophets and revelations. Unlike the exclusivists who generally compare the ideal of their own faith with the practices of others, Sikhism not only acknowledges and appreciates other faiths but accepts their validity as well. There is an episode relating to Guru Nanak's visit to Multan where he is received by the holy men residing in the town. They met the Guru with a bowl filled to the brim with milk, implying that the place was already full with holy men of different religious traditions. Guru Nanak is said to have placed a flower petal on the milk, indicating that his faith though distinct was not an attempt to replace any but would co-exist with others. This attitude helps us understand and appreciate other religions and live in harmony with other faith-communities.

The Sikh scripture calls for respect for all religions, tolerance for religious pluralism understanding and co-operation among different faith-communities. It is quite explicit in its statement that revelation cannot be religion-specific, region-specific or caste-specific. In other words, the claim to truth cannot be the monopoly of any one particular religion, caste, class, or region. The Sikh scripture contains, apart from six of the Sikh Gurus, hymns of certain other holy men coming from Hindu as well as Muslim traditions. They belong to different caste-groups and several of them belonged to the so-called lower strata of society. These holy men came from different far-off regions of India and they belonged to a period of about five centuries beginning with the twelfth century' [chronologically, Shaikh Farid (1173-1266) is the first and Guru Tegh Bahadur (1621-1675) is the last] and ending with the seventeenth.

Since each expression of revelation is considered an attempt to encounter and understand the Real One in a particular localised context, the Sikh Gurus advised

everybody to be true to his or her faith: a Muslim should be a true Muslim and a Hindu should become a true Hindu. There is no instance in Sikh history or tradition of exhorting anybody to convert to Sikhism because it was, so to say, a better faith than any other. On the other hand, it holds that while mutual witnessing promotes mutual respect, proselytising devalues the faith of the other. Sikhism seeks to unite people belonging to different religious traditions into a broader unity: Sikh theology holds that the object of religion is not to divide mankind, but to unite it; "not to act like scissor and tear asunder the social fabric, but to act like a needle and sew it together."

Similarly, Sikhism also rejects the idea of only one Saviour. The idea that my prophet or my spiritual teacher is the only Saviour to lead humanity on the road to salvation is alien to Sikhism which takes different religions as divine revelations made known by the prophets or spiritual preceptors at different times in different spatio-cultural contexts. It accepts each one of the prophets and the traditions founded by them as equally valid paths toward God-realization. In one of his hymns as included in the Guru Granth Sahib, Guru Amar Das, the third spiritual preceptor of the Sikhs, declares all religious traditions equally valid as he prays to Lord:

*The world is burning in the fire of passion
Save it, O Lord, by Thy grace;
Save it the way Thou consider best.*

There are several instances in the Sikh tradition where we find the Sikh Gurus advising their followers to give equal regard to the prophets and seers from all traditions. Sikhs must not look down upon those who have a different form of worship. Such an attitude in the late medieval times was much ahead of the times and can very easily be taken as a precursor to the modern-day pluralistic model. The oft-quoted example in this viewpoint is that of Guru Arjan who was once visited by a group of followers. They were confused by the diverse incarnations in which God was worshipped and they sought the Guru's advice. The Guru advised them: "All forms and attributes are God's, yet He transcends them. You should, therefore, worship only the Absolute One. At the same time, you must abjure rancor towards those who have a different way of worship."

Lest this understanding and appreciation of other religions should remain an abstract idea, Sikhism seeks to promote a dialogical relationship between different faith-communities. The Sikh scripture is quite emphatic

in stating that “man throughout his worldly existence must seek to converse with others by first listening to other’s viewpoint and then putting forward his own, for this is the only way to attain truth” The notions of listening to the others’ viewpoint (*kichhu suniai*) and putting forward your own viewpoint (*kichhu kahiai*) clearly urges fruitful dialogue aimed at searching for the truth. Such a dialogical relationship with other faiths leads to a much-need deeper understanding and appreciation of other religions. The Sikh scripture categorically rejects polemics, insisting rather that only after polemics have been set aside can the real search for truth begin and bear fruit. Polemics and argumentation cause - and are also caused by - the ego which in the Sikh scripture is referred to as a ‘serious malady’ but humility, a pre-requisite for genuine listening to another, is the essence of all virtues. There are innumerable references in Sikh scripture that stress the value of humility.

The best example of interfaith dialogue in the Sikh scripture is Guru Nanak’s *Sidh Gosti* which is a sort of spiritual dialogue on the Sikh philosophy of life vis-a-vis the philosophy of yoga. In this composition, the yogis put searching questions to Guru Nanak who answers them with courtesy and confidence. The dialogue is held without hurting the feelings of any of the participants, ever retaining serenity and sobriety and aiming at realising the truth. This is the basis as well as the ideal of interfaith dialogue in Sikhism. Other examples of dialogue can be found within the hymns of Sikh saints. Certain shlokas, especially of Kabir and Farid have been frequently held up and commented upon by the Gurus for the way they make use of dialogue rather than polemics as a means for clarifying or expanding God’s message to humanity.

The vision of religious tolerance and the affirmation of religious pluralism that are found in the message of the Gurus as contained in scripture are also embodied in the lives of the Gurus themselves and in Sikh tradition in general. This is evident in the way Guru Nanak was revered not just by Sikhs but equally by Hindus and Muslims. And Guru Arjan was recognized by the Emperor Jehangir for the way his message and conduct brought Hindus and Muslims together to converse with him. Guru Tegh Bahadur went even further and laid down his life to protect man’s religious freedom, offering himself for sacrifice in order to stop the Muslim ruler of his time from forcing the conversion of Hindus to Islam. It was clear that he would have done the same for Muslims had they found themselves in a similar situation under Hindu rulers. The Guru’s sacrifice was

clearly to uphold what we today say is the fundamental principle of religious pluralism—all persons have freedom of conscience and the right to choose their own faith.

When Guru Gobind Singh took up the struggle against the deceit and decadence of Hindu Rajput chiefs and the oppression and suppression of the Mughal government of the day, he could count on many Hindus and Muslims standing by his side. One of the most moving Sikh affirmations of the value and validity of other religions can be found in Bhai Kanhaiya as he looked after slain and wounded soldiers on the battlefield of Anandpur and honoured the same divine essence in all of them, no matter what their religion. Treating all human beings as spiritually one and ethnically equal no matter what their religious beliefs is the pre-requisite for maintaining harmonious relationship in the modern-day pluralistic society. The Sikh attitude towards other religions and religious communities can be taken as a model.

Looking Ahead

If we want a world free from the prevalent distrust and disharmony, hatred and violence, we must be able to see others as our brothers and sisters. This means that we have to discover how to affirm our own identity without threatening the identity of others. And we have to recognise and feel in our religious awareness that when we revile another’s religion or desecrate another community’s place of worship, we revile or desecrate the Divine Presence itself. This happens to be the central message of the Sikh faith in its teaching that if we truly believe in God’s love for all beings, we must affirm and value the others in their otherness. The Sikh acceptance of the cultural and religious plurality in human social existence is found expressed in several of its institutions and the Sikh way of life. The Sikhs conclude their daily prayer to God seeking welfare of all, *sarbat da bhala*. They see the love for God as the vis-a-tergo for love of mankind and they express this love through seva or voluntary service rendered unto others and such other philanthropic activities.

Sikhism is in full agreement with St. James’s assertion that “faith without works is dead” (James 2:20); with their ethics of creative activism, they seek to realise the Gurus’ vision of a society based on faith and love, tolerance and justice. This is the need of our contemporary, threatened world — that we do not limit ourselves to words alone but try to actively turn religious words into reality in our everyday lives. ☪

Sikh Monotheism

It seems quite logical to start a discussion of Sikh monotheism with reference to the *Mool Mantra*. At the very beginning of the Sikh scripture, this contains the basic creed of Sikhism in very succinct form. An English translation, as rendered in "Hymns of Guru Nanak," published by the Language Department, Punjab in 1972, is as follows:

There is but one God

True is His Name, creative His Personality

And immortal His form. He is without fear, sans enmity,

Unborn and self-illuminated

By the Guru's grace He is obtained

This can be said to be a pristine statement of uncompromising monotheism. But as it unfolds in the rest of the Guru Granth Sahib, it adopts stances, hues, and emphasis, which are particular to Sikhism.

Monotheism can be said to be a prerogative of many religious traditions of the world. Judaism and Islam are obvious examples. Zoroastrianism is to be included with some explanatory remarks and with the addition of the religions, which believe in the incarnation and manifestation of One True God. Christianity, Vaishnavism and Shaivism, not to speak of all of them, would be put in this category. But as is the case with religious traditions of the world themselves, so we find the situation in their concepts of, and approaches to, Monotheism as well. That is although almost all the basic truths and aspects of religious life are represented in each of the religious traditions, each of these tends to emphasise certain dimensions of the religious experience more than others. And these particular accentuations at the core of the spiritual experience of these traditions, are the factors which appear to determine the special hue or distinctiveness of these traditions.

Similarly, the belief in One True God, with all His myriad qualities and attributes, is not the same in all its aspects in the traditions who claim or can be assigned to the belief in Monotheism. Each of these traditions, in spite of sharing some common elements, characteristic of a monotheistic belief, appears to be special with regard to some other particular points in their approach and emphasis in their spiritual vision.

Judaism, for example, in the description of its monotheistic belief, often uses anthropomorphic descriptions of God with a stress on His extreme

spite of the gods and goddesses of other nations. This sensitivity, as described in the Old Testament, often results in severe consequences for the Israelites. This image of Almighty God is quite different in contrast with His representation in Christianity with an overflowing love for mankind. Similarly, the emphasis on the transcendence of Allah and He as Creator being wholly other and on different level than the creatures, which is the usual case in the description of the Divine in the Holy Quran, is unlike immanence of the Holy as highlighted in the monotheistic traditions within Hindu culture.

Sikhism, while in its rejection of the incarnation or appearance of Divinity in any material manifestation, is close to Islamic belief in monotheism, in some other respects, in this regard, it has its own individual approach. The spiritual Truth of the monotheistic belief, as described in the holy scripture of Sikhism, is essentially in the form of a Person with sublime attributes. References to Him, nonetheless, in the form of Absolute Truth, beyond qualities, are also to be met. The words *Ek Onkar* are particularly said to refer to that state of Godhead beyond attributes. In the terms of Indian philosophy these two aspects of the Ultimate Truth would be designated as *Sacguna* and *Nirguna Brahman*. It is in its *Sadgiaunat* form, and that also personified as One Single True God, with His immanence, closeness and jaccessibility, equally emphasised, which is the common parlance to point at the Supreme Being in Guru Granth Sahib. The laudation and singing praises of the Supreme Reality in this personified form, is a major theme of Guru Granth Sahib. There is however the concept, special with Sikhism, of the "visible form of Divine Essence" as the Guru-shabad embodied in the Guru Granth Sahib. According to late Professor Gurubachan Singh Talib in his introduction to the English translation of Guru Granth Sahib, Bhai Nand Lal in his *Rahitnama* has explained the Sikh belief on Divine being in three forms. Two are the same as mentioned above and the third is the Guru-Shabad. Hence the Centrality of Guru Granth Sahib in ritual worship of the Akal Purakh, as well as, in the whole religious system of the Sikh tradition.

The general approach towards the Supreme Being adopted in the Granth Sahib is that which comes in the tradition of *Bhakti-marga* as prevalent in Medieval India, in its various shades and hues. There are a number of compositions, in this holy book, which are filled with an attitude in Bhakti called *Dasya-rus* which can also be said to be the general approach towards the

Almighty in the Holy Quran. This attitude of Bhakti is said to involve the servant-Master or slave and Master relationship with God. In this attitude a respectful distance between the bhakta and the object of *Bhakti* is implied. But more common in Guru Granth Sahib is the attitude, which involves a love relation between the *Bhakti* and the Divine Beloved. For this type of relationship with God and for the expression of its various moods and aspects, both bhakta saints and the holy Gurus have often utilised similes of husband and wife or lover and beloved between the devotee and the Supreme Object of veneration.

Now, there are a host of titles derived from Sanskrit, Arabic or Persian sources which have been employed in Guru Granth Sahib while referring, beseeching or addressing the Supreme Being. This indiscriminate use of titles for the Supreme Being, drawn from various traditions, not only points to the various noble qualities of the Supreme Being and exhibit different aspects of His Person, but these also highlight a basic element of the spiritual vision of Guru Nanak Dev and imbibed in Guru Granth Sahib. The Janamsakhi of Guru Nanak and the contents of Guru Granth Sahib, leave no doubt that in their spiritual vision, attainment to the Ultimate Truth, favour of the Supreme Being, is universally available to all mankind, irrespective of the distinctions of caste, creed, race, gender community or any other limitations that human beings may have erected between them. It is very clear from the teachings propounded in Guru Granth Sahib that in its eyes the distinctions between various religious traditions like Hindu or Muslim or social groupings of caste system have no meaning. The only distinction, which Guru Granth Sahib admits is that between a God-oriented person, a *Bhakta* or *Gurmukh* and a person who has made the material world or the gratification of sense pleasures as the goal of his life.

There is an important aspect of the teachings of Guru Granth Sahib which can easily be missed in a discussion about its monotheistic belief. This is that the demand of Guru Granth Sahib, from man, like that of the holy Quran, is not so much an adherence to the idea of One True God, which was never a totally unheard of notion, but that they should take on to it most sincerely and earnestly. They should make Him as the one true object of their lives and to attain his pleasure and union with Him as their supreme passion. The pre-Islamic people of Arabia were well acquainted with Allah as a Deity and even, as internal evidence in the holy Quran speaks, they admitted Him as the controller of the natural forces in the universe and benefactor of all favours. Similarly, medieval Indian society cannot be said to have been ignorant about the idea of the One Supreme Object of worship. But the case in both the

above situations was that the majority of people, barring exceptions, were paying only lip service to this belief. In the medieval society of India, even today, both Hindus and the Muslims have been adhering to their religious beliefs very superficially, as almost a part of their inherited culture only. The call of Guru Granth Sahib to mankind is that not only the people should accept the concept of monotheism, but also they should submerge their whole life with Divine consciousness. They should make the remembrance of God as their ruling infatuation and should consider the dissolution of one's individuality in Him as the *ultimate goal of life*.

It should be clear that according to this scheme of things, as preached in Guru Granth Sahib man's ultimate destiny, the highest goal of his life is spiritual not material. His true self or his soul justly belongs to the realm beyond this physical world and beyond material objects. Man's physical existence, his life in this world with all the different relationships it involves and all the paraphernalia such an existence requires, all have significance because they provide the means to realise his spiritual destiny. If these means happen to be taken as the goal of life in themselves and the pursuits of a person remain 'limited to chasing the worldly things only, then according to these scriptures, these means have turned in to snares and trappings which keep him away from the realisation of his true destiny, the spiritual goal as described earlier.

It is true that by favouring the path of *Sahaj*, Gurbani rejects the concept of the utility of harsh austerities for spiritual advancement and encourages the standard of God-realisation with the performance of social and other duties. Still, there is a vast difference between performing worldly duties with a God-oriented consciousness, as a result of *Simran* and *Bhakti* and being engrossed in the quest of worldly ambitions as the sole object of man's life. There are numerous verses in Gurbani which belittle the pleasures of sense gratifications in comparison to the bliss of *Simran* and the acquisition of *Bhakti* which leave no doubt about the true object of human existence in its point of view. Today, after observing devastating results of the one-sided materialistic approach in the societies of Europe and America, one can take lessons and hold fast to the true spirit of *Sahaj* in the teachings of Gurbani, or to similar concepts in the scriptures of other religions. This will allow one to benefit by the positive aspects of modern culture without doing injustice to the spiritual ideal set for man by Guru Granth Sahib and other religious scriptures. ☪

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Prayer of the Sikhs

Ardaas

The Sikh's conception of God is personal. He moves with him like a fish does in water and lives with him like a wife with her husband. He is in constant communion with Him through prayer. Therefore prayer is omnipresent in Sikhism. The Scripture consists chiefly of prayers. No ceremony, whether religious or secular, is complete without prayer. Nay, most of the ceremonies and rituals contain nothing else. Before going on a journey, or opening a shop, or occupying a new house, the Sikh opens the holy book and asks for God's blessing. Often if time and means permit, he also arranges for the singing of hymns in thanks-giving. But he will never omit a short prayer, which even the poorest can afford.

No priest is required to address this, anybody, man or woman old or young, can lead in prayer. Even a boy or a girl may be seen conducting the morning or evening service and leading in prayer a big congregation consisting of the learned and advanced in age. This is purposely encouraged, so that every body may learn to shoulder his or her responsibilities without the help of a priestly class.

The prayer varies in size and size and contents. Sometimes only a few words will do. A man starting on horseback with one foot in the stirrup, may mutter to himself: "O Lord of the plume! Help Thy humble servant" Or a few lines may be quoted from the Scripture by way of saying grace before or after meals.

It is said that at the time of vacating Anandpur Sahib, there was no time to tarry; all that Sri Guru Gobind Singh Sahib said was *Meri Paj Rakheeri* - मेरी येन रकीं.

As a piece of composition it is one of the rarities of literature. It is not a work of any one man or any one time. The whole Sikh nation has been at work on it for centuries. The custom of offering prayers must have begun with the rise of Sikhism, but by the time of Guru Hargobind, the fifth successor of Guru Nanak, when places of worship had been organized and a definite book of faith had been installed in them, it became an established rule together for the purpose of praying in congregations. According to the Dubistan-I-Mazaheb when anybody wanted a gift from heaven, he would come to such an assembly of Sikhs and ask them to pray for him. Even the Guru asked his Sikhs to pray for him. Familiar expressions of prayer began to

accumulate, until by the time of Guru Gobind Singh a definite form was given to it.

Ardaas can be divided into three parts.

* Six lines of verse by Guru Gobind Singh invoking God and the first nine Gurus.

* From line 7 to 25, rhythmic prose, composed by various generations of Sikhs, as the events of their history went on leaving impressions upon their minds. The community even now has not abdicated its right of moulding this part of the prayer. It can refer in any suitable terms to the present-day difficulties and sorrows of the panth e.g... in connection with the wearing of kirpans and the reforming of temples.

* The prayers proper, the composition of which except a few words here and there depends entirely upon the person praying.

The first seven and the last two lines can in no case be altered or omitted though, in all other lines, changes can be made, can shorten, omit, add to them.

Though everybody is required to be able to lead in prayer, everybody cannot be expected to be original and to express himself in an assembly in a correct, concise and moving manner. Therefore it is provided that the man offering the prayer should begin with a recitation and get more and more flexible as he proceeds. After the composition of the Guru and the Community, the individual has a chance to try his free hand in expressing deep felt thoughts or the conjectured ideas of the whole congregation, it being so helpful so, educative.

The prayer is communal, not only in the composition of its language, but also in the nature of its subject matter. The Sikh, while offering it, is made to realize that he is a part of the corporate body, called the panth or the Khalsa, whose past and present history is recounted with all its sacrifices, successes, glories and needs. In order to understand why so much of the prayer is taken up with historical details, we must consider the meaning of the Sikh prayers.

The Gurus were very considered in the imparting of their teaching. They did not deliver lectures or write books and leave them to be understood by their Sikhs. They took as much care in the preparation of the disciple as of the lesson itself. They wanted to see that what they

gave was capable of being digested and assimilated. Therefore the teaching was in the disciple's own vernacular and given in the form of a song or discourse. Further, it was not delivered all at once, in one life. The Gurus took in hand the training of a nation and each one of them at time gave as much instruction as was needful passing it on to the next Guru when the work of one generation was complete. In this way the whole course of training extended over ten generations.

In other ways too, the Gurus took care to see that no effect of their teaching was lost upon the disciple. Different morning and evening services were fixed according to the mood or the atmosphere of the time. The philosophical Japji (or the Meditations of Guru Nanak) is to be read in the morning and the *Kirtan Sohila*, which breathes the spirit of calmness and resignation is fixed for bed time. If we look into the nature of the compositions, we shall find that the difference is just suited to the difference between our frame of mind in the morning and that of the evening. Passions are dominant in the evening. In the morning the mind is open to the contemplative part of the soul. It has been tranquillised by the calm sleep and is nearer heaven, fresh and clear, and can dwell on the difficult problems of human life discussed in the Japji. Being irritated and overstrung by the nervous energy of the day, by the night time a culminating point of its human vitality is reached; and as we sit in bed, preparing for sleep, we can no longer bear the strain of hard thinking. Therefore a short musical piece is all that has to be recited before we give ourselves up to sleep. The thoughts contained in the poem are further made easy by being woven in the form of imaginative figures. Our imagination just at that time is very active so abstract ideas are presented to us clothed in images. The difficult idea of His manifestations is made clear to us by being compared to the oneness of the sun in spite of the divisions of time and season. The figure of the bride approaching the door of her spouse, even as oil is anointed by friends of the family. It is really the human soul yearning to meet God after waiting day and night to receive a call from Him. Again, how beautifully the diversity of God's presence is diffused in the face of nature, presented in the form of stars and planets moving round the alter of God to perform an *arti*. Instances enough to show what efforts the Gurus have taken to suit their teaching to the mood in the disciple's mind.

In case of the prayer, too the same care has been taken. The Sikh has to bring himself into mood for prayer before he addresses himself to his God. When we actually pray, we stand face to face with God. But before we enter into the innermost tabernacle of God and reach that consummation, we have to traverse the ground of moral struggle and spiritual preparation. We have to realise what the communion with God has meant for those who have loved him; what sufferings and sacrifices they have to undergo to be able to see his face. We have to refresh ourselves with the sweet faith of those immortals

and fortify our minds with their patient strength and resignation.

Prayer does not mean mere physiological union with God or an undisturbed rest in him, but an active yearning of the soul to feel one with God who is always active who is always patient, who is always hopeful. Prayer should, therefore refresh our spirit and make us ready to do God's will. This can be done, if we first commune ourselves with the God revealed in history, and reverently watch the organic growth of Divinity in mankind. To do this we have to feel ourselves as part of that congregation of God-like beings who represent the best in man. We should steep ourselves in association with those in whose company we feel the presence of God.

The Sikh prayer was composed from this point of view. It begins with an invocation to God and then different souls are invoked in the order of precedence. The highest ideal of godliness according to the Sikhs was realised in Guru Nanak and his nine successors. Therefore they are mentioned in order. Then the five Beloved Ones, who for their sacrifice were invested with collective guruship by the last Guru, then the Guru's sons, who bravely met martyrdom and though young, kept up the brave tradition of their forefathers; then other great men and women, who wore arms and practiced charity and in the face of unspeakable suffering, kept their faith unsullied. This part of the prayer involves the whole community, past and present and is most vigorous in style and language.

How many hearts in these long centuries has it soothed in affliction and braved in difficulties: It bears the stamp of all that is best and most moving in Sikhism. It is the crystallisation of the Sikh nation's history. It is a living monument of its greatness which generation of the Sikhs will repeat to themselves to keep alive the faith in their midst.

After evoking vision of the mighty deeds of their forefathers, they think of their present condition, their temples, their associations, their choirs moving nightly round the Golden Temple, their banners; their mansions, which remind them of their past glory and call blessings upon them.

Then begins the prayer proper. Here one is quite free to express oneself and in the last but one line the Sikh prays for advancement of his religion to promote the knowledge of God among men; but this missionary work is to be carried on with due regard to other's rights and sentiments, for in the next line it prays for the good of every body without distinction of caste or creed.

Ardaas goes back to the days of the conflict with Mughuls in which the Sikhs suffered martyrdoms that are recounted. Yet nowhere is shown any sign of bitterness or revenge, there is no reproach or curse upon the enemy; only the sufferings are enumerated which are taken as sacrifices made by the community. ☪

Principal Teja Singh

The Guru Granth Sahib

Some Major Social Concerns

It is clear that the Sikhs look upon the Guru Granth as a guide for appropriate behaviour both in relation to God and to fellow beings. This is how scriptures have served the believers. However, this does not mean that scriptures always contain specific guidelines. All scriptures consist mainly of broad, general propositions, chiefly of an ethical nature. Their application to everyday life is an act of interpretation. This task is performed by a category of specialists who claim exclusive privilege to act as interpreters by two processes. First, they claim that the scripture, even if it is accessible to every believer, requires special knowledge which the common believer lacks. Second, they assert, such assertion being based on long-standing tradition about the authenticity of the scriptural text itself, that the interpretation they are offering is the only genuine interpretation that can be legitimately constructed from the text. Any alternative interpretation is, by simple deduction, declared to be heretical.

Sikhism is among the world's newest religions. The history of inscription of the Guru Granth is not more than a few hundred years old, even if some of the text that came to be integrated into it can be said to go back to earlier times. Unlike as in the case of the Quran, a considerable body of this text was preserved in writing, but a good part was orally transmitted from person to person and from one generation to another. It was Guru Arjan Dev, the fifth Sikh Guru, who initiated the process of inscribing text of the Guru Granth. The impetus for this was that the Guru's elder brother and others had started passing off some of his compositions as being the hymns of the Gurus.

Guru Arjun Dev's compilation, known as *Pothi Sahib* or Kartarpur Bir, went through a number of vicissitudes during which further additions were made. It is known that in the version known as Banno Bir some of the verses of Surdas and Mirabai, which Guru Arjun Dev had rejected and a few hymns alleged to be by Guru Nanak came to be inscribed. It was against this backdrop that Guru Gobind Singh, the tenth and last Guru during whose Guruship Sikhism underwent substantial transformation, took the decision to inscribe the Guru Granth as we know

it today. Other versions of the Guru Granth were available at this time. One of the principal tasks in the face of the simultaneous existence of varied versions was to establish the version inscribed during his time as the authoritative version. Guru Gobind Singh resolved this difficulty by declaring his own version as the canonical version of the Guru Granth.

One can be reasonably sure that process of inscribing the canonical version of the Guru Granth was not entirely seamless. For one thing, as already indicated, a number of different versions were evidently in circulation at the time of the compiling of the canonical version. Second, the decision as to which verses to include and which to leave out was itself an act of interpretation. With respect to the central text at the core of the entire edifice of Sikhism, as indeed of most other religions, interpretation played a vital but hidden role. However, the role of interpretation in the preservation and inscription of the Guru Granth is suppressed in orthodox Sikh doctrine and the belief that the text is as it came down in history is itself a tenet of orthodox faith. Orthodoxy is most concerned to conceal and erase from the consciousness of the believers that its central text does embody acts of interpretation. This is understandable, because the authority and power of orthodox religion depends on its claiming a monopoly of truth and on declaring its version to be absolute and all other versions to be deviations or even heresies.

Guru Gobind Singh brought about two significant transformations in Sikhism. One, he established a single text which was thenceforth to be the Sikh scripture, signifying that whatever was of value had been inscribed in the Guru Granth and this was the sacred voice of the Gurus. It was to be the spiritual guide for the Sikhs in the future. Second, and this transformation was particularly significant in elevating the standing of Guru Granth as a scripture, Guru Gobind Singh shifted the locus of spiritual authority from the Guru to the Guru Granth. It is thus that the Guru Granth came to be seen as the principal source of religious and social wisdom and became a point of reference for the Sikhs in matters concerning both this world and thereafter.

Smith draws pointed attention to this development.

The Sikh community ... at a certain point in its relatively short history thus far decided to move on from its tradition of living leaders (Gurus) for the community and to adopt in its stead a new pattern of authority. Retaining those great men's revered memory and indeed perpetuating it, the group chose explicitly to organise their life henceforth, after passing of the tenth Guru in terms, rather, of an authoritative collection of recognised writings—the cherished teachings chiefly of those leaders, along with pieces from a few other 'saints'. This collection they have called in personalising fashion, the Guru Granth Sahib.

One may deem it delinquent for us not to understand the role of this sacred collection in the corporate life and personal piety of this remarkable community. Among overt and observable aspects of the special treatment accorded it are the little shrines or separate rooms that in recent times many Sikhs have come to maintain in their homes, wherein the scripture is decoratively and reverently housed. An outsider can hardly but be struck by the devotion and engagement evinced in Sikh's turning to these, regularly opening them each day and worshipping God before them."

I have surveyed this historical process briefly to make two significant points. One is that the scriptural text that we know today as the Guru Granth has to be understood in context of the historical process of its emergence as well as the meaning that believers have attached to it in different times and places. As Smith has noted, believers may hold that whatever their scripture has meant or means to them, there cannot be any meaning to any text, religious or otherwise, without a human response to it. In other words, what meaning a people attach to their scripture or to any passage of it is the outcome of their peculiar circumstances in time and place. It is in this sense that scripture is both a human and an historical reality, not to deny the possibility of it being divine and absolute.

The other point is that the very act of selection, consolidation, inscription and reading of a scriptural text is an interpretative act and has to be seen as such for analytical purposes even if for the believers it is the word of the Divine or words that those having access to the Divine communicated. This point is central to our concern. From a historical point of view one can document that the scripture has in reality meant to some degree similar and to some degree different things to different people at different times and places. One can also document what those similar and different things have been and are. Even the links

between those meanings and the contemporary influences, the processes of change, the community life, the community pressures and the force of tradition can be traced. The real meaning of the scripture or any part of it is not any one meaning. It is the historical reality of actual meanings over the centuries to the people and is as mundane, or as transcending, or both, as have been the actual meanings in the lives and hearts of persons.

This leaves us with two options in discussing the major social concerns of the Guru Granth. One can look at what the Sikhs see to be the social message of the Guru Granth and explore the extent to which their perception of that social message shapes their actions and behaviour. This can be a remarkably fascinating exercise, but it suffers from the limitation that what is actually studied is not what the scripture contains, but what the believers perceive to be the social message and whether or how they translate it in their daily processes of life. Alternatively, one can limit oneself to the text, without going into a consideration of what interpretation of that message has been sanctified and how that interpretation has been perceived and translated into their lives by the believers. Let me clarify that I have followed the second approach. I have gone by the reading of the scripture rather than the imprint it may have on the Sikhs in social matters or how it may have shaped the social life of each succeeding generation of Sikhs. This is mainly on account of my lack of knowledge both about Sikhism and the Sikhs. I thought I could elucidate the social concerns of the Guru Granth without saying something about the Sikhs about whom I could hardly claim to be knowledgeable.

A preliminary reading of the Guru Granth does not leave one with the impression that social concerns are at its core. Unlike many other scriptures that we are familiar with, the Guru Granth does not contain any passages laying down specific prescriptions or prohibitions about any aspects of social life. Its principal concern is with ensuring human happiness through prodding the believers toward a spiritual quest for the Divine. Again and again, the Guru Granth dwells upon the virtues of devotion to God conceived as the creator and as the source of human bliss. It tells the believers '*He cannot be established, He cannot be created. He Himself is Immaculate and Pure.*' It is beyond human comprehension to describe him, let alone to fathom his creative powers. '*He Himself knows Himself. The praisers praise the Lord, but they do not obtain intuitive understanding—the*

steams and rivers flowing into the ocean do not know its vastness.' 'His limits cannot be perceived. What is the Mystery of His Mind? The limits of the created universe cannot be perceived. Many struggle to know His limits, but His limits cannot be perceived. No one knows these limits. The more you say about them, much more still remains to be said. Great is the Master, High is His Heavenly Home. Highest of the High, above all is His Name.' 'Only One as Great and as High as God can know His Loft- and Exalted State. Only he himself is that Great. He Himself knows Himself.'

Since God is 'all in all', the believer is exhorted to recognise the power of His Command. *'It is written that you shall obey the Hukum of His Command, and walk in the Way of His Will. By His Command, bodies are created; His Command cannot be described. By His Command souls come into being; by His Command glory and greatness are obtained. By His Command, some are high and some are low, by His Written Command pain and pleasure are obtained. Some by His Command are blessed and forgiven; others, by His Command, wander aimlessly for ever. Everyone is subject to His Command; no one is beyond His Command.'* According to the Lord's Command, people perform their actions. *'Before and after, His Command is pervading.'* *'One who does not know the Hukum of the lord's Command cries out in terrible pain.'* *'There is no power in the hands of mortal beings; the Doer, the Cause of causes is the Lord of all. The helpless beings are subject to His Command. That which pleases him ultimately comes to pass.'*

One might say in passing that the entire text of the Guru Granth is replete with allusions to the pervading power of the Divine so much so that the believer is almost reduced to being powerless.

Human happiness in the face of this high degree of powerlessness of the believer lies in spiritual unity with the Divine. Again and again, the Guru Granth reiterates almost in the manner reminiscent of other major world scriptures, that unflinching adherence to personal piety offers the way out of human powerlessness before God. This piety does not consist in observance of empty rituals. There are any number of passages in the Guru Granth that caricature the Mullah and the Pandit who engage in empty rituals and go round and round in the circle of reincarnation. *'One may have the eighteen Puranaas written in his hand; he may recite the four Vedas by heart and take ritual bath at holy festivals and give charitable donations, he may observe the ritual fasts and perform religious ceremonies day and night. He may be a Qazi, a Mullah or a Shaykh, a Yogi or a wandering hermit wearing saffron-coloured robes; he may be a householder working at his job; but without*

understanding the essence of devotional worship, all people are bound and gagged, and driven along by the Messenger of Death.' *'You are a Mullah, and you are a Qazi, only when you know the Naam, the Name of God.'* *'He alone is a Qazi who renounces selfishness and conceit, and makes the One Name his Support.'* *'He alone is a Mullah, who banishes evil; he alone is a saintly dervish, who takes the Support of the Lord's Praise. Always, at any moment, remember God, the Creator within you heart. Let meditation beads be the subjugation of the ten senses. Let good conduct and self-restraint be your circumcision.'*

Salvation, understood most broadly as liberation from negative attitudes of the mind such as egoism, conceit and greed for wealth and material comfort, is achieved according to the Guru Granth through spiritual worship and meditation, and right conduct required to overcome human propensities for wrongdoing. Meditation and Spiritual worship come through devotion to the Guru and recitation of the sacred compositions of the Guru, signifying the accumulated wisdom of those who succeeded in overcoming their self and merged with the Divine. *'He dwells in each and every heart, by the Hukum of His Command, by His Hukum, we contemplate him. That soul-bride who lacks the Lord's name acts without virtue, and so she grieves.'* *'God is not pleased with clever tricks and commands. You may practice a thousand forms of cleverness, but not one will go along with you in the end. Meditate on that Lord, that Lord, day and night.'* *'God Himself is everything; those who are in their ego cannot speak of this. Through the Word of the Guru's Shabad, He is realised, and the pain of egoism is eradicated from within.'* *'If one goes through the Shabad, then salvation is obtained, and one finds the Door of Liberation.'* *'The Word of the Guru's Shabad is Ambrosial Nectar, drinking it in, thirst is quenched. This true mind is attuned to Truth, and it remains permeated with the True One. In speaking, in saying and in words, remain immersed in the Shabad.'*

It is through the Shabad, the repeated recitation of the sacred words of the Gurus, that the right attitude is cultivated.

'You must know in your heart that every thing is temporary. Family, household and siblings are all entanglements.

Kings, rulers and nobles are mortal and transitory; only God's Gate is the permanent place.

First, is the Lord's Praise: second, contentment; third, humility, and fourth, giving to charities. Fifth is to hold one's desires in restraint.

These are the five most sublime daily prayers. Let your daily worship be the knowledge that God is everywhere. Let renunciation of evil actions be the pitcher you carry.

Let realisation of the One Lord God be your call to prayer; be a good child of God - let this be your trumpet.

'Let what is earned righteously be your blessed food. Wash away pollution with the river of your heart.'

'Let good deeds be your body and faith your bride. Play and enjoy the Lord's love and delight.

Purify what is impure, and let the Lord's Presence be your religious tradition. Let your total awareness be the turban on your head.'

'After all their reading, the Pandits, the religious scholars, and the astrologers argue and debate. Their intellect and understanding are perverted; they just don't understand. They are filled with greed and corruption. Through 8.4 million incarnations they wander lost and confused; through all their wandering and roaming, they are ruined. They act according to their pre-ordained destiny, which no one can erase.

It is very difficult to serve the True Guru. Surrender your head; give up your selfishness.

Realising the Shabad, one meets with the Lord, and all one's service is accepted. By personally experiencing the Personality of the Guru, one's own personality is lifted, and one's light merges into the Light,

'Reflect on your own self, and so practice good conduct; chant the Name of the Lord as your self-discipline and meditation.

The Name of the Lord is your Companion, Friend and Dear Beloved; chant it, and meditate on it.

Singing the Glorious Praises of the Lord, be happy. Apply the ointment of spiritual wisdom to your eyes.

The Word of the Shabad is the lamp which illuminates the three worlds; Quieting your fears, become fearless, and you shall cross over the impassible world ocean.

Meeting the Guru, your affairs shall be resolved. You shall find the joy and the beauty of the Lord's Love and Affection; the Lord Himself shall shower you with His Grace.'

This is the promise of the Guru Granth's invitation to spirituality. If the principal thrust of the Guru Granth is spiritual, this does not mean that it is entirely indifferent to social matters. No religious scripture can afford to do this because the very purpose of a scripture is to address human condition. Most scriptures and the religions of which they are authoritative guides are founded upon the premise that human nature combines potential for both evil and good. If the potential for evil is

allowed free play or becomes ascendant, the human condition has a natural propensity to deteriorate. When this happens, and the presumption always is that this is almost natural to happen unless constraints are placed, all those socio-psychological attributes that incline human beings towards hedonism of the one kind or another take hold of the individual and society. Both become mired into worldly pleasures and the potential for all kinds of social evils is created which ultimately becomes serious obstruction in the pursuit of a harmonious and peaceful existence. Life becomes conflict ridden, leading individuals to compete for worldly possessions, ostentatious display of wealth and social class differences giving rise to social and economic inequalities.

Most religious scriptures as well as the religious traditions have come in the course of time to represent attempt to restrain this potential and strike reasonable balance between this and the other worldly concerns. Even the most casual perusal of the Guru Granth leads one to easily conclude that its principal occupation is to introduce a system of checks and balances by seeking to wean away human beings from too strong an orientation toward hedonist living to one oriented toward spiritual pursuit.

This is eloquently brought out by two conceptual categories that are repeatedly and frequently used in the Guru Granth. One is the concept of duality. If one reads through the text, one comes across this word quite often. The word has at no point been defined. Nor is it any where indicated what meaning should be imputed to it. However, from the context in which the word is used, it is clear that duality fundamentally refers to the human potential for being simultaneously drawn towards this worldly pleasures and the desire to attain peace and harmony. This quality which most people would under normal circumstances possess in society is a serious impediment to their self-realisation and attainment of tranquility and peace, not to speak of spiritually elevating themselves.

Many verses in the Guru Granth refer to the effects of duality on human condition and the virtue of overcoming this through seeking to tread the spiritual path. Those who do not understand the nature of sin and virtue are attached to duality; they wander around deluded. Attached to duality, the world is distracted and distressed. The mind is

polluted by the love of duality. Filthy is that kitchen, and filthy is that dwelling. . . .’ *The world is polluted with the filth of egotism, suffering in pain. This filth sticks to them because of their love of duality.*’

‘Hypocrisy is not devotion-speaking words of duality leads only to misery.’

‘In their dreams at night, people wander around as long as they sleep; just so, they are under the power of the snake Maya, as long as their hearts are filled with ego and duality.’

‘Reading and studying, the Pandits and the silent sages have grown weary, but attached to the love of duality, they have lost their honour.’

‘There are painted mansions to behold, white-washed, with beautiful doors; they were constructed to give pleasure to the mind, but this is only for the sake of the love of duality.’

‘Attached to duality, the foolish, blind and stupid people waste away life and die.’

‘Like worms, they live in manure and in it, they die over and over again.’

‘Through the love with duality, no one has found peace. They write falsehood, and they practice falsehood; they are burnt to ashes by focusing their consciousness on falsehood.’

‘Some are stuck in falsehood, and false are the rewards they receive.’

In love with duality, they waste away their lives in vain. They drown themselves, and drown their entire family; speaking lies, they eat poison.’

‘One who reads, while attached to duality, does not understand. He yearns for the three-phased Maya. This unstable mind cannot be held steady. Attached to duality, it wanders in the ten directions. ... It is a poisonous worm, drenched with poison, and in poison it rots away.’

‘O Siblings of Destiny, the world is in misery, engrossed in the love of duality.’

The other concept frequently used in the Guru Granth is that of the dichotomy between the gurmukh and the manmukh. The foundational principle underlying this dichotomy is that there are in the world two kinds of people: those who are given to worldly pleasures and those who have overcome their worldly attractions and taken to the path of devotion. The Gurmukh knows the Divine Light, while the foolish self-willed manmukh gropes around in the darkness. One who sees that Light within each and every heart understands the Essence

of the Guru’s Teachings. *Those who understand are Gurmukh; recognise and applaud them’*

‘One who attains perfection as Gurmukh, obtains the Immeasurable True Lord.’ The Gurmukh praises the Naam, and the fire of egotism is extinguished’.

The raging fire within is extinguished; the Gurmukh obtains spiritual wisdom.’

‘The Lord abides within the mind of the Gurmukh, who merges in the Lord’s Union, through the Guru.’

‘The Gurmukhs do not like falsehood. They are imbued with Truth; they love only Truth. Practicing truth, self-discipline and good deeds, the Gurmukh is enlightened.’

‘The Gurmukhs meditate on the Naam; they eradicate selfishness and conceit from within. They are pure, inwardly and outwardly; they merge into the Truest of the True.’

‘For the Gurmukh, the love of the Name of the Lord is chanting, deep meditation and self-discipline. The Gurmukhs shed their ego; attuned to the Naam, they find peace’.

‘Through stubborn-mindedness, the intellect is drowned; one who becomes Gurmukh and truthful is saved.’

‘The Gurmukhs dwell for ever in balanced restraint.’

So, the Guru Granth advises, ‘Become Gurmukh, and immerse yourself in the Shabad.’

The manmukhs are entirely the opposite. *‘Anger and egoism are within him night and day; he burns, and suffers constant pain. They babble and tell lies, eating the poison of love of duality. For the sake of Maya, they wander from house to house, and lose their honour. They are like the son of a prostitute, who does not know the name of his father.’*

‘The self-willed manmukhs are polluted. They are filled with the pollution of egoism, wickedness and desire.’

‘Some are lovers of beautiful young women; emotional attachment to Maya is very dear to them.’

‘The unfortunate self-willed manmukhs remain asleep. They are inwardly attached to egoism. The minds and bodies of the self-willed manmukhs are filled with darkness; they find no shelter, no place to rest.’

‘The self-willed manmukhs perform religious rituals, but they are burnt down by their selfishness and conceit. Their births and deaths do not cease; over and over again, they come and go in reincarnation.’

‘By ritualistic fasts, vows, purities and self-discipline and worship ceremonies, they still cannot get rid of their hypocrisy and doubt. Inwardly, they are impure, pierced

through attachment to Maya; they are like elephants, who throw dirt all over themselves right after the bath.'

'The lives of the self-willed manmukhs are useless; in the end, they die, regretting and repenting. The husband is away and the wife is getting dressed. This is what the blind, self-willed manmukhs are doing. They are not honoured in this world, and they shall find no place in the world hereafter.'

'They are wasting their lives in vain.' 'Whosoever associates with the self-willed manmukhs, will have his face blackened and dirtied.'

The central social message of the Guru Granth is thus clear and straightforward. *"The pleasures of gold and silver, the pleasures of women, the pleasures of the fragrance of sandalwood, the pleasure of horses, the pleasure of a soft bed in a palace, the pleasure of sweet treats and the pleasure of hearty meals, these pleasures of the human body are so numerous. . . ."*

'Humanity is in spiritual darkness, people see things that do not exist.'

'So win the game of life; let your mind surrender and accept death. When the self dies, the individual mind comes to know the Supreme Mind. As the inner vision is awakened, one comes to know one's own home, deep within the self.'

This is broadly the social theme Guru Granth reiterates time and again to exhort believers to give up egoism, self-indulgence and selfishness and launch upon the quest for the Divine. The underlying assumption that forms the basis of this exhortation is that control of common human proclivities for evil egoism, selfishness, greed, lust and worldly attachments, brings in social balance as well as personal and social harmony.

One significant question that arises in this context is whether Guru Granth sees the journey from being a Gurmukh to being a manmukh in terms of a clear-cut dichotomy or as a continuum. At any point of time, believers would be at various stages of such journey. Some would have imbibed all the virtues of being a Gurmukh. Others may be seeking to do so with varying degrees of success. Should the characterisation as Gurmukh be restricted to one who has arrived at the destination? Or, should it also apply to those who have started on that journey without necessarily having arrived at the final destination. If we take the first view, it would seem that there are no intermediate stages of being a Gurmukh. Unless one has reached the final stage of the journey, one would continue to be counted among the manmukh. An alternate view can be that the important point in this context is

not where and how far one has proceeded on this journey. But what is a intention of the believer. If one is fired with the desire to overcome ego, lead a life of purity and attain unity with the Divine, one is akeady on the way to becoming a Gurmukh unless one meanwhile relapses completely and settles back to a life of attraction for worldly pleasures. It is by remaining steadfast in one's journey toward overcoming common human failings that a believer becomes a Gurmukh. Thus, the dichotomy between the Gurmukh and the manmukh should be seen in terms of *intentionality* rather than the final effect of achieving the status of a Gurmukh. Someone who is completely immersed in the pleasures of this world, who is habitually egoistic, who appropriates other peoples' wealth and whose conscience is not troubled by egoism, selfishness and indifference to the Divine is truly a manmukh. If one has become aware of the Divine, understands that egoism, selfishness and self-indulgence are undesirable traits, one has already become transformed and already a Gurmukh.

All religions rest on the premise that human beings are inherently imperfect but can work towards perfection. They are capable of engaging in acts and behaviour that has the potential to destroy peace and tranquility of an individual life as well as create conditions of conflict with fellow human beings. Most religions are , therefore, attempts at social engineering, seeking to shape human conduct in a way that man can be at peace with himself as well as fellow human beings. Looked at from this general perspective, religion is individual or personal as well as social. At the individual level, religion seeks to order man's relationship with the Divine and provides a framework for regulation of individual conduct. Notions of good and evil as well as sins and rewards for the pursuit of, and adherence to, the right path are central to most religions. These conceptions are meant to create moral imperatives for the individual for adhering to the right path, the path considered desirable for ensuring personal and social harmony.

Relationship with the divine is conceived in most religions in hierarchical terms. The Divine, characterised differently in different religions, is placed on a pedestal. On the other hand, man is placed in a subordinate, one can even say subservient, position and is to that extent supposed to be beholden to the Divine. It is thus that man is supposed to seek Divine blessings to ensure peace, harmony and balance in this life and in the life hereafter. Conceptions of heaven and hell are common to most religions and are intended to strike a fear of the Divine in man to keep to the

right path. At the social level, religions seek to create a framework for the individual to live in peace and harmony with fellow human beings. The relationship between fellow human beings is by and large conceived in egalitarian terms. All human beings are projected as equal unto one another. This is not to say that religions do not anticipate individual and social differences. All religions anticipate individual and social differences arising out of differential endowments. However, these differences do not render individuals as unequal in the eyes of the Divine. In other words, the equality that religions affirm is the equality of belief rather than that of endowments, whether personal or social.

This is where religions run into serious difficulties. One difficulty is that all religions outline a vision of a future society, but their scriptures also have to account for ground realities of the societies of their origin. Since the societies in which most religions evolved and took shape were unequal, they could not have taken an entirely unequivocal position on social inequality. On the one hand, they had to deal with and account for social inequalities that existed in society. On the other hand, they had to outline a vision of a social order wherein social equality would prevail. At least this is the case with most world religions with the possible exception of Hindu scriptures whose conception of society is explicitly constructed as a many layered entity. This is a remarkable contradiction to most world religions when it comes to the question of reading social equality into them. There is often a tendency on the part of those who make it their business to interpret these scriptures either to underplay the passages that seem to endorse existing social inequalities or to transpose the passages that propagate the vision of a future egalitarian order and so argue that equality constitutes the real essence of religion. This tendency is most eloquently illustrated by interpretations of the Quran. There are many passages in the Quran that would seem to clearly endorse social inequality, but the interpretation that enjoys wide currency (so much so that any attempt to suggest otherwise is seen as sacrilegious,) is that Islam stands for social equality (*masawat*). This holds equally for other religious traditions as well.

The Guru Granth's attitude on the issue of social equality is notably marked by contradictoriness. Passages such as 'By His Command, some are high and some are low' and 'You have so many forms and colours, so many classes, high and low' would seem to endorse social inequality. On the other

hand, there are other passages where the inherent equality of human beings is strongly endorsed. 'Everyone says that there are four castes, four social classes. They all emanate from the drop of God's seed. The entire universe is made of the same clay. The Potter has shaped it into all sorts of vessels. The five elements join together, to make the form of the human body. Who can say which is less, and which is more?'

'Do not be fooled by appearances of high and low.'

"Those who believe in high and low social classes, only sing songs and chants of egoism."

One way out of this contradictoriness is to transpose the futuristic vision of the Guru Granth over the other passages and to argue that the Guru Granth's social orientation is remarkably egalitarian. This approach cannot be sustained in the face of the other passages that endorse social inequality or offer a rationale for it. The other option is to recognise that contradiction arises out of the scripture having to deal with existing social inequality and outlining a vision of an egalitarian social order in the future. This perspective has the merit of accounting for the Guru Granth's strong emphasis upon charity and service as religious duties as interim measures designed to ease existing inequalities until the future social order has taken shape and is established.

The second difficulty relates to the distinction between believers and non-believers. Whereas all religions lay emphasis upon the essential equality of the believers, their attitude toward non-believers differs markedly. The non-believer easily becomes the recognisable 'other' and hence liable to differential treatment vis-a-vis the 'believer.' Some religions allow for incorporation of the non-believer, i.e. the recognisable 'other', through assimilation or conversion. Others deny the possibility of incorporation altogether by creating a clear and unbridgeable dichotomy between believers and non-believers. This dichotomy becomes particularly strong where the non-believer refuses to be incorporated and wishes to adhere to the integrity and solace of his own faith. Where this dichotomy is salient, and I would argue it is central to most universal religions, the relationship between believers and non-believers has a built-in potential for conflict and breakdown of social harmony.

Considerable evidence by now exists that this conflict and disharmony has been endemic throughout history. On the one hand, it has involved efforts by one set of believers to either kill non-believers or to coerce them to change their faith and become one with the "faithful". On the other hand, there are instances where the prospect of conversion

was also not afforded. Elimination was the only choice offered to the non-believer. The history of the Crusades illustrates this clearly. The Spanish Christian armies were willing to allow the choice to Jews to embrace Christianity in order to escape death. This possibility was denied to Muslims whose only fate was eventual exodus or elimination. Smith draws pointed attention to this basic reality when he writes:

The devil can cite scripture for his purpose, we were reminded long ago. Gullible devout folk follow. The pious, certainly, can at times cite it with equal damage while fooling themselves, and alas some others, that it is for God's purpose. Historical instances abound. Scripture served as the chief moral justification for slavery among those who resisted proposals to abolish that institution; and indeed as sanctifying many an oppressive status quo against movements for justice. There is the fearsome extent to which scripture has served in outrageous wars to make both sides self-righteous, and all the more fierce. Again, it has served the degradation of women. Many further instances could be cited, from the past and from the present day. Another: the mighty force of a scripture's binding a community together has worked to make sharp, and often relentless, divergence between communities. Especially in the case of the Western triad—Jewish, Christian, Islamic—the scripture-based disparagement of those deemed outsiders has been, and continues to be, disastrous.

Critical to a consideration of the distinction between the believers and non-believers in religions is to recognise the close inter-linkage between community and power. So long as considerations of community and power do not enter into their mutual relations, the believer and the non-believer can co-exist in the same time and place through acceptance and toleration of religious differences and skillfully crafted truce. Medina, symbolising the possibility of co-existence of different faiths and their adherents within the same territory is often cited, and not without good reason, as an example of this kind of truce. What is often overlooked is that even this kind of a truce broke down once the transformation of the religious communities into political communities began to take place. Once that began to happen, the distinction between the believer and the non-believer, between 'we' and 'they', was an inevitable corollary.

Secularism is aimed at transcending the divide between believers and non-believers (and believers following different lines of persuasion within the same religion) by seeking to define the political community in strictly non-religious terms. It proclaimed that religion was not, and could not be, the basis of defining a political community so that

even followers of different religions, or even the followers of different lines of persuasion within the same religion, could become equal citizens of a nation-state.

The Guru Granth comes very close to this secular dictum, but not because it overrides the dichotomy of the believer and the non-believer. It does so by a degree of eclecticism in the matter of belief:

*I do not know what pleases my Lord
O mind, seek out the way.
The meditatives practice meditation,
And the wise practice spiritual wisdom,
But how rare are those who know God!
The worshippers of Bhagaauti practice self-discipline,
The Yogi speaks of liberation,
And the ascetic is absorbed in ascetism.
The men of silence observe silence,
The Sanyaasees observe celibacy,
And the Udaasees abide in detachment.
There are nine forms of devotional worship.
The Pandits recite the Vedas.
The householders assert their faith in family life.
Those who utter One Word, those who take many forms, the naked renunciates,
The wearers of patched coats, the magicians, those who always remain awake,
And those who bathe at holy places of pilgrimage.
Those who go without food, those who never touch others,
The hermits who never show themselves,
And those who are wise in their own minds.
Of these, no one admits to any deficiency;
All say that they have found the Lord.
But he alone is a devotee, whom the Lord has united with Himself.
Avoiding all devices and contrivances, I have sought his sanctuary.
Nanak has fallen at the Feet of the Guru.*

Imtiaz Ahmad

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An Illustrated Janamsakhi: Bhai Bala Tradition



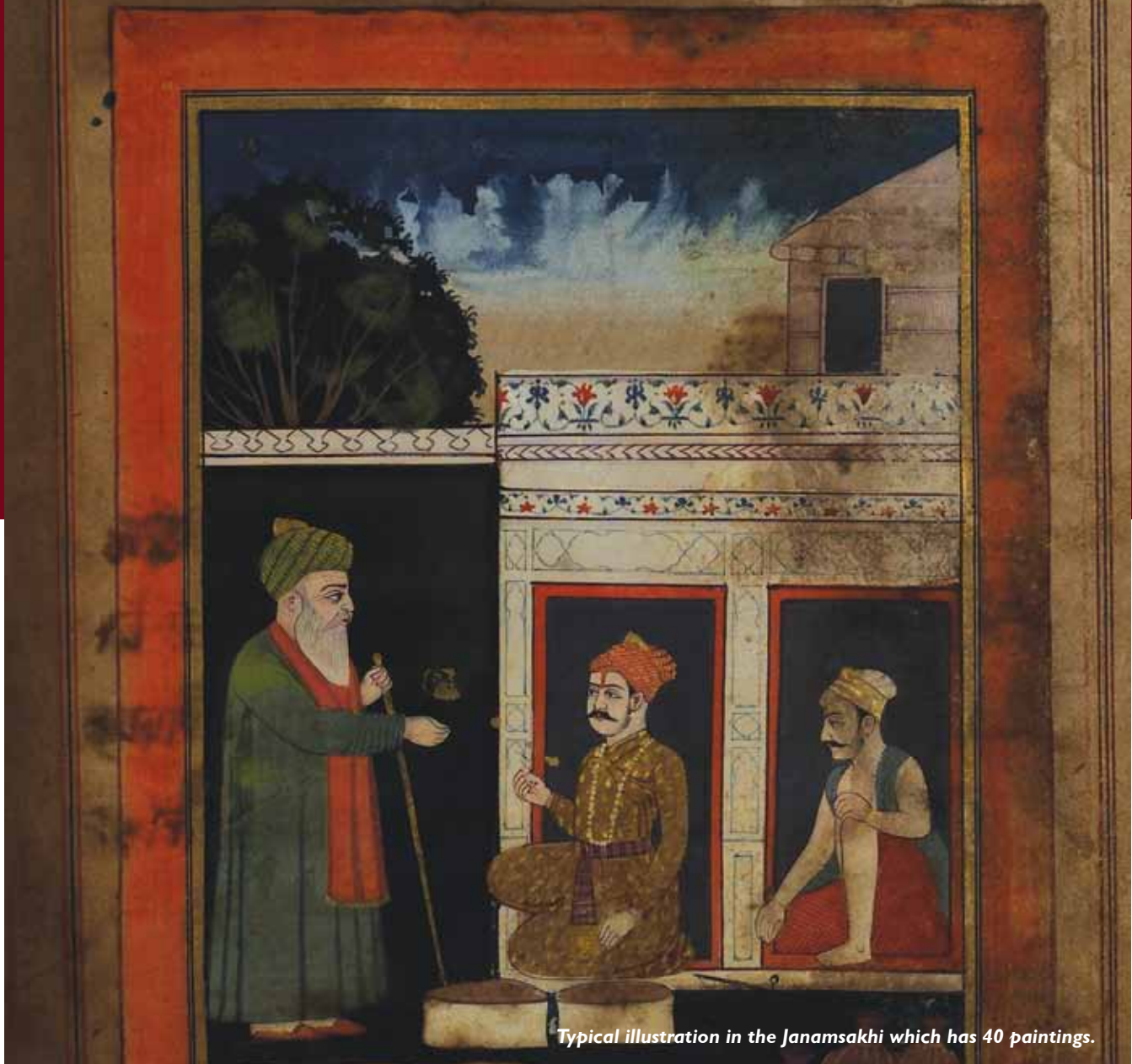
Guru Nanak giving the mantle of Guruship to Bhai Lehna.

The word “Sakhi” is a derivative of the word *Saksya* (साक्ष्य) meaning ‘evidence’ or testimony. It’s usage in Panjabi however usually refers to stories or anecdotes which came down by way of oral history from eyewitness accounts and amongst the community of Sikhs, refers to incidents or stories of the happenings during the lives of the Gurus. Though ‘Janam’ literally means birth, but in the religious ethos it invariably connotes the ‘life period’. So Janam Sakhis are, so to say, eye witness accounts or evidence of the divine mission of the Gurus. These are not biographies in the clinical sense, rather they are heigraphical in essence.

The Gurus were truly an embodiment of the divine. They lived in difficult times and went about

their mission with bare minimum infrastructure. They had no compelling ego to write daily diaries to leave for posterity. They were self facing and consequently we find no significant mention of incidents of their lives in their own writings or scriptures. Guru Nanak did carry a ‘Pothi’ (book) with him, but that was for recording the *Bani* to ensure that the message he had brought was not diluted, tempered with or corrupted.

Thus, whatever we know about lives of the Gurus is from the writing of their contemporaries, friends, devotees and foes alike. What clearly emerges from these writing is that however biased the writer might be, the greatness, uniqueness, humility and divinity of the Gurus perforce emerges from them. Janam Sakhis in a manner, become the basis of faith.



Typical illustration in the Janamsakhi which has 40 paintings.

Sikhs as such are indebted to many of these chroniclers who documented incidents of the lives of the Gurus as best as they could for making available to us the reconstructed and detailed history of their lives. The stories of their lives - Sakhis of their Janam- the Janamsakhis.

This brings us to the tradition of Janamsakhi, writings mostly associated with life of the first Guru, Guru Nanak Dev, most of them being compiled during the 17th and 19th centuries.

These certainly are not biographical accounts, but in form of a dialogue highlighting his teaching through anecdotes exposing the Gurus spiritual and human greatness.

Since the writers were most devout, some had personal exposure, others had heard amazing happenings from those who had near experiences and some like Bhai Gurdas had sat at the feet of the Gurus. They were amazed at the marvelous deeds, almost in the realm of legends and even mythical.

The ethos of any nation is a composite of history, myths and legend. Sikhs are debarred from accepting our Gurus as incarnations and miracles are termed as divine wrath (ਕਰਮਾਤ ਕਹਿਰ ਕਾ ਨਾਮ). But the lives, the acts, the achievement of the Gurus, as seen by an ordinary but devout person were nothing short of miracle. Imagine a mendicant like Guru Nanak protesting in writing against the mighty Emperor Babar in those heinous days. Imagine the Satguru in

the midst of established hegemony of the Pandits and throwing water towards the West or for that matter standing in a temple at Jaganathpuri and denouncing the futility of physical Aarti or to tell the Qazis of Mecca to turn the Gurus feet towards wherever God was not!

The Janamsakhis of Guru Nanak are of this tradition, open to scrutiny and historical analysis, but every component of tradition need not be analysed and rejected only to prove a hypothesis. It should be done with *Bibek Budhi* and more important *Nirmal Maan* that is of discerning intellect and an unbiased mind.

that it was started on the Baisakh Panchami of Samat 1582 ie, 1525 A.D. which corroborates with some other versions of the Bhai Bala Janamsakhis. It also states that the writing was undertaken under the directions of Guru Angad Dev and took two months and seventeen days to complete it. It then goes on to describe how the Guru sent Bhai Bala to Talwandi to retrieve the Janampatri of Guru Nanak from the kin of Pandit Hardyal which he eventually managed to get.

Throughout the manuscript, Bhai Bala is present in every episode and affirms the stories as an eye



Guru Nanak at Mecca.



Guru Nanak and Wali Kandhari.

There is this Janamsakhi in the Bhai Bala tradition, very special because it has some very interesting paintings in it. This manuscript contains 211 leaves or 422 pages of hand-written Gurumukhi with 40 paintings depicting various episodes from the life of Guru Nanak.

This is apparently a recession of the Bala version. On the very first page of the Janamsakhi, is written

witness. He also narrates the experiences and affirms the legend that Bhai Bala was a constant companion of the Satguru along with Bhai Mardana.

Bhai Bala is mentioned as Bala Sandhu and one Lala Punnu who are said to have gone to Talwandi Rai Bhoi, where they met Bhai Laloo, Pandit Hardyal's surviving brother, who after searching for five days located Guru Nanak's Janampatri. It

was given by Bhai Laloo on the assurance that if Baba Sri Chand, Guru Nanak's son, took umbrage to this then Guru Angad would protect him. The separation and divergence of the Udasi and Guru ghar traditions becomes very evident at the very beginning.

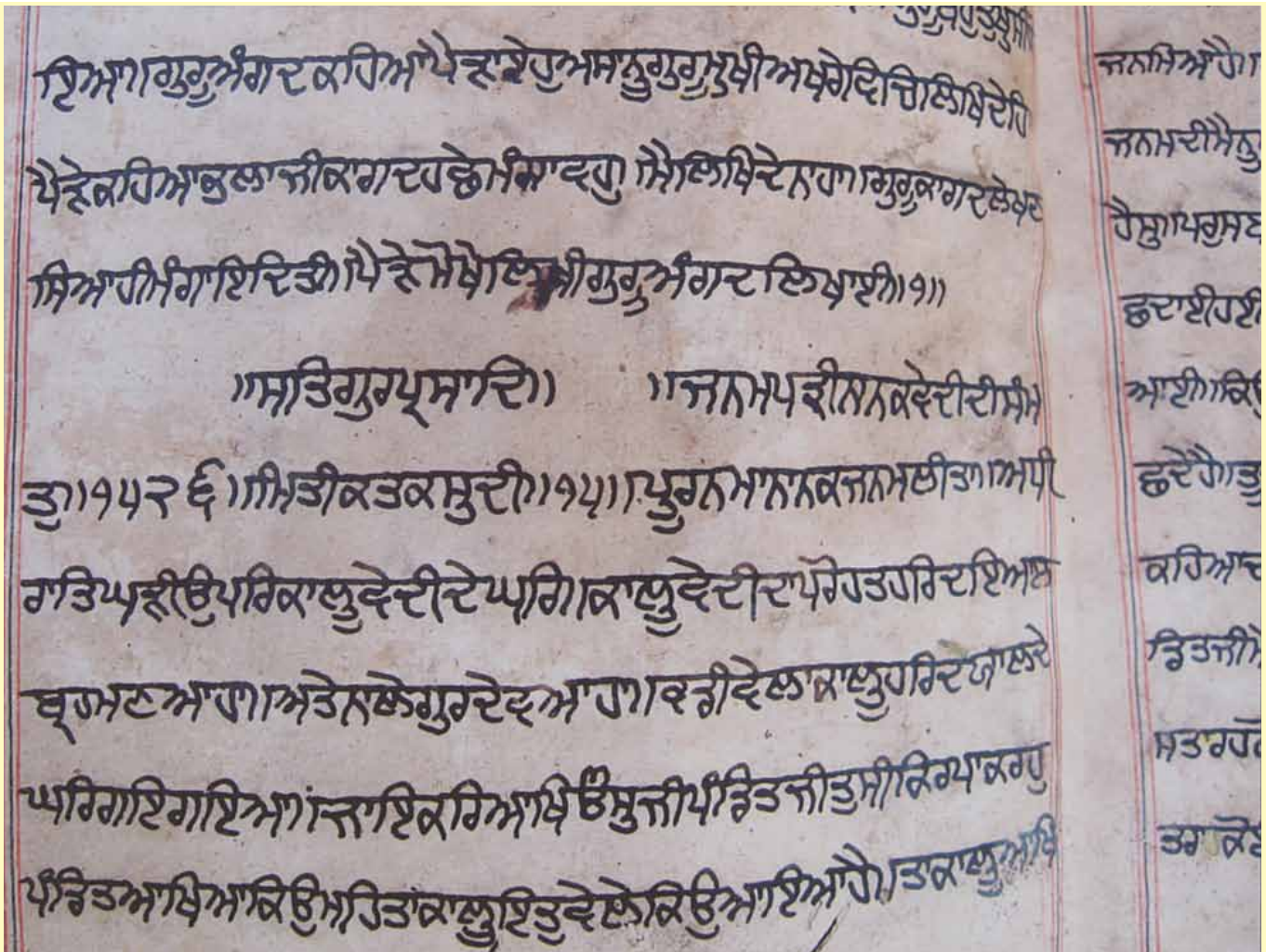
Like other Bala recessions, this manuscript too states that one Parra Mokha was the scribe, so chosen by Guru Angad because he was well versed in both Devnagari and Gurumkhi scripts, so affirming Guru Angad's contribution in reforming and development of the Gurumkhi script.

as *Katak Sudhi* '15' Pooranma- "Half Ghari after midnight"

It describes how Pandit Hardyal enquires about the first moments of the child's birth from the midwife who says that, unlike other infants, this one laughed like a grown up: "Happy to born."

Which is in total consonance with Gurbani, where the human life form is lauded and being born is the ultimate wish of even the gods.

The paintings are in the late Mughal style, done by travelling artists who roamed the countryside



Each of the 422 pages have seventeen lines except for page 38 which has 24 lines. The size of the lettering in the first two pages is a bit smaller than that of the rest. Though hand writing on page 38 appears to be different, the continuity of the text is undisturbed.

The first Sakhi is about the birth of Guru Nanak and describes this in detail, giving the date of birth

looking for work. The pictures follow some common templates seen in other manuscripts also. These are done on leaves which seen to have been left blank with titles put on them and possibly painted later.

The paintings are mostly in vertical or in codex forms. A though few are horizontal, still the titles appear on top.

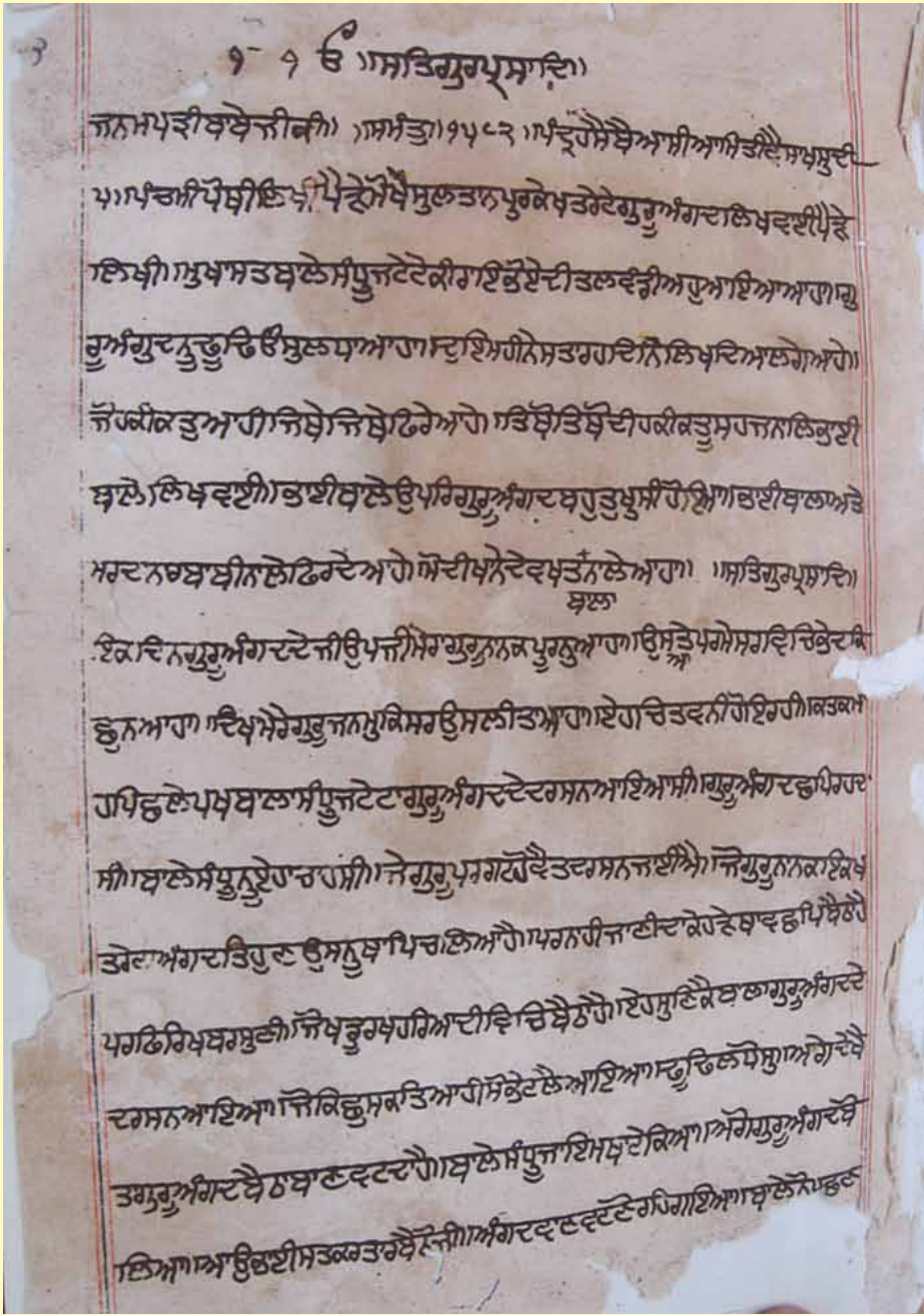
Each of the pictures depicts the moral of the Sakhi in simplified manner. As we go through the folio, the life of Guru Nanak unfolds in multifaceted glory and diversity.

Beginning with the depiction of child Nanak being shown to Pandit Hardyal the panorama carries through to his going to the Padsha, then the Qazi, then his engagement and Sehra Bandi and so on. The episodes of his grazing the cattle, feeding the mendicants, his duties at the Modi Khana and so on punctuate narrative of the manuscript appropriately.

One painting depicts Guru Nanak's meeting with his sister's husband, Jairam. In the narrative it is told that when Guru Nanak tried to touch the feet of his brother-in-law while staying at Sultanpur Lodhi, he is stopped by Jairam, depicting the Guru's humility and social courtsey.

The well known incident of procuring the rabaab for Mardana and assertion of the sublimity of music for inner transformation comes out when the Sakhi reveals that when were struck, the rabaab vibrated ਤੂੰ ਹੀ ਨਿਰੰਕਾਰ, ਨਾਨਕ ਬੰਦਾ ਤੇਰਾ. Ethos and faith of a people are rooted in such Sakhis.

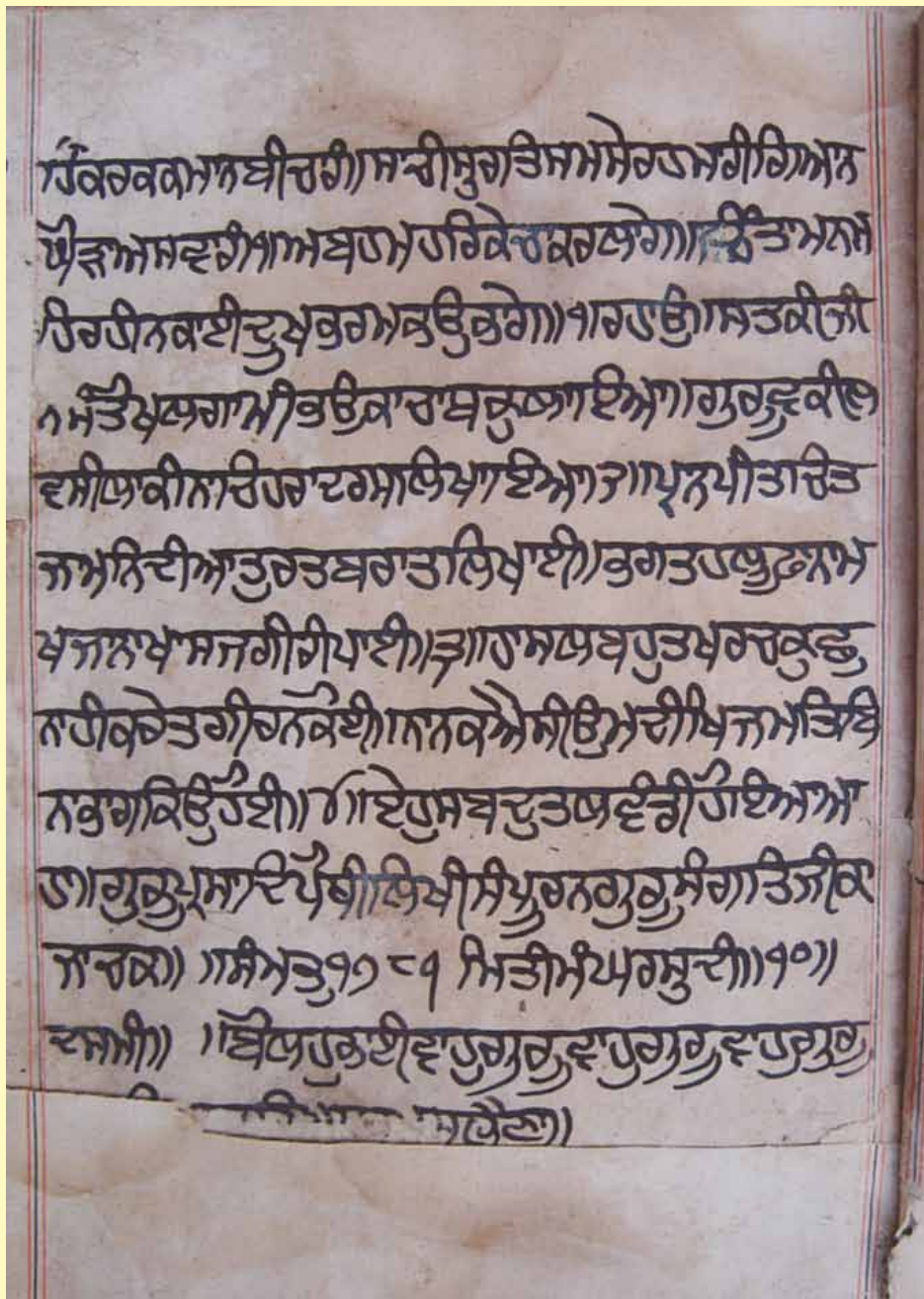
Wali Qandhari's Sakhi too is interestingly depicted. There is no acrimony or hostility visible between Guru Nanak and the Wali. In fact narration



Opening page of the manuscript.

in the Sakhi is an interaction between the two and concludes with the Guru stating:

“One God is the Lord, the whole world is His “ which is the fundamental creed of Sikhism. From this depiction one can agree with the version that the Panja (hand) mark of the Satguru at Hasan Abdal was in fact engraved by the Wali to commemorate the Guru's visit and was no Miracle.



Last page of the manuscript, with the date.

The Guru who decried miracles could not have performed one himself.

The message in the picture depicting Guru Nanak's visit to Bhai Laalo is the substance of Sikh faith. In the manuscript, the Guru tells Bhai Laalo:

"One who worships an Avtaar (incarnation), how good a devout (Bhagat) he may be, he is reborn. Even if he is a Nirgui and does not seek the Ultimate (Paramesar), he is reborn. But if he seeks the one Nirankar (the Ultimate

Formless), then he merges with Him".

The painting of Guru Nanak at Kurukshetrashowshim getting meat cooked to the surprise of the Sadhus and Pandits, and appropriately illustrates the ethos that "all foods are pure which are provided by the Lord" (ਖਾਣਾ ਪੀਵ ਪਵਿੱਤਰ ਹੈ) and then the narrative quotes the shalok that man is born of flesh (ਪਹਿਲਾ ਮਾਸੋਂ ਅੰਦਰ ਕੀਮਿਆ)

The last image shows Guru Nanak placing a coconut before Bhai Lehna, bowing before him, anointing him as Guru Angad, the second Nanak or Mahalla 2. This narrative too delineates this story and Bala is witness to it.

Finally at the end this Janamsakhi records a dialogue between Bala and Guru Angad about the status of earlier Bhagats and how they could not reach Nirankar. The second Master says : "Nanak said that Kabir did not initiate a movement to propagate his

message," which sums up the Sikh ethos of the Sangat being Guru-roop, the necessity of social relevance and the practice of precepts of faith in social existence.

The last page of the manuscript records the scribe's gratitude and affirms completion of this particular recession of the Janamsakhi in the Bhai Bala tradition, which was achieved on Maghar Sudhi Dasin Samat in 1732 A.D.

Bhayee Sikandar Singh

The stunning photography of Malkiat Singh



Malkiat Singh's photographs which were on display at Lalit Kala Academi in New Delhi during February 2006, and inaugurated by Gursharan Kaur, wife of Dr. Manmohan Singh, India's Prime Minister, explores a realm beyond the obvious and poignant in their silent intensity. As the lines between the beholder and the beholden blur, the onlooker is a participant into the joyous, wistful and touching moments as the photographer delves into the veritable soul of his subjects with rare sensitivity.

Curated by Alka Raghuvanshi, she goes on to write, "The images are haunting as they linger on the mind's canvas almost like phantoms of light and shade, just out of hand's reach yet surely within the reach of the mind. His eye searches for the unknown within the known and the unseen within the seen, distilled moments frozen in time, eternal in their imagery just like the faith.

They say that Sikhism is not a mere covenant of faith; it is a state of mind. As the photographer captures a rare state of communion with the faith, its integral vibrance dominates awareness and

transcends the barriers of time and space. It is this visual encounter that epitomises the absoluteness of the faith that is a celebration of life itself.

Each photograph narrates a tale of life lived to the brim and Malkiat's intensive journey which took him to explore vistas of his own creativity, as he remained suspended in the present continuous for the last four years to shoot his subjects in the most unlikely of places.

The collection boasts of some extraordinary photographs from the gurudwaras of Pakistan, including the Nankana Sahib, birthplace of the founder of the Sikh faith Guru Nanak Dev. He has also captured life in and around the gurudwaras and Sikhs in Pakistan in an ingenious way as he mingled with the pilgrims as one of them to experience their journey and then document his own.

It is also about the Sikhs we see and meet everyday, the followers of this religion whose faith is rooted in the wisdom and knowledge contained in its Holy Scripture, the Guru Granth Sahib. It is about their culture, their traditions and the rituals that structure their lives. It is about their heroes and legends that enrich the distinguished history of the community. It is about the zealous effervescence that exemplifies the typical Sikh to express the genteel humility that paradoxically exists with righteous aggression.

Traversing the entire gamut of Sikh traditions, major gurudwaras and pilgrimages, rural and urban festivals, dispensation of education in institutions, the Sikh diaspora, Sikhs in the armed forces, Malkiat's eye sees these moments with the quietitude of paintings as they unfold the never-say-die spirit of the community and their innate strength. The moments of pathos that he captures reflect a pain that he has lived with and seen from close quarters. He has turned this pain into his strength as his gossamer sensitivity enters spaces that are private and personal and yet he doesn't intrude. His presence becomes a silent part of his own canvas. He paints with his



Grandmother and her reflection are beautifully pictured.

camera and the characters appear almost magically to become a part of his creative impulse as if they are destined to make an appearance just for him.

Fierce warriors, devout pilgrims and humble servants of their Wahe Guru, they are all here: the Nihangs at Hola Mohalla joyously celebrating the eternal victory of good over evil, the *kar sewaks* cleaning the holy sarovar of the Golden Temple in a pristine moment at the very summit of devotion, pilgrims to Hemkunt Sahib ascending on the wings of faith, their devotion and surrender complete, as their journey of faith is tempered through fire to emerge strong and pure, like iron. Or is it gold?

Malkiat Singh's perspective when he looks through the lens is to capture the unsaid. People interest him in their myriad moods. He took up photography as a full time vocation following his training in fine arts at the Rajasthan College of Arts. Among the numerous citations and awards conferred upon him for excellence in photography, includes the UP State Lalit Kala Akademi Award for Art Photography and the Sahitya Kala Parishad Award. His work has been a part of various state and national level exhibitions of the Lalit Kala Akademi. He has been a regular contributor to various travel magazines and journals and brings to photography a perspective that is refreshingly intense and an interesting entwining of art and factualism. This Delhi-based photographer has been working on this project for the last four years.

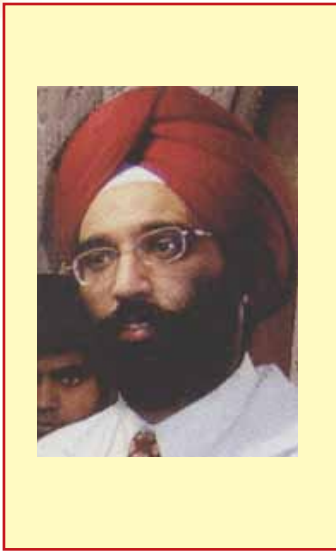
Alka Raghuvanshi who curated the exhibition, is a celebrated author and art curator and has been on



Kar Sewa at the Harmandar Sahib, Amritsar: stunning sprits captured by the lens.

the editorial teams of the *Indian Express*, the *Times of India* and the BBC. She was the arts editor of *Pioneer* and editor of *Swagat*. She has authored and edited over 20 books and is the series editor of "Dances of India." She is India's first trained art curator, having been at the Goldsmiths College, London and the Museum of Modern Art in Oxford. She has curated and designed nearly 10 major exhibitions many of which travelled to other parts of the country as well.

The text supporting Malkiat's photography is by Sandeep Goswami who is an aeronautical engineer by education and an entrepreneur by vocation. An inveterate travel aficionado, his Punjabi lineage binds him inseparably to the state of Punjab, its people and culture. Besides delving deeply into adventure sports, his literary efforts have been published in various publications and magazines. His work is peppered with a heartfelt conviction for the subject and is replete with interesting details which captures the underlying spirit of places and people.

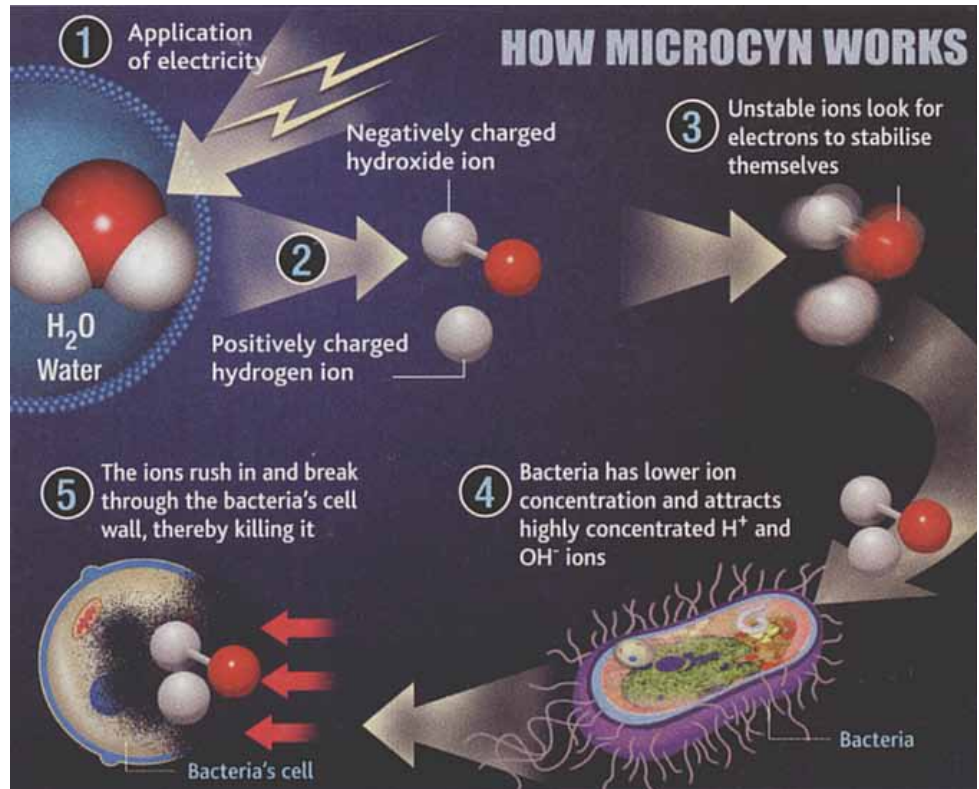


Dr. Amar Pal Singh's "healing touch"

A solution of water and salt electrochemically charged in a way that can destroy most bacteria, virus, fungi, spores and their ilk sans the toxic effects of traditional disinfectants and antiseptics is a major medical breakthrough. Dr. Amar Pal Singh Suri, podiatrist at the Diabetic Foot Care Clinic in New Delhi and the only doctor running clinical trials in India, says that diabetic foot ulcers are healing for the first time ever.

Developed by California-based Oculus Innovative Sciences, "Microcyn", as the oxidised water is this called, has already been approved as a disinfectant and antiseptic for wound care in the US, Europe, Mexico and Canada. Though Dr. Amar Pal Singh Suri initiated the Delhi trials on his own after he learnt about the technology at a conference in Germany last year, Oculus says it is working with prospective distributors in India to get regulatory approval from the Ministry of Health.

If it is successful, it will be a wonder therapy for millions who suffer Dr. Amar Pal Singh claims. After six months of randomised blind clinical trials, he will submit his results before the ICMR to initiate the regulatory approval process.



Gurbani Kirtan at the Darbar Sahib

The Golden Temple ambience is again resonating with *Gurbani kirtan* performed with traditional stringed musical instruments, heard for the first time after partition. The tradition of performing kirtan accompanied with taos, rabab, dilruba swarmandal has been revived in the Darbar Sahib.

Prof. Kartar Singh, Director of the SGPC-run Sangeet Academy at Anandpur Sahib had, in early March performed kirtan with traditional instruments, including two tanpuras, taus, swarmandal and harmonium. He sang four shabads of Guru Nanak Dev and Guru Gobind Singh, including 'Mitar Piare Nu', and of Bhagat Kabir and Bhagat Ramanand in *Raag Basant*.

This was followed by Dr. Gurnam Singh, Head of the Music Department of Gurmat Sangeet, Panjabi University, Patiala, Bhai Nirmal Singh Khalsa and Bhai Gurmit Singh who performed kirtan in mid March followed by Bhai Avtar Singh, the doyen of

keertanias. SGPC said it would ensure that at least one raagi adept in traditional instruments was present during kirtan in the sanctum sanctorum.

Students are being trained at Panjabi University and the SGPC-run Sangeet Academy at Anandpur Sahib on such traditional instruments to revive the true tradition.

INTACH to preserve Qila Ahluwalia

The Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage (INTACH) is to preserve the 250-year-old qila belonging to Sardar Jassa Singh Ahluwalia, the great Sikh warrior called Sultan-ul-Quam, but one which is presently in a dilapidated condition.

S.K.Mishra, Chairman INTACH has, in a letter to Jagjit Singh Walia, President of the Jassa Singh Memorial Society, stated that “the INTACH team will prepare detailed drawings of two gates of Qila Ahluwalia and get estimates after which we shall approach the Punjab Government for funds. Restoration work for the gates could then be taken up. We are all keen that this historic building should be preserved.”

Dr. Montek Singh Ahluwalia, Deputy Chairman, Planning Commission and his wife Isher Judge Ahluwalia paid a visit to the qila last February to obtain information about this heritage building which they described as a “national heritage” that needed “immediate preservation.”

Sardar Jassa Singh Ahluwalia played a pivotal role in repelling foreign invasions during the 18th century, was acclaimed as a supreme leader of the Khalsa Panth and awarded the title of “Padshah” (king) or “Sultan-ul-Quam” (emperor of the Sikh community) after the conquest of Lahore by Sikhs in November, 1761 and the death of Nawab Kapur Singh Faizullapuria. A devout follower of Gurbani and fierce soldier on the battlefield, Jassa Singh epitomised the message of *Miri Piri* given by Guru Hargobind.

According to historians, the fort was intact until 1850. The wall paintings on windows of the building seem to be the works dating back to the 19th century. “There seems to be a clear impact of the European

school of art, style and technique on the art work. Except to one painting, which is of Lord Shiva, all others are European paintings.”

Punjab village celebrates the girlchild

Village Khothran near Nawanshahar has stirred conscience of its people, eradicating the evil of female foeticide and helping the girlchild. Surrounded by green fields, dotted with clusters of kutch-pucca houses opening into slushy streets, the girl child is getting new life here. A girl is as welcome as a boy and lending credence to this changed mindset are the statistics. Against 50 males and 31 females born in 2004, of the 77 children born here in 2005, 44 were girls, giving a fillip to the dwindling sex ratio of the district and encouraging volunteers of “Upkaar” to stoke the campaign fire further.

This district-level conordination body was formed by the Deputy Commissioner, with people from all walks of life and spearheads the campaign. United they all stand for one cause – that of saving the girl child. While the increased number of girls at the end of the year have brought some cheer to the volunteers as also village sarpanch Nirmal Kaur, they know it’s just the beginning and they have a long way to go. Then, again, every villager believes that large oaks grow from small acorns and are willing to work for it. They want their small beginning to snowball into a people’s movement for correcting sex ratio of their villages, going on to the block, the district, the state and finally the entire country.

“It all began in January 2005 when we celebrated Lohri for all the girls of our village: thus began our fight against foeticide. Backed by the DC and supported by the administration, today we have successfully aborted all abortions. Nobody thinks on those lines anymore,” exclaims an elated Nirmal Kaur.

Her day, from sunrise to sunset, comes packed with door-to-door visits, educating villagers about the fallout of abortion and counselling elders against differentiating between children on the basis of sex. Significantly, this has lifted the pressure of producing boys from the lives of women like Narinder Kaur, now expecting her second baby.

In memory of Hari Singh Nalwa

The Government of Pakistan's Punjab will be establishing a medical institute in the name of Hari Singh Nalwa, the legendary General of Maharaja Ranjit Singh's army in the nineteenth century .

The matter had been taken up with the Chief Minister of Pakistan's Punjab, Parvez Elahi, on his recent trip to India who also agreed to raise a medical institute in the name of Hari Singh Nalwa at his place of birth near Gujranwala .

The Governments of Indian and Pakistani Punjab will contribute 50 per cent each for establishing the proposed institute, which would be handed over to some NRI to finance its subsidised operations.

Meanwhile, the Pakistan Government construct a 23 feet wide road between Nankana Sahib and Lahore. Pilgrims visiting Nankana Sahib in the future would also be able to visit the Sacha Sauda gurudwara after construction of the road.

International airport at Halwara

The Union Government has given its clearance to the Punjab Government's proposal to set up an international airport at Halwara, near Ludhiana. Earlier, the state government had submitted a proposal to set up such an airport at Laddowal, near Ludhiana, but that proposal did not find favour with the Union Government.

Chief Minister Capt. Amarinder Singh said that the airport at Halwara, which was at present an important fighter air base, would also have cargo handling facilities. In the absence of an airport of international standards, Punjab had been facing problems of connectivity with the main cities in India and abroad. The Planning Commission had also accepted the state government's proposal for a special package worth Rs2,040 crore for various development activities in the Punjab, and forwarded to the Union Government for necessary action.

New SGPC programmes

The Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) head S. Avtar Singh has asked the government to release lists of innocent youths killed

by rehabilitated terrorists ("cats") so that parents of such victims would stop search for their "missing" children. He said the government should also release the list of these so-called "cats" who carried rewards on their heads and the names of the police officers who rehabilitated the terrorists but pocketed the reward money. Many police officers were also given out-of-turn promotions. He said the human rights image of the country was very poor and was reflected as such by the international community. Not only this, extra-judicial measures adopted by the government during those days dealt a stunning blow to the judiciary and democracy in the country.

The SGPC chief warned that in case the government did not release the lists, they would compile this on their own and raise the issue before the human rights forum of the United Nations. The rehabilitation policy had demoralised the youth of the state and this was one of the reasons they were turning apostate, he added.

S. Avtar Singh said that they had started the *Amrit Chhako-Singh Sajo* campaign in which 1.25 lakh youngsters would be baptised by this year end. So far 40,000 youngsters had been baptised and the Sant Samaj was helping in this effort he revealed. The idea was to baptise all Sikhs in the country so as also to check rampant drug abuse.

French Sikhs fight 'unjust' turban ban

French Sikhs have vowed to fight a new "emergency" order by France's highest judicial authority asking them to remove their turbans for driving licence photographs. The interim order is part of an ongoing legal challenge against the French state by Paris businessman Shingara Singh Mann, who formerly served in the French Army. Mann's case is thought to have wider implications for France's estimated 10,000-strong Sikh community, with a knock-on effect for passport photographs as well.

Mann, whose long-running battle for the right to be pictured "normally" on his driving license and passport, said that he and the wider Sikh community did not accept the logic of the Conseil d'Etat's order. The Conseil d'Etat, which is responsible for

lawsuits against the state, said in its judgement that the turban issue was a question of public security and not a restriction on religious freedom. The judgement reverses the body's own order of 5 December granting Mann and other Sikhs the right to wear their turbans for driving license photographs.

to keep their turban" and other sections of the press picking up a parallel ongoing story about Canadian Sikhs' struggle to prevent the port of Montreal from forcing them to remove their turbans and don hard hats while at work.

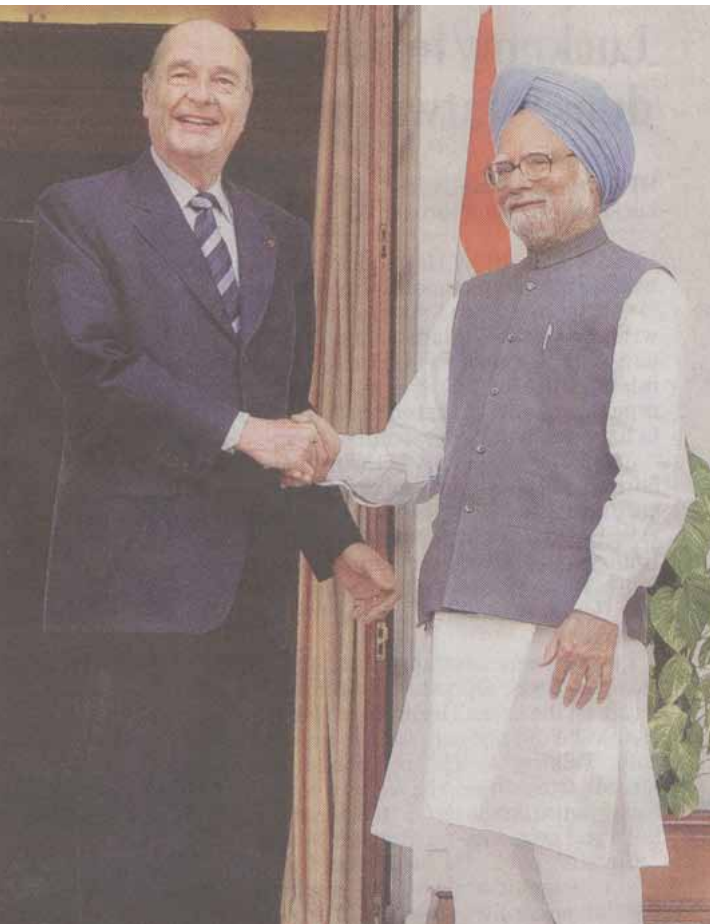
Britain's Education Initiative

On the other hand, Britain has announced a new tri-city education initiative comprising road shows, a Study UK exhibition and a series of seminars to woo students from the Punjab. "Everything that you wanted to know about studying in the UK will be answered at the event," British High Commissioner Michael Arthur said in his statement.

Rod Pryde, Director of the British Council, recently inaugurated the event in Ludhiana. The events were held in three cities: Chandigarh, Ludhiana and Jalandhar. Through an interest mix of quizzes about 17,000 people were contacted in Punjab's best schools, colleges and marketplaces.

Stressing on the myriad attractions of Britain as a destination for students, Sir Michael said "Each year, thousands of international students come to the UK to study and develop brilliant careers. They are spoilt for choice; from stem cell research to drama, MBAs to advertising, students can study at more than 180 institutions in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland."

The road show was designed to update students in the Punjab on various courses available for undergraduate and post-graduate programmes, scholarship prospects and online courses in the country.



Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and French President Jacques Chirac at Hyderabad House in New Delhi on 20 February 2006: the French are treading towards ethnic isolation in the world.

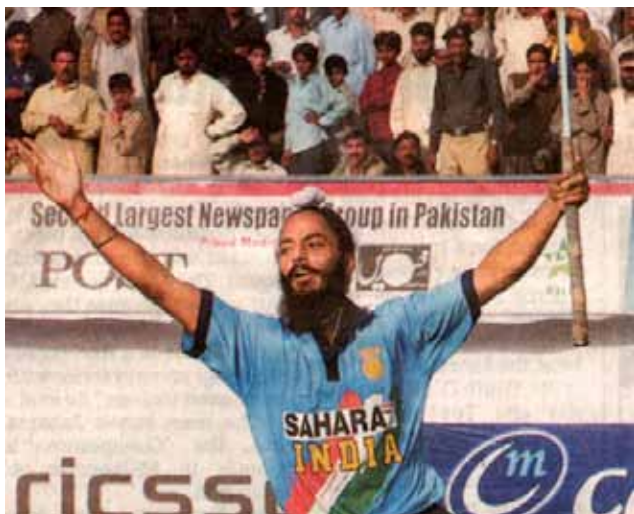
Commentators said Mann's right-to-turban struggle has focused unwelcome attention on France's official colour and ethnicity-blind policies towards its religious minorities. The official flip-flop over Mann's case comes barely two years after the government had controversially banned conspicuous religious signs in state schools.

The battle of wills between Mann and the French state has attracted considerable media attention in the country with Le Figaro dolefully reporting "Les Sikhs veulent garder leur turban," which translates as "the Sikhs want

Sikhs on the sportsfield

Continuing their traditional propensity for excelling in various sports, Sikh hockey players, cricketers, shooters and polo players have been in the news. The Indian hockey team has had a lean decade but there are signs of increasing ascendancy as the boys in patkas sport national colours on astro turf in international tournaments.

Pictures playing to the right and below have Sandeep Singh tackling a Malaysian player at the Commonwealth Games in Melbourne, Harpal Singh defending the goal against a Pakistani forward at Chandigarh and Rajpal Singh celebrating after scoring against Pakistan at Faisalabad in late February.



Avneet Kaur of Bhatinda won a Gold Medal in the shooting event at the XVIII Commonwealth Games at the Wellsford Rifle Range at Bendigo near Melbourne on 17 March 2006.



The picture above shows mass motorcyclists from the Punjab Police Academy at Phillaur displaying their skills during the 71st Kila Raipur Sports festival at the Grewal Sports Stadium near Mandi Ahmedgarh in mid-February. Other feats performed by various individuals and teams included horse tent pegging and other equestrian events including the world famous bullock cart races, in groups of four.



Perhaps the most interesting of Sikh sportsmen of late is undoubtedly Mudhsuden Singh Panesar of Northamptonshire, England, the first Sikh to play for England's cricket team. Popularly known as Monty Panesar, his inclusion in the England cricket squad for the Indian tour has been highly acclaimed and he did not falter, taking some prize wickets in his very first test match for England at Nagpur. England's coach Duncan Fletcher said that the young spinner's classical action and attitude gained for his team "control" in the first Test against India. Fletcher said he was surprised at the control Monty showed in the first Test in Nagpur and his consistency will prove to be handy for England. "I was surprised at the control he showed right from the start: he didn't seem to show any nerves. He's got a good classical action and that's what we've been trying to get out of our bowlers, instead of these mechanical actions where they are fighting to get consistency", Fletcher said.

The pictures show former Indian Cricket Captain Bishen Singh Bedi meeting England spinner Monty Panesar at Mumbai before the test, and in the picture above the England team celebrates Monty's taking of Sachin Tendulkar's wicket at Nagpur.

S. Khushwant Singh honoured by the Sikh Canadians

The Centennial Foundation which is headquartered in Toronto, Canada and is an institution which focuses on cultural, social and educational issues pertaining to Sikh-Canadians and Sikhs of the Diaspora, was founded in 1997 to commemorate the centennial of the first settlement of Sikhs in Canada, even though their antecedents go back a further score years or so.

Each year, The Centennial Foundation of Canada holds a Vaisakhi Gala, wherein it also honours a carefully selected list of individuals from around the world - Sikh and non-Sikh - who have made extraordinary contributions to the welfare of mankind, in one form or the other.

This year, the list of those who have been selected as recipients of the *Annual Sewa Awards* is led by Sardar Khushwant Singh.

A delegation was sent to New Delhi to have the Award presented to Sardar Khushwant Singh by Dr. T. Sher Singh (Founding Chair of the Foundation).



Dr. T. Sher Singh of the Centennial Foundation of Canada speaking on the occasion.



Canadian High Commissioner Ms. Lucie Edwards presenting the Award to S. Khushwant Singh at her residence in New Delhi on 20 February 2006.

The *Sewa Award* from The Centennial Foundation for Sardar Khushwant Singh has the added honour of being endorsed by several other institutions in the diaspora and is meant to convey the gratitude of Sikhs around the world for the lifelong contributions of this special citizen of India.

The award itself consists of an aluminum sculpture created by the famous Hoselton Studios, being a famed Canadian bird known for its haunting and soothing calls in the northern wilderness. The piece of art, roughly 17" by 7" by 10", carries the following inscription:



THE CENTENNIAL FOUNDATION
Canada

2006 Sewa Award

KHUSHWANT SINGH
for a lifetime of
impeccable scholarship
inspiring writing
insightful humour and
A relentless joie de vivre .

With love and gratitude from
Sikhs around the World

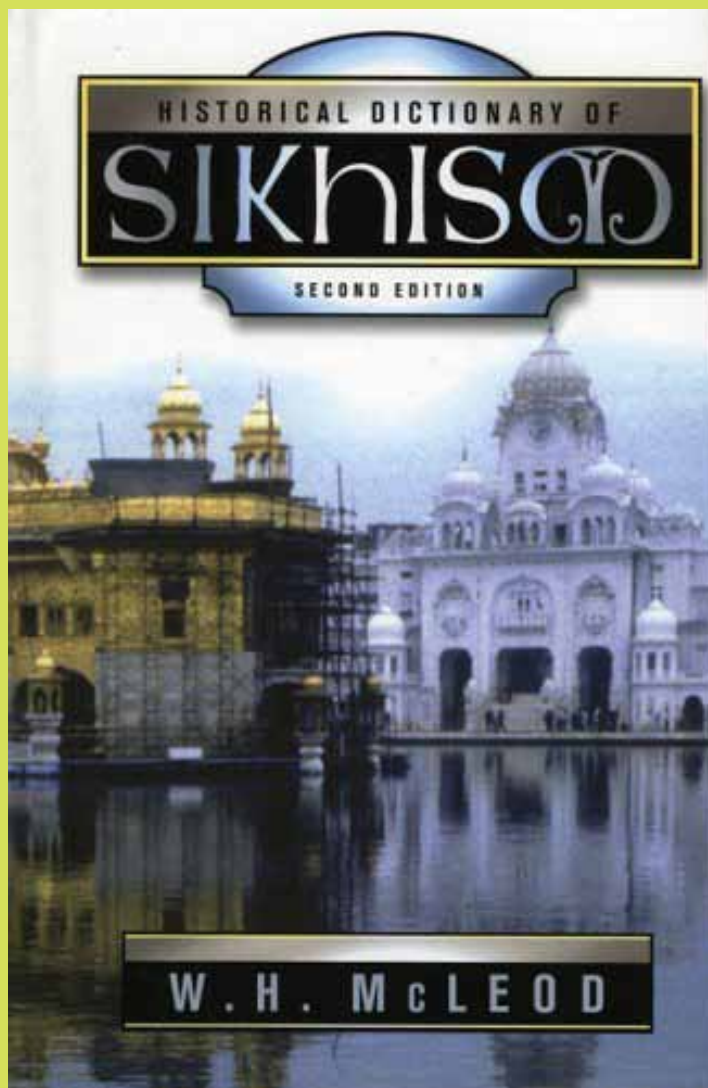
According to most recent figures at the beginning of the 21st century, there are almost twenty-five million Sikhs, making Sikhism the sixth largest religion in the world. Slightly less than two million Sikhs live outside Punjab and India, with significant populations spread across six continents. North America (the United States and Canada) have over half a million, as does the United Kingdom while Europe has over one quarter of a million. Oceania (Australia, New Zealand and Fiji) and South East Asia have the same, about 250,000.

The numbers are modest enough and much of the world's public remains ignorant about their Sikh neighbours, who they are and in what they believe. But these figures are rising enough to warrant increasing curiosity about "the Sikh next door." More importantly, a new generation of young Sikhs growing up in the diaspora, far from their historical roots, require new ways to understand and preserve their heritage. Hence the obvious need for well-written, brief, descriptive forms of information on various aspects of the Sikh belief, culture and lifestyle.

Perhaps the most authoritative and complete encyclopedia on Sikhism remains the *Mahaan Kosh* by Kahn Singh Nabha compiled in 1930. This monumental work is wide-ranging and exhaustive; even the most arcane facts and obscure events are covered. However, it is in Punjabi, which limits its universal usefulness. There have been other attempts to compile shorter, more linguistically accessible encyclopedia in English, such as the ones by Harjinder Singh Dilgeer and Surinder Singh Kohli, as well as a very comprehensive four-volume *Encyclopaedia of Sikhism*, published by Punjabi University, India, that was the brainchild of Professor Harbans Singh.

Hew McLeod has spent a lifetime in his research on Sikhism. His scholarly writings have not been free of controversy, but they have nevertheless been instrumental in defining a place for Sikhism and Sikh studies in the consciousness of Western societies.

McLeod first published his *Historical Dictionary of Sikhism* in 1995. This book is a revised, much expanded second edition. It is small enough to be non-intimidating, with an inviting, user-friendly style that a wide range of readers will find appealing.



HISTORICAL DICTIONARY OF SIKHISM
W.H. McLeod 2005
Second Edition, xxx+297 pages. \$70.00
Scarecrow Press, Lanham, Maryland, USA

The book is divided into three main sections. The first section begins with a map of the Punjab, a "family tree" of some of the Gurus and a chronological timeline. It then gives an abbreviated outline of the teachings of the Gurus, several paragraphs on Sikh identity and a brief discussion of two contrasting approaches to history. The map needs some clarification, since Punjab has been repeatedly truncated and its boundaries redrawn. In 1947, half of Punjab went into creating Pakistan; from the remaining part in India, two other states - Himachal Pradesh and Haryana - have since been carved out.

In his outline on the teachings of the Gurus, as he has done in many of his writings, once again McLeod casts Nanak as a teacher of the Sant tradition.

This diminishes the revolutionary nature of Guru Nanak's message and its enduring effect on Indian society. In this section, there is also a paragraph about the institution of the Khalsa but fails to note that this momentous event underscored the Sikhs' sense of themselves as a separate faith that developed over two centuries from Nanak to Gobind Singh - a faith clearly demarcated by its beliefs and practices from the many Indic religions that dotted the Indian landscape.

The discussion on successors of Guru Nanak is concise by necessity. But some parts could have benefited from an extra sentence or two. For example, Guru Tegh Bahadur is described as a "recluse" who was "executed by the Mughals." The fact that he accepted death in support of the rights of a people of another faith is incredibly significant and rated at least a few words!

Guru Gobind Singh is portrayed as "the leader of his Sikhs, fighting to sustain his position as the ruler of a small Shivalik principality"! This makes him seem like some petty warlord instead of the Guru! His four sons were martyrs to the cause, but McLeod's description sounds as if the older two sons were killed leaving instead of defending Chamkaur in battle. It would have also been appropriate to add that the younger two sons, even as small children only seven and eight years old, were willing to be martyred rather than accept Islam. A continuously held and deeply loved belief that permeates Sikhism is that in 1699, five Sikhs (*Panj Piarey*) were the first to accept initiation in the Khalsa and that Guru Gobind Singh himself accepted initiation from their hands. Hew McLeod elides by this very significant point. It is as if in a presentation on Christianity, one were to ignore the detail of crucifixion because not all the facts may be historically clear. [*One always wonders whether such distortions and omissions, so often done are by default or by design-Ed.*]

A fundamental doctrine in Sikhism is the connectedness and continuity of the message from Guru Nanak to Guru Gobind Singh. Somehow this linkage does not clearly come through in McLeod's exposition of the Sikh faith.

McLeod then steps into an area that has proved so difficult for him in the past. His emphasis on "traditional" historian vs. "sceptical" historian is disconcerting. His ideas of "tradition" are completely suffused with a sense of his head-shaking doubt. It is

as if believers of a faith - "traditional" interpreters—are incapable of intellectual rigour when looking at their own faith. The best that can be done is to give them "a measure of cautious trust"? The "sceptical" ones are the only ones who "investigate"? Although he ends his section with the proviso, "History is constantly being rewritten and no interpretation is forever fixed," he states that "this historical dictionary adopts the contrary view," i.e., tradition is not generally reliable. Many entries in this book seem to be coloured by this attitude.

We would argue that an inherent conflict between intellectual rigour and faith does not exist. One can honestly believe and yet question whatever in a tradition may be only inadequately documented. An unbiased scholar can and should just as easily start with the assumption that the unbroken continuity of a tradition speaks generally to its veracity, unless incontrovertible evidence is found to contradict it.

Like a giant glossary, the second section of the book covers the gamut of topics on Sikh religion, history, and culture. Many entries stand out for the brief, but complete, treatment of their subject. For instance, the ones on "Gender" and "Gender of God" are excellent and terse commentaries on the unequivocal Sikh ideal of gender equality and the actual practice that varies considerably from it. Another example of this is "Sikh Architecture," a short, but tantalising, note on its distinctive style. The development and sentiment for a Sikh "Nanakshahi" calendar finds well-deserved space.

Other entries are, perhaps, somewhat less adequately presented. One of these is the entry on "Art." It talks about the popular genre of calendar illustrations and mentions the artists Sobha Singh and Kirpal Singh. However, there is little analysis or discussion of other influences on Sikh art, or the course of its development. McLeod's 1991 book, "Popular Sikh Art", albeit a work of much greater specificity, provides a far more useful introduction to this topic.

Among famous Sikhs, Giani Zail Singh, the President of India in 1984 when the Indian Army attacked the Golden Temple, rates inclusion, as does another major personage of this period, Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale. But the entries on both are much too scimpy; Kapur Singh is dismissed in one sentence by a mention of his participation in the agitation for Punjabi Suba and Khalistan. His role as the major

architect of the Anandpur Sahib Resolution, as well as his significant analytic contributions to the exposition of a uniquely Sikh worldview are neglected.

One accurate measure of the importance of a historical event is the extent of the resulting consequences. For this reason, the Anandpur Sahib Resolution deserved a more complete treatment. The Indian government repeatedly blamed this resolution as the root of the troubling events of the two decades that brought the country to the brink of fragmentation in the 1980s.


The five articles of Sikh faith (*panj kakkars*) that all Amritdhari and many Keshadhari Sikhs wear are defined. However, the entry notes that perhaps there were only three - *kesh*, *kirpan* and *kacchera* (long, unshorn hair, sword, and knee-length breeches) - that were mandated on the historic Vaisakhi of 1699 at the inauguration of the Khalsa. McLeod suggests that the other two appeared later. Most Sikhs would find this interpretation difficult to accept.

There is considerable dissension about the exact authorship of the writings ascribed to Guru Gobind Singh. The Sikh Panth has accepted some to be authentic, but the larger body of writing in the *Dasam Granth* appears to have been penned by other poets of that era. McLeod accepts this view and handles the disagreements with great aplomb. This dispute, however, continues to fester. Based on his critical analysis of the contents of *Dasam Granth* and his similar treatment of a hagiographic work, *Gurbilas Patshai Chheveen*, Gurbaksh Singh "Kala Afghana" has been excommunicated by the Jathedar Akal Takht. Even though controversial, Kala Afghana's writings have electrified a whole generation of Sikhs yet McLeod has not mentioned him or his works, either in his text or in his bibliography, perhaps because he has written only in Punjabi. This is an unfortunate omission in what is otherwise a very inclusive work.

The third, and final, section comprises over one hundred pages of bibliography and source materials, with its own very useful "Contents" listing, compiled by subject headings. Librarians would find this approach extremely valuable when organising their collections on Sikhism. This is a superb and extensive collation, ranging from the traditional hagiographies known as *janam-sakhis*, to more intellectually rigorous scholarly works. McLeod even provides references to publications that have been sharply critical of his own writings.

There is also a listing of the plethora of websites on Sikhism that have appeared, particularly in the diaspora, over the past two decades. These offer a whole gamut of topics, ranging from forums of opinion and debate to search engines and translations of Guru Granth Sahib as well as other texts. However, McLeod has omitted listing websites such as the Sikh American Legal Defence and Education Fund (SALDEF), formerly known as the Sikh Mediawatch and Research Task Force (SMART), as well as the Sikh Coalition. These sites deserve inclusion on the basis of their unparalleled activity and assistance in matters of equal rights in the complex North American existence.

With the caveats mentioned above, this remains a very valuable book that will be of undeniable appeal to a broad audience. It is strongly recommended as an addition to Gurdwara, academic and public library collections. Its style is terse, but very readable, as befits a work of this genre. Its wealth of useful facts and cross-references will undoubtedly serve as a springboard to motivate the reader towards more in-depth exploration and research.

The Scarecrow Press has sponsored a unique series of publications under the aegis of its editor, Jon Woronoff. It has published a range of notable historical accounts of most major world religions, including, not only Sikhism, but also Catholicism, Ecumenical Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism, Taoism, and the Baha'i faith. It has also put out accounts of philosophies and movements whose ideas have served to shape humankind, such as the Civil Rights Movement, the Gay Liberation Movement, Organised Labour, the Welfare State, the Olympic Movement and many others. 

Reviewed by *Dr. I.J. Singh and Laurie Bolger*



Depicting the Faith in Philately

The “Colonisation” of India actually began when the Afghan invader Mahmud of Ghazni established his rule at Lahore in 1023 AD but returned to Ghazni after each invasion. Then Mohammed of Ghor invaded India and conquered larger territories from 1175 AD until his death in 1206 AD. From then till the coming of Guru Nanak Dev, born on 21 October 1469 in Talwandi (now known as Nankana Sahib), the sub-continent witnessed the most bloody and gory of times. Sikhism, the faith which restored justice and love to humanity, was founded by Guru Nanak

Sikhism means the path of discipline and discipleship as bestowed by the ten Sikh Gurus. It is a practical religion, a faith of hope and optimism. The word *Sikh* is derived from the Sanskrit word *Shishya* (a disciple) who follows the *Sheekh* (teachings of Guru Granth Sahib). The holy Scripture which contains teachings and sermons of Gurus, was compiled by the Fifth Guru Arjan Dev and finally given status of Guru by the Tenth Master Guru Gobind Singh.

Postage stamps have been issued on the theme from time to time, some depicted hereunder.

Guru Nanak gave hope through three uniquely essential principles: *Nam Japo, Kirt Karo, Vand-ke-chako*. Guru Nanak travelled great distances during 1507-1521, as far as Mecca in the West and Dacca in the East, Tibet in the North and Sri Lanka in the South to spread the message of God.

There are 97 compositions of hymns under 19 (musical) ragaas in Guru Granth Sahib.

Guru Angad Dev propagated the message of God with emphasis to avoid slander, stealing, forgery and lust. The Guru preached that God was omnipresent and we could be one with Him only through love, honesty and loyalty. Composing 63 hymns sufficing ‘Nanak’ identified that author of hymns as a Sikh Guru. Gururji also introduced the Gurumukhi script and developed its grammar.



Guru Amar Das the third Nanak in succession instituted *Pangat* (dining together in the *Guru-ka-langar*) and *Sangat*, the mixed congregation, where his disciples met as brothers in faith. He composed 907 Hymns, Pauris and Shlokas under 29 Raags in Guru Granth Sahib.



Guru Ram Das the fourth Guru marked the excavation of holy tank Amrit Sarovar on land gifted by Mughul Emperor Akbar the Great, composed 679 Hymns, Pauris and Shlokas at 29 Raags in Guru Granth Sahib. The Golden Temple (Darbar Sahib) was constructed in early 16th century as the nucleus of Sikhism, Sanctum Sanctorum for Sikhs which keeps its doors open to all persons irrespective of their faiths.



Guru Arjan Dev compiled Adi Granth and added his hymns, pauris and shlokas. The 400th year of Parkash Gurupurab of Sri Adi Granth Sahib was celebrated worldwide in 2004.



When compiling the Adi Granth, Guru Arjan Dev also enshrined the writings of Bhagats and Sufis of other religions.

Sheikh Farid: Faridkot is the resting place of Sheikh Baba Farid 1175-1265, the immortal Sufi bard and father of Punjabi literature whose 4 hymns and 112 shlokas are enshrined in Adi Granth.

Bhai Gurdas: Born in Gurdaspur, he was the son of Datar Chand, younger brother of Guru Amar Das. He was contemporary of the third, fifth and sixth Gurus. A brilliant scholar and a great poet, he composed 39 ballads in Punjabi, 556 couplets (Kabits) in Braj and was also scribe of the Guru Granth Sahib.

Sant Namdeo, 1270-1350 AD, was a celebrated saint the son of Dam Seti, a tailor who resided at Narsi Bamni in Satara district. His mother Gona Bai was daughter of a tailor and his father possessed devotional enthusiasm. 62 of his hymns have been incorporated in the Adi Granth. The themes of these hymns are the varied spiritual experiences of Namdev.



Kabir 1398-1495 was the most revolutionary saint of the Bhakti movement. He condemned social and religious abuses and emphasised the fundamental equality and fraternity of all mankind. He fought against vicious influences, was critical of Hindu Pandits and Muslim Mullas and inveighed against the Yogis and Sahus.



Kabir's contribution to the Granth Sahib comprises 534 different verses arranged under 17 Raagas.

Surdas 1478-1585, was Brahmin family-born, in addition to learning Sanskrit and Persian, studied music and learnt poetry.

Ravidas 1324-1414, The spiritual power of Ravidas was known far and wide. He inspired Meera Bai, the queen of Chittore who became his disciple. Ravidas was a resident of Kashi and came from a cobbler's family. In spite of his "low caste", he rose to the position of great honour and respect through a life of simplicity and piety. 40 Shabads of his are included in Granth Sahib.



Guru Tegh Bahadur 1621-1676, The stamp depicts Gurdwara Sis Ganj Sahib (Delhi) where his martyrdom took place. His martyrdom is history's supreme act in vindication of religious freedom and dignity and Guruji is remembered as *Hind-ki-Chadaar*, protector of the Honour of India.

Bhay Kaho Kow Det Nahin Nahin Bhay Manat Aan: Who doth not evoke fear in others nor accepted fear from any one, 59 Hymns and 56 Shlokas in Guru Granth Sahib.

Guru Gobind Singh 1677-1708. Stamp issued on the Guru's birth tercentenary, depicting Sri Takht Harmandir Sahib at Patna, where Guruji was born on Saturday, 22 December 1666 and spent the first 8 years of his childhood. Guruji created the *Khalsa Panth* and gave distinctive identity to the Sikhs (five 'K's).



Talwandi Sabo at Bhatinda: Fifth seat of authority of the Sikhs. A magnificent Gurdwara was erected to perpetuate the memory of Guru Gobind Singh's stay in 1706. This place owes its importance to compilation of Guru Granth Sahib (Damdami Bir) by Guru Gobind Singh. Scribe was Bhai Mani Singh.

Nanded: Guru Gobind Singh bestowed Guruship (Gur Gaddi) upon the Granth at Nanded on 4 October 1708.



"The community should recognise Guru Granth as the Guru, obey the commandments enshrined therein, recognise the Granth as the visible body of the Guru. The Sikh who wishes to meet me will find me there".

Guru Granth Sahib is the holy book of the Sikhs and their Supreme Authority. Total shabads shlokas and chants are 5894 under 31 Raagas in 1430 pages.

Pearl S. Buck Nobel Prize Winner wrote that the "Guru Granth Sahib is a source book, an expression of man's loneliness, his aspiration, his longings, his cry to God and his hunger for communication with that being. I have studied the scriptures of other great religions, but I do not find elsewhere the same power of appeal to the heart and mind as I find here".



Dr S Radhakrishnan, President of India "I find in the Guru Granth a wide range of mystical emotions, intimate expressions of the personal realisation of God and rapturous Hymns of Divine love".

Sadhu Vaswani "The living spirit of the Gurus speaketh today in the words of this ever-living book, the inspired testament of the saint, which the Tenth Nanak (Guru Gobind Singh) with the last benediction of his earthly life, left to his disciples as their Enlightener".



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Gurmat Sangeet Utsav Seminar at Panjabi University, Patiala



Dr Gurnam Singh, Head of the Department of Gurmat Sangeet, leading his students in rendering Shabad Keertan.

The Panjabi University at Patiala, one of the premier institutes of higher education in the north of India, was established on 30th April, 1962 under the Panjabi University Act, 1961. This is the second University in the world to be named after a language, the first being the Hebrew University in Israel.

Although initially main role of the University was to develop and promote the Panjabi language, literature and culture, it has since evolved into a multi-faceted and multi-faculty educational institution with over fifty five teaching and research departments covering various disciplines in the Arts, Humanities and Sciences. Panjabi University, Patiala added another feather to its cap by being the first University in the world to have taken up the pioneer task of providing academic and scholastic base to the original and exclusive tradition of *Gurmat Sangeet*.



Left to right: Dr Gurnam Singh, Bhayee Sikandar Singh, S. Surinder Singh "Singh Bandhu" and Prof. Yashpal.

Under the dynamic leadership of Sardar Swaran Singh Boparai, Vice Chancellor of Panjabi University, and with the help of Bibi Jasbir Kaur Khalsa, Chairperson, Sri Guru Gian Parkash Foundation, New Delhi a Gurmat Sangeet Chair and Department of Gurmat Sangeet have been established by the syndicate of Panjabi University for the promotion and propagation of Gurmat Sangeet. The establishment of the Chair and the Department owe much to the unabated and consistent efforts to their head, Dr Gurnam Singh aimed at furthering and sustaining the great heritage of Sikhism for mankind.

Gurmat Sangeet Bhawan

The University has a modern well-planned campus located about seven kilometers from Patiala city, also called the City of Gardens. The Campus is spread over about 320 acres with imposing buildings in lush green, pollution-free environment, away from the hustle and bustle of city life. A Gurmat Sangeet Bhawan is being constructed on the Panjabi University campus with financial support from various individuals and organisations. After the "Takk Ceremony", performed by the Jathedar Sri Akal Takht Sahib, construction work of the Bhawan commenced on 17 November, 2003. The University has reserved eight kanals of land for the Bhawan. Various blocks have been designed to be built in the Bhawan for training and research on playing and singing with musical instruments all that is related to Gurmat Sangeet.

The Department recently held a two day seminar on Gurmat Sangeet where a Fellowship was also awarded to Bhai Avtar Singh, the most respected of raagis today.