

I/2009

# NISHAAN

NAGAARA



**Women in Sikhism**  
**Our war of the sexes**  
**Women's Equality**  
**Legacy of Bhai Rup Chand**



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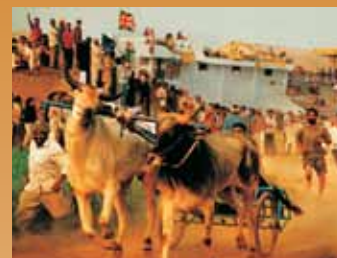
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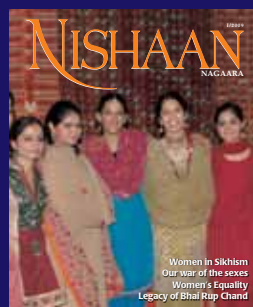


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Cover : Harsimran Kaur and Harleen Kaur with cousins, March 2009

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# Woman

Next to bread, the essential man is centred in his divine love for woman. His sexless passion also has woman as its terra firma. All his glorious hopes and aspirations are bees humming round this flower-woman. The Home of Love revolves round her as a dream beauty. In a great and cultured world, the honour for woman must needs be infinite. I do not think that the ideal honour for woman is as yet in sight. As George Meredith puts in the mouth of Bis Diana of the Crossways, "Men may have rounded Seraglio Point, they have not yet doubled Cape Turk."

Woman shall be the second best God or the God of the intellectuals on earth. She shall be absolutely free. And it is out of her freedom that we shall yet win new ideals of Home and Art. I tell you as a beloved slave of man she has contributed a major portion of the whole of his culture and civilisation. The slavery of woman to man is due to man largely but essentially to the woman herself. Only in motherhood does she become free. A divine sovereignty is then conferred on her. Her intuitive omniscience is more developed than man's, her spirit of self-sacrifice is real and man's is more or less dramatic and unreal.

The whole of Guru Granth is the voice of a wedded woman or a maiden pining in love of the Beautiful. Her nobleness in Guru Granth is infinite, her freedom is of the highest. Both man and woman as sexes are forgotten in her voice. She becomes the Supreme Reality and a freed Soul. In the freed soul alone is the subordination of one to the other effectively abolished and all disputes hushed.

As Bolshevism is in modern politics so is the modern women's movement in the sphere of woman; both are protests, there is something

rotten in the systems of our marriages and social inequalities and the protest is to bring better culture. Much is frivolous futility in such ill-balanced movements. But the balance shall tremble again and woman shall find her real spiritual worth in herself. So far she is still a toy-like thing. In her imagined freedom what is she doing ? Aping man ! Man himself is yet in his swaddling clothes. Let us look at the modern woman a little and compare that old and this new. She has certainly lost her beauty and has not yet gained her soul. When in that old superb figure of hers the Christ-Braids fell all about her swanlike neck, her face shone in this world like the moon in black clouds. Even that so-called savage Afridi of the Indian Frontier was moved to sing of "the bazaar of the tresses of my Beloved," and in passionate worship of her the most brutal of men found some kind of cultural atmosphere. It was the culture of total self-sacrifice for her sake. In her worship too is all patriotism, honour of a race, war and defence of home and hearth.

What would freedom itself be if man were devoid of woman worship ? One wonders what is woman. Man called her wife, but she stood as his daughter before him and she made a Buddha of her father. She was always a mystery to the human race. Her tresses suggested a secret, her eyes that loved made it deeper. The virgin was desired by the young man, he fell worshipping before her, she was the mother and he the son. Her clothes were a Universe in themselves and her soul was sought after from eternity to eternity. It was hidden in the fold of her clothes, it was fluttering of someone's heart in the flapping of her veil-cloth. The national flags are dim shadows of the veil-cloth that flies, as the sister of the nation runs appealing to man "up and fight, for I am in danger". The other day

the eastern wind was flaunting a sun-lit cloud before my eyes. I thought it was the veil-cloth of my mother, I stood up thinking my mother had come back from the dead. I shed a tear and the sun went past me. The woman's forehead we have for centuries contemplated as our sky aglow with the calm sparkle of the moon. Poets sang and husbands and fathers and all poets in action in this living love of woman, died serving her and her children.

The mother mysterious, so noble, divine, so full of love that she drew the whole-souled devotion of humane men for centuries and was still a mystery. She was as mysterious as Nature. A literature was born, an art became alive, a history was made glorious in the defence of her honour and pride. Woman was still a mystery. And for ever concealed was her face in the night of her hair, in the mystery of her clothes, in the appeal of her eyes and in the music of her voice and she was revealed partly to man in her acts of faith, love and noble self-sacrifice. She wore the cross of the whole family as did Jesus, but started no Christianity. Every woman is the Messiah. Her daily life in the service of man gave us the songs of her beautiful soul as the shifting colours of the sky and the changing lines of Nature tell us of Nature's inner Person.

Woman was thus the inspiration for all the heroic efforts of man to make himself man. Woman is responsible for all his best longings for immortality, for all his religions, for all his arts, and for all his noble wingings above earth and sky. And when I contemplate the modern type of woman that has denuded her head of hair and her limbs of the mystery of clothes and when she has not, by throwing all these cumbersome veils aside, revealed her soul to us, I fall dead and despair-whither is she going? The world has become emptied of human beauty. I wanted to cling to her soul, the immortal portion of her, and she wishes me to cling to her flesh and bone which is precious only because of her great soul.

The Guru leads the ideas of the coming world. If with Sikhs of today there are (those) who veil their women and enslave them, they are not of the Gurus. The third Guru while giving audience to a Hindu Queen of Mandi when she came all veiled to Him said, "You O mad woman, have come to see the Guru and your cover your face from Him." How can those who call themselves His disciples tolerate anything infringing the absolute freedom of woman. On the other hand, those who free her and ape the Western fashions remind one, as Marie Corelli graphically puts it, of the poultry yard. That is certainly worse than nursing a peculiar type of womanhood, of noble self-restraint behind the oriental veils. Veils often symbolise the beauty and mystery of the concealed and the veiled is more sacred than the unveiled. But if veils accentuate this sex difference or unveiling does the same, both are unholy. Only when man and woman both live above body and mind as freed souls, they represent the culture of live freedom. Live freedom is freed also of sex differences. Stupid, indeed, are those sects who wish to get rid of woman as an obstacle to spiritual progress.

Woman is the greatest and truest aid to the maintenance of the true spiritual attitude. Woman's soul crying to the soul of man is the only divine lyric trembling like the music of the Infinite and the Eternal. Man's self-transcendence is as much of him, as his physical indulgence, as his intellectual aestheticism. He is a spirit. It is when the spirit of the Holy Ghost fills him and his body and bread, his intellect and his woman are suffused with his discovery of the personal God in man and Nature that Man, the artist becomes himself the highest Artthe ex-pression of the mystery of life.

The true artist is the best art, the best culture, the best literature and the best religion.

*Professor Puran Singh*  
[Extract from 'Spirit Born People']





Nāgar Kirtan in Manhattan.

# Women's Equality:

## Why Aren't We Spearheading The Struggle?

*"The whole Guru Granth is the voice of a wedded woman or a maiden pining in love of the Beautiful. Her nobleness in Guru Granth is infinite, her freedom is of the highest. Both man and woman as sexes are forgotten in her voice. She becomes the supreme reality and a freed soul. In the freed soul alone is the subordination of one to the other effectively abolished and all disputes hushed." - Professor Puran Singh*

Doctrinally, for us Sikhs, questions of woman's capacity and capabilities are a moot issue.

The divinity of Guru Nanak was recognised first by the none

other than Bebe Nanaki. One of Guru Gobind Singh ji's bravest lieutenants was Mai Bhago.

Thus, the woman's role was neither sanctioned nor codified. It didn't need to be. Every woman's (for that matter every Sikh's) personal relationship with the Guru and the Creator moved each *Sardarni* in the spirit of utter volunteerism to do what she did.

So, why are we party to a culture of domination today?

I submit: the *raison d'être* of a Sikh is to fight every dimension of domination by anyone over another, regardless of whether it

is spiritual, political or otherwise. In the past few decades, we've seen a desire to codify women's equality as a global community; however, this ideal is too often couched, albeit earnestly, in terms of a goal sometime in the future.

Paragraph 13 of the United Nation's 1995 Beijing Declaration issued at the fourth World Conference on Women stated: "Women's empowerment and their full participation on the basis of equality in all spheres of society, including participation in the decision-making process and access to power, are fundamental



for the achievement of equality, development and peace.”

I see our community still “declaring” women to be equal. It is time to stop the symbolic declarations and begin to assert, through our actions, the equal treatment of women in private and public spaces.

Guru Nanak’s declaration on women’s emancipation came 500 years ago, amidst the clash of Semitic and Aryan traditions, whereas our modern world appears still to be deliberating on it.

For the large part, religions, ideologies and other cultural systems have created strong protections for cohesion of society and nurture of its norms. This end is often ensured by way of controls over behaviour - hence, the preoccupation with gender and sexuality in all systems, which guide human interaction.

Characteristically, societies developed a necessary division of labour, loosely based on perceived biological ability. This solidified and eventually extended symbolically, with women responsible for the upbringing of the family and related activities involving cultivating and cooking. Conversely, men related to the wider environment through their engagement in hunting, warfare and political relations.

The subservience of women to men became widespread in all spheres, with rare exceptions. Combined with profound fears about the dangers surrounding sexuality (elaborated in complex ritual customs to deal with “purity” and “security”), these disparities led to the literal separation of women from men, especially in worship.

For me, the height of folly is that Sikhs have fallen victim to the larger hegemony’s dictation of how we should think and behave. The results are that we are now debating whether we should allow women to do certain things, be it in our local *gurdwara* or even within the *Darbar Sahib* complex.

How absurd!

We have no basis in our doctrine for this prejudice, yet our debate on negative energies continues.

The Sikh culture, as envisioned in the *Guru Granth* and created by the *Ten Nanaks*, insists on complete equality. There is no stratification spectrum of inferior or superior status in any form, be it gender or other social divisions. The foundational doctrine of the Sikh



*Nobility in being: Khalsa couple at Washington DC function.*



*Spirit of the Sikh woman: Dr. (Mrs) Kanwal Vilku with an Antarctica expedition near the South Pole.*





Gurukirn Kaur Khalsa, Secretary of Guru Nanak Dwara in Phoenix, Arizona.

Faith propagates integration, not division, to uplift human dignity.

Consequently, the Sikh scriptural canon, the *Guru Granth*, reveals *Waheguru* as The One Universal Integrative Force. The succeeding divine attributes are messages of integration; there is no allusion to division based on gender.

In the Sikh vision, the woman is the single thread, which drives humanity. Her participation in all dimensions of life must be recognised as the essential elements in human affairs. With the exception of the Divine Order of *Waheguru*, Guru Nanak in *Asa-ki-Var* proclaims that everything in human existence depends on the Woman; the only exception being *Waheguru*, the non-human factor.

We see then that it is not an accident that the perspective adopted for self-realisation in *gurbani* (Sikh scripture) is that of the woman. The feminine vocabulary, symbolism and behaviour are the medium for self-realisation, which is the expression of total freedom or Divine realization.

Harinder Singh Mehboob articulates the Woman-consciousness in the *Guru Granth* as follows:

"In the *Guru Granth Sahib*, several dimensions of the woman-consciousness are experienced in the spiritual longing of humans. Guru Nanak - Truth did not incorporate it as a mere illustration or thought, rather it is a significant part of the whole experience. Woman is that form of its genius whose intense movement transforms the complete radiant richness of the Creation's fertile aspects into human morality. In the feelings of coming together and pangs of separation, several representative forms of life converge like a great carnival."

"Hence, firstly, the *Khalsa* must have the complete experience of the woman in accordance with the standards of Divine values; secondly, the *Khalsa* must be aware of the completeness of the woman in all colours of coming together and pangs of separation: the complete and grave experience intoxicated with pure essence and aesthetical splendour! This experience must have movement, longing, and serene bliss at the same time."

I must ask, are we experiencing this wonder, this *vismad*?

In the *Sikhi* lifestyle, *Waheguru* is enshrined in each and every heart. The same divine light is present in all human beings. Every man and woman is an image of *Waheguru*. The Gurus were far ahead of their time; they brought clarity by highlighting the prevalent jarring social inequalities. Regarding barring women from participating in society based on their purported association with "impurity," the Guru proclaims, rather, that all doubts in one's mind on this issue are the impurity!

In terms of rights and responsibilities of the Sikhs, here is what the revolution of the Sikh Gurus encompassed:

Admitting women into the *sangat* (congregation) without any restrictions or reservations; encouraging the education of all Sikhs, men and women included; condemning the cruel custom of sati (the Hindu custom of self- or coerced- immolation of the widow on the husband's funeral pyre); advocating widow remarriage, abolishing purdah (veils); and declaring that "Woman is the Conscience of Man."

Furthermore, the *Khalsa* initiation ceremony, from day one was open to men and women alike. Also at the same time, a law was made to not associate with those who practiced female infanticide.



Still today some in the community, like many other Indians, are still complicit in female feticide! Open your eyes and hearts to the conspiracy of silence surrounding gendercide.

While busy pushing our preferences as laws, we completely disregard the Guru's direct command!

As well, we see that historically, the Guru forbade Sikhs to exercise any proprietary rights over women captured in battle; they could not be kept as slaves or wives but were to be treated with the utmost respect.

"In all contemporary records, mostly in Persian, written generally by Muslims as well as by Maratha agents posted at a number of places in Northern India, there is not a single instance either in Delhi or elsewhere in which the Sikhs raised a finger against women," records historian Hari Ram Gupta.

Culture can be judged from the position and respect it gives to women.

Today, we are faced with the question, are we part of Sikh culture or are we more Punjabi, Hindustani, or *Firangi*? If the answer is we want to be more Sikh-like, the first allegiance needs to be to the *Guru Granth - Panth*.

I saw an excellent, but disturbing, extrapolation of perversion toward South Asian women in the film *Maatr-bhoomi*. I look at the alarming statistics on woman-to-man ratios in Punjab. I read testimonies of domestic abuse in Vancouver and London.

Yes, I know versions of this injustice are prevalent in the whole world, in every community. Why, then, should I make noise about it?

Simple. Because even if one woman is treated unfairly, especially by those who claim to be Sikh, it is a crime. Our tradition, in the words of Bhai Gurdas, upholds a very different attitude and we should strive to see it made real: "In world events, literary affairs, virtuous behaviour, and exemplifying wisdom, Woman – half of the world's population–brings forth freedom."

Roles specified for men or women are antithetical to Sikh beliefs and practices.

Sikh culture incorporates those ideas and practices that do not divide the human race for the purpose of defining their rights and responsibilities. Thus, the classification of roles for women and men becomes an absurdity.



Sardarni Anika Kaur being honoured by S. Bishen Singh of the PGPC at Lahore.

Yes, there are prescribed tasks that are specific to a Sikh. Everything is prescribed for a Sikh by the wisdom of the Guru, from the *shakhsi* (personal) to the *panthak* (collective) living. There are enough historical narrations to substantiate this aspect.

Prof. Puran Singh observes: "Never was eastern or western woman so free when she rose like *Sundari*, the nurse-sister of the *Khalsa* in times when the Sikhs were pitched against the Mughal empire; *Sundari* chose her own vocation, dedicated her whole freed life as the sister-nurse alike of the *Khalsa* and his foes."

That was in the eighteenth century. How are we facilitating the identity formation of Sikh women today? Let us shift our focus away from men's empowerment to the empowerment of all!

The Guru dealt with subordination, prohibitions on remarriage, dowry, menstruation-related taboos, superstitions, and other oppressive customs that had become cemented into society and were propagated by immature or under-developed minds.





*The Sikh Women's Association and The Nagaara Trust (publishers of the Nishaan) holding seminar at New Delhi on 'Gender equality in Sikh philosophy'.*

Once more, the Guru's dictum, "Burn away those customs that make me forget the Beloved!" must be applied to everything that is designed to keep women subservient, docile and dependent today.

Anything that glorifies male gender preference encourages female neglect and perpetuates the view of a woman, a wife, a mother, a daughter, as a liability is not aligned with the Sikh vision.

It has been shown that every Sikh has the same rights and responsibilities; there are no separate roles for men or women. Over 500 years ago, Guru Nanak launched a struggle for equal rights. Every single Guru articulated and practiced the equality of men and women while working to liberate women who were captives within their own social hierarchies.

*Sikhi* rejects gender inequalities; it stresses the family-hood of the human race.

Doctrinally, Sikh women hold an equal status in all affairs, from spiritual to political. It is a

shortcoming of the human faculties and a result of the dominance and influence of other cultures that crept into the practitioners of the Sikh faith and began to justify the imposition of an inferior status on the female.

These shortcomings are the product of ignorance on the part of the practitioners as well as the nefarious designs of the forces operating actively to undermine the vision of the Gurus.

We must instead unite in our true understanding of the Sikh revolution and actively create a world that sides with inclusion and love.

I want to challenge all Sikhs, especially those who claim to build *panthak* institutions, to raise awareness in their communities about women's situation, the discrimination they face everyday, and the work being done to ensure rights and access to opportunities on three fronts:

Firstly, we must invest in women's capacity building and skills development to deal with people and institutions.

Second, we ought to ensure women's participation in every domain of life, offer them greater control, and allow them to assert decision-making power at home, community and society.

Third and finally, we should pledge to work diligently toward transformative action to bring about gender equality between men and women.

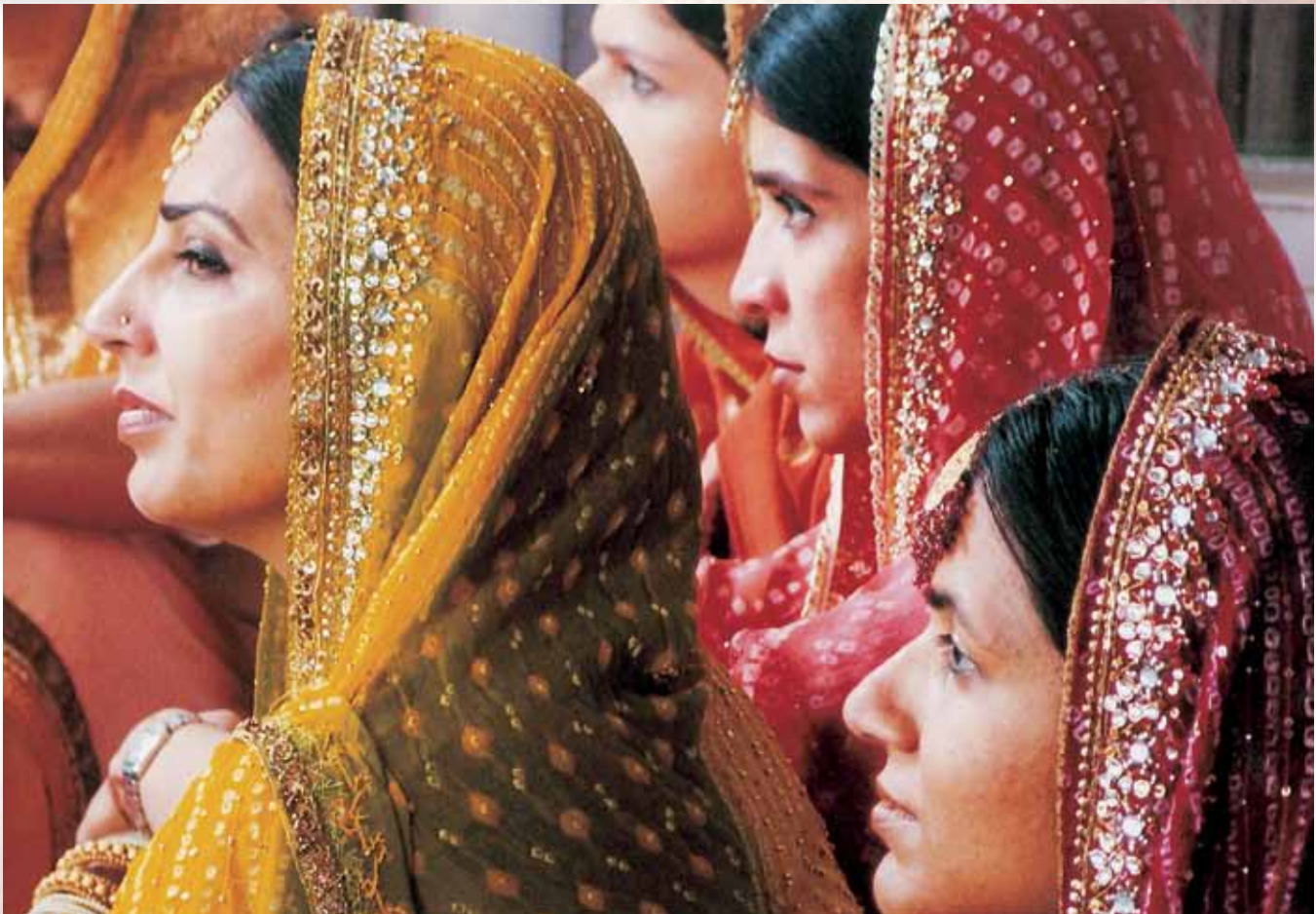
Rather than wait for an International Women's Day, let us focus NOW on equality as an objective, not on women as a target group. Men and women need to become partners in its pursuit, rather than throw up their hands and decry that prejudice is too deeply entrenched in our world to be changed, or placate historical wrongs with erratic token advancement. The daunting task is to move beyond mere recognition of gender differences, and increase vital attention to reducing gender disparities!

**Harinder Singh**

*Co-founder and Executive Director of the Sikh Research Institute (SikhRI) which is headquartered in Texas, U.S.A.*



# Women In Sikhism And The World



This subject has become the clarion call for Sikhism. Numerous scholars have written on it; dozens of articles are being written and published about this all over the world.

I am not re-visiting this subject for the sake of it but want to share some 'Case Histories' which are important as they become the mirror of daily life. They either confirm the application of what the scholars deduce or highlight the gap that exists between 'Theory' and 'Practice.'

Dr Surinder Singh Kohli, in 'The Position of Women in Sikhism' from his book, 'Sikhism and Guru Granth Sahib', has surveyed Indian literature, historical and mythological, to define the role and status of women in ancient India. He determines that women were given an exalted place but it was under the influence of Islam that Indian women became subservient.

He also reviews this aspect from the social and cultural spheres. His references to ancient and medieval Punjabi literature, for example 'Mirza-Sahibaan' and 'Heer-Ranjha' are interesting but one wonders why he has stayed away from other religions, particularly Hinduism (*Sarvuttam Granth – Guru Granth Sahib* by Swami Tirath Danda Sanyasi). In this *Sarvuttam Panth – Khalsa Panth* (The Best of all Religions – Khalsa Panth), Swami Ji (who later became Khalsa) has given numerous examples from various Hindu scriptures showing that in Hinduism, the status of women (per their Holy Scriptures) is outright degrading and even obnoxious : all such scriptures cited were in fact written much before the advent of Islam.

He has numerous quotes from Gurbani, such as *So kiyo manda aaakhiyae...* (Asa Di War) and *Satian eh na aakhiyae...* (Var Suhi)'....



I have had the opportunity to participate in various 'Interfaith Meetings' in Texas and come into close contact with scholars from Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Bahais, Hinduism and Buddhism. However, when it comes to the subject of 'Status of Women', most of them just cannot look straight into your eyes !

I leave it to scholars to give quotes from Scriptures of other religions, but give just one: "Theirs is the only religion (Sikhism) which pronounces in their scriptures that women are equal in every aspect to men. They had women soldiers, leading armies into battle against 'you know who' (the usual suspects). Sikh history is an inspiring one..."

I once met a lady at the Sikh Centre in Houston. She was wearing the keski; a number of American ladies wear keski attending Gurdwara, but this lady was black. I met her after langar. She told me that she had a Ph. D., was born Christian and had been part of a Study Circle, meeting once a week for Bible Studies. In one such meeting, she raised this specific question, on the 'Status of Women in Christianity'. Over some weeks, in their study circle, discussions were devoted to this topic. Various quotes from the Bible were dissected, but she was not convinced, in fact was rather most disillusioned.

Then she started surfing the net and 'discovered' Sikhism. She could not believe that such a religion existed, one which bestowed such unconditional equality of gender. Then she found that in Houston there was a Sikh Centre where Sikh congregational meetings were held. She started visiting the Sikh Centre, introduced me to her 5-year old son and her husband (a white American and a senior IT executive). The husband soon became a Sikh as well.

Later, however, I noticed that they had stopped coming to the Sikh Centre and months later, I met them again in another Gurdwara (Houston now has 6 Gurdwaras, starting with the original Sikh Centre established in 1973). She told me frankly that she was disappointed, because, firstly, the whole service was conducted in Gurmukhi which she could neither participate in, nor understand. Secondly, the priests had no knowledge of English and she could not even communicate with them. Thirdly, women's actual participation was only in the kitchen, to cook langar. Thus in practice, women in the Sikh religion were treated not much differently than in any other religion.

"There is an enormous gap between what the Sri Guru Granth Sahib ordains and what the Sikhs practice."

This is sad but true, our Gurdwaras in the USA are all run in the manner of gurdwaras in a village in the Punjab. Our clergy and management are extremely deficient in English and simply cannot impress, let alone the westerners, even our own younger generation.

Now, I relate another experience: The Sikh Foundation's Office at Palo Alto in California is located close to Stanford University, one of America's most prestigious (and also the most expensive) University. In fact Stanford University has given the impetus to and nurtured America's hi-tech industry, resulting in the famous Silicon Valley.

The fifteen Sikh students at Stanford had taken an initiative to get a course introduced on Sikhism. This was with approval of the Dean and at no cost to the University. Classes were held every Thursday evening with volunteer teachers from the Bay Area Sikh Community.

The Sikh Foundation Chairman, Dr. Narinder Singh Kapany, well-regarded as the 'Father of Fibre Optics' was scheduled to give a lecture in this series. Unfortunately, he fell unwell and was unable to attend and in his place, at the last minute, I was drafted in to fill that slot. I was surprised that though only fifteen students had registered, the attendees were more than fifty. A number of young Sikhs and even non Sikh executives from Silicon Valley not far from Stanford University, joined in as 'Audit Students'.

After the lecture, I was requested to help conduct the Question and Answer session continuing from a previous class and the subject most appropriately was : "Status of Women in Sikhism."

I began with the statement that any Scripture, or for that matter any worthy document (including the Constitution of USA) can have three positions on a subject. One positive; second negative and third, neutral, not stated position i.e. 'silent'.

The Constitution of the USA was silent on the issue of voting rights to women and it took almost 140 years of struggle by women in the USA to get their voting rights.

Now, if a Scripture is negative, how can you change that to become positive? Difficult or impossible? Even if the Prophet himself came back



and wanted to make a change, his fanatical followers would not let him do so. So in my opinion, this is situation fait-accompli and a lost cause! When the scripture is very positive, such as Sri Guru Granth Sahib, wherein not just in passing but repeatedly the equality of women is asserted, there is no ambiguity, no doubt whatsoever.

However, the problem in Sikhism is the gap between the lofty teachings and their actual practice. I really believe that psyche of the Indian sub continental race has been corrupted by thousands of years of slavery, which is the worst form of caste system. Only with that kind of psyche could Tulsi Das in Ram Chrit Manas dare to categorise women along with 'untouchables', animals and beasts of burden – all worthy of being beaten with a stick!

It was not under influence of Muslim invaders that the status of women was degraded in India: the indigenous Hindu 'culture' already carried this incurable cancer.

The Sikhs, in minority, were surrounded by such insidious practice and inevitably were influenced into accepting and practicing it, even though this was in stark contravention of the clear teachings of Sri Guru Granth Sahib.

However, if women come forward, they can demand and claim their equal rights because they are so assured in the Sri Guru Granth Sahib.

An example from Texas : every December, a Sikh Youth Camp and Retreat is organised in Houston, a major item in the Agenda being 'Amrit Prachar'. A young Sikh lady, who had taken amrit in the previous years, claimed that she had faithfully been keeping *Rehat* (Sikh Code of Conduct) rigorously, and wanted to be included in the 'Panj Pyaras'. (The Five Beloved ones, who are chosen to prepare and then administer the Amrit). Sure, there were some objections, but she won her right.

It is often asked why no woman raagi does kirtan in the Darbar Sahib. My thought is that they first have to deserve, then desire. Women jathas should first fulfill all the other requirements of being good Kirtania.

Another related question is on 'Sewa In The Darbar Sahib' as was once attempted by American Singhnis. They were granted the right, but at the last minute, they were denied thus for 'technical' reasons.

However, they should never give up this right and claim it again and again, until it becomes part of the tradition.

Once, the wife of a friend chided me, "Veer ji, you have exalted your wife so much to have spoilt her". I smiled and said, "Dear Sister, I am following the edict of Guru Gobind Singh ji. Didn't he bestow the name 'Kaur' (meaning Princess) to our daughters? Yes, then the mother of a Princess has to be a Maharani Queen) and so she deserves to be respected and treated like a Queen"!

We used to have an hour's radio broadcast 'Gurbanee Veechar' every Sunday morning in Houston. The fifteen-minute segment of 'Questions and Answers' was hosted by me. A young lady once asked me about the status of women in Sikhism, but she predicated her question that she had read and heard all the quotes from Sri Guru Granth Sahib; she wanted to know if there was any scientific basis behind all these quotes, since Sikhism is considered a very scientific religion.

This was a very strong, very modern question and a very challenging one. My answer was very straightforward. The entire world is built on molecular theory and, of course, the minute components of a molecule such as atoms, electrons, neutrons etc. are basic building blocks. Similarly in biology, there are cells and chromosomes. The sex determining chromosomes are Y and X. In fact Y chromosomes are basic feminine chromosomes. In humans, YY chromosomes determine a female person, and XY chromosomes result in a male person. Thus even the males are half females. Does it not look obvious that the really fundamental one is the "Y" chromosome?

Guru ji says: *Eis Jag Maen Purakh Ek Hae, Haur Sagli Naar* GGS Pages 591-592.

(In this world, there is just One Male – Akalpurakh, The Almighty; every one else is female).

Let us consider another branch of Scientific thought: psychology. Guru ji has emphatically stated that 'naam' cannot be realised if there remains one's ego. These two, Naam and Ego cannot reside concurrently. Since attainment of Naam is the goal, ego has to go. Guru ji stresses those very feminine characteristics such as 'Hukam Mannna', 'Haleemi', 'Tehl Sewa' continuously.





It is the female characteristics that subdue ego, and so one attains Naam. (I actually believe it is not just equality, but that females are superior to males in spirituality). In Sri Guru Granth Sahib, there are many examples of the 'pangs of separation' as suffered by a wife when separated from her husband. Those kinds of pangs are clearly symptomatic of very high, rather ultimate level of Love, of which Guru ji says, *Jin Prem Keo Tin Hi Prabh Paeo* (Those who love can attain Akal Purakh).

As an urdu poet wrote: *Intiha Yae Hae Ke Bande Ku Khuda Karta Hae Ishaq*. We have to accept 'basic nature' as being female only then does the light of Gurbani shine brilliantly.

Unfortunately male chauvinism is our biggest hurdle and main block in the path of our progress on this "road less traveled – Sikhi." I believe that owing to neglect and giving little attention to the teachings of Gurbani, we Sikhs have over hundreds of years, lapsed into this pitfall, where our practices in regard to equality of gender are far from the teachings of Gurbani.

A radical movement of the manner of Singh Sabha Lehr is imperative, needed urgently, because inequality of the genders has attained world wide prominence and Sikhism is the only faith that can take humanity in the right direction.

Since the impetus has begun in the western world, where women are challenging wrongful doings, we will have to address this issue here, rather than in India or the Punjab. Sikhs in the Diaspora must take the lead in closing this gap between practice and teaching as they are the ones with comparatively lesser 'cultural baggage'.

However, my assessment is that disengagement of this movement from the Punjab and spearheading it in the west will, in fact, be resisted by the 'so called' tradition-bound religious leadership in the Punjab. On many minor issues previously, they have demonstrated their very lack of vision in the global context.

Organisationally, I think the Khalsa Council is best suited to take lead. They are not Diaspora Sikhs, but American Sikhs. Sikhs in the Diaspora must join hands with them to spearhead this moment. Awareness is needed both at individual and panthic levels. A campaign has to be launched to bring about such universal awareness. Based on the level of awareness, local cells should be created that promote activities at closing this gap. Active members will naturally be the younger Sikh generation, who were born and / or brought up in the western countries. These cells will network with other cells as well as Central Body of the Khalsa Council.

Actions must be double edged, on the one hand encouraging and preparing women to take on more definitive roles and on the other, persuade current management at local levels to 'let go' and give proper opportunities for Sikh women to be in positions of visibility and public performances.

Having recognised the need for this mass movement, its launch will start opening many doors, at least in the USA, Britain, Australia, New Zealand, Singapore, Malaysia and many other 'progressive' countries.

It is not going to be an easy task, to rectify this neglect of centuries, but we owe it our Guru ji and to humanity at large. The time is Now.

**Dr. Jasbir Singh Sethi**  
Houston, Texas, USA.





# Our War of the Sexes

We are both well aware of the fundamentals of Sikh teaching that reiterate equality for men and women, and so forth. That's not where this essay begins.

We were passing the time talking about this and that, and about March 8 that was commemorated over the world as 'Women's Day', when our thoughts turned to how young Sikhs view their mates these days.

Naturally, for starters, we went on to peruse the 'Matrimonials' in the ethnic press, and also talked to a few young Sikhs of both sexes.

What flabbergasted us was how many young men look for 'China dolls', and how many young women, otherwise dedicated Sikhs, opt for the 'clean-shaven' look. Sometimes they even hunt for a 'clean-shaven gursikh'! Admittedly, there are very few ads that are quite so moronic, but to us it remains a classic oxymoron, like labelling someone a God-fearing atheist.

It seems that many young Sikh keshadhari males feel undesired and rejected by their Sikh women counterparts. Not a desirable place to be for a growing young man, we thought.

Equally disturbing is the other side of the spectrum. 'Saabat soorat' gursikh women (especially the ones that don a dastaar) have trouble finding matches, although they are not so vocal about it and don't often publicly decry Sikh men's craving for Bollywood models or look-alikes for their wives.

In this litany of how skewed is our thinking in such matters, one must add the undeniable fact that in our culture, for a woman the probability of finding a spouse, if she is divorced or has a child, is infinitesimally small.

Go to any function in any gurdwara and there is no way to escape the continual hum of conversation that permeates the assemblage, men and women, but largely emanates from the women.

This kind of rumination brought us to the question: what exactly is the place of the mother in a family beyond carrying the fetus for the necessary gestational period? What is the meaning of responsible parenting?

For a baby, we would think it takes more than keeping one end full and the other end dry, and as the baby grows, it means more than providing the right sex- and age- specific toys - from a Barbie doll or an iPod to a BMW.

We were intrigued by the Jewish maxim that any child born of a Jewish mother is by definition a Jew, irrespective of the father's religious affiliation, or the circumstances in which the child was conceived or born. (This is not the position in all of Judaic thought. For the Orthodox, marrying outside their tradition is not accepted and may result in shunning by the community.)

The idea of matrilineal transmission of Jewish faith most likely emerged from the never easy and contentious existence of the Jews. In their history of long-standing persecution, fatherhood was not always clearly established and the child unquestionably remained a mother's responsibility.

This is vital particularly in view of the fact that some Orthodox Jewish religious practices are heavily loaded in favour of patriarchy. For example, remember that a minyan (quorum required to conduct a communal religious service) consists of ten men; nine men and one woman would not do.

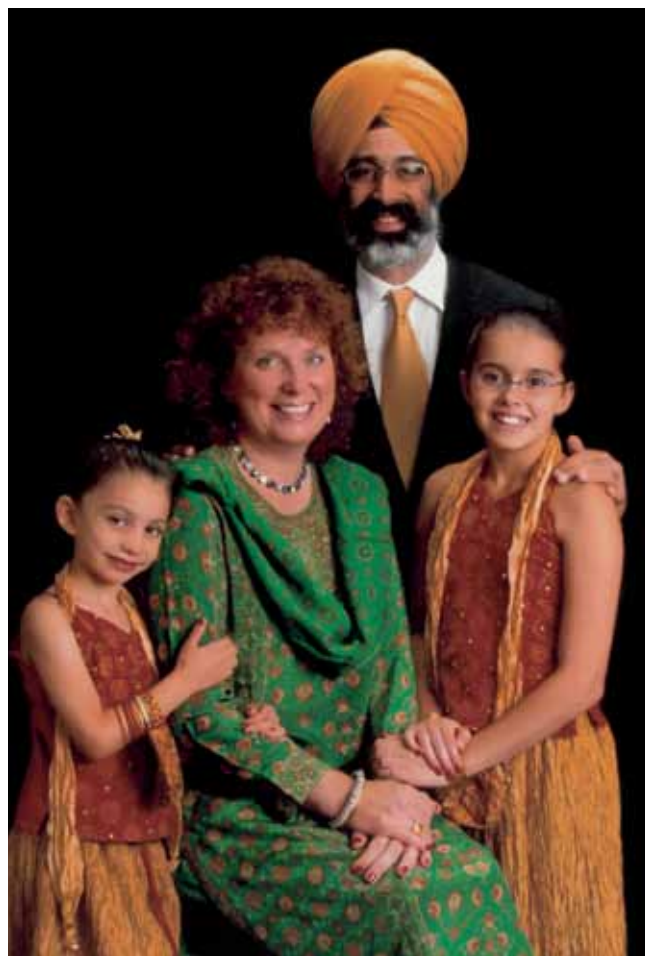
Keep in mind also that, in some Jewish practices, a woman undergoes a ritual purification every month after her menstrual period, and may not attend religious services during that time.

We need to add that mainstream Judaism accepts women as full partners without any of these caveats.

Yet, the belief that the mother is the primary element in defining the faith of a newborn is recognition of her central place. Why? Because, since the dawn of our existence, men have often been somewhat absentee fathers, even if it was only as hunters-gatherers. The human newborn is entirely helpless at birth and dependent on the mother for survival.

Even though not universally accepted in Jewish belief and practice, the dictum that a Jewish woman's child is a Jew recognises the pivotal place of the mother in the life of a child. It says that even if a Jewish woman marries outside her faith, or the child is of uncertain paternity, she is duty-bound to raise it as a Jew. In fact, the non-Jewish parent then is adding to the richness of the gene pool of the Jewish people. Furthermore, this attitude doesn't isolate the Jewish people from their neighbours of other faiths.

The Sikhs, as we see it, have evolved a very confusing set of parameters in the matter of raising a child. Whereas the responsibilities of a Sikh mother in raising a Gursikh child are critically noticed, her rights are invariably diminished.



In spite of the undeniably equal place that our doctrine provides women, our culture has always been an extreme patriarchy. Perhaps the reasons were socioeconomic, in a community that was largely agrarian until only a generation or two ago.

To a farming people, as many Sikhs still are, landholdings are the key to survival and prosperity. Thus, practices developed to reject alliances and cultural models wherein familial land would get divided over generations. Progressively smaller holdings guaranteed a downward economic spiral.

So a culture evolved in which the bride married into the family of the groom, and automatically adopted the new lifestyle, even the religion of the groom. Often she was also renamed by the groom and his family. She was given a reasonable dowry at marriage by her parents and, in turn, relinquished any claims to family property or land thereafter.

It was as if at marriage a bride sundered all ties to her family of birth. This model remains operational even today, even though it is now considerably strained and attenuated.



In this simplified narrative, the bride's existence, though extremely busy in her new joint-family, was considerably simplified. If her husband and his family were good Sikhs, she adopted good Sikh practices; if they practiced a mixed lifestyle, so did she and her children.

In this male-dominated Sikh existence, women developed few independent voices; consequently, we have written women out of our historical narrative and religious practices. We point to the fact that women are not allowed to perform kirtan at the premier Sikh historical gurdwaras, including the Harmandir Sahib at Amritsar.

They are only fleetingly and minimally mentioned in history. Their voices are rarely if ever heard in matters of gurdwara management, pretty much anywhere in the world. They are visible in gurdwaras as silent (even distracting) spectators or busy preparing the langar, never as equal partners.

We illustrate our concerns by two telling examples.

Many erudite writers insist that there were no women at the dramatic Vaisakhi of 1699 where the Khalsa identity was forged. On the other hand, we doubt that the crowd of 80,000 at that time was largely or entirely devoid of women.

Two professors of Sikh Studies have argued that the Sikh Code of Conduct (*Rehat Maryada*) is not applicable to women, and they may cut their hair.

We think that the *Rehat Maryada* seems silent or ambiguous on the place of women because of the cultural realities from which we have not yet emerged. There is no logical or sensible reason for such selective myopia in interpreting Sikh doctrine or teaching.

Also, over the past fifty years, Bollywood has increasingly come to define our social existence and cultural norms. If Sikh men lust for China dolls, the women, too, look at clean-shaven hunks as their ideal beaus.

Remember that we are perhaps the last of the generation of Sikhs who learned the rudiments of Sikhism by listening to the parables of Sikhi from our mothers and grandmothers.

Now, as the world turns, times are a-changing. Women are increasingly finding a fulfilling and progressively equal place and powerful voice in secular society, but not in Sikh institutions or religious practices. The Sikh ethos remains defined in the time-

honoured cultural mindset and argot that denies a woman's identity, quite contrary to all the doctrinal teaching and its spiritual import.

Over the years, we have known many Sikh families where only one parent - either the mother or the father, but not both - was deeply attached to Sikhi. It seems that the probability of the children remaining connected to Sikhi is greater when it is the mother rather than the father who alone has such ties that can be passed on to the next generation.

We Sikhs, by our cultural and tribal mores, don't even see the symbolism in the Jewish act of claiming as a Jew every child born to a Jewish woman.

The result: we have brought forth a generation of Sikh men and women who have a vague and ill-defined connection to Sikhi, and conflicting ideas of what it means to be a Sikh.

We have diminished and ignored what it means to be a Sikh wife and mother.

By participating in large-scale female foeticide, we have attempted to eliminate Sikh daughters.

By forcing arranged marriages on to the ones that survive, we repress their sense of self and spiritual relationship with the Guru that they should carry forth to their children.

By engaging in honour killings, we try to terrify the rest of them into submission and slavery or else...

One or more of these practices take place in scattered pockets of the community even though they are unequivocally prohibited by Sikh doctrine.

Where, then, are we going to find Sikh women of the next generation?

We happily add a postscript.

There are some spirited souls who are carving a new niche as liberated Gursikh women of the 21st century, but largely outside the ambit of our gurdwaras. You see them as film producers, writers, youth camp organizers, artists and even human rights activists. They seem to be creating the impetus of a new enlightenment and the power of feminine liberation.

To us the moral is clear:

Rights and responsibilities must coexist. A house divided ... or at war within ... cannot stand.

*Dr. I.J. Singh & Gurmeet Kaur*  
USA

# 'Leaders of Today... Lighting the Torch for Tomorrow'



The imposing OAS Building in the heart of Washington DC.

There was a sea of elegant turbans and exquisite *salwar-kameezs*, breathtaking against the imposing Washington D.C. backdrop of the Washington Monument and the White House. The historic, prestigious and iconic Organization of American States (OAS) Building provided the inspirational setting for the Kaur Foundation Leadership Awards Gala 2008, held on 20 June.

A striking aspect of the gala was the prominent role played by the Sikh youth. Immaculately dressed, purposeful and with complete dedication ready to play their roles for the evening, working hard to ensure a smooth flow. The affable and humorous emcee, young attorney Gobind Singh Sethi, keeping the pace brisk and enthused!

'Leaders of Today – Lighting the Torch for Tomorrow' was the evening's theme and the four honorees did the community proud. Fauja Singh, 97-year-old world champion marathoner, was greeted with a thunderous standing ovation. In a world that worships youthfulness, the admiration this nonagenarian garnered was inspirational. Running marathons at an astonishing 81 years of age, he has been steadily improving and breaking world records. His stamina powered by a simple vegetarian diet. In his acceptance

speech, he credited the power of "positive thinking and healthy living," combining personal belief with the promotional tag line from Addidas - "Impossible is Nothing." His coach, Harmander Singh, paid tribute to his will power and discipline and encouraged the audience to let this message serve as an inspiring example. Kaur Foundation cited his "indomitable spirit of *chardi kala*." Cameras kept clicking as gala attendees sought to capture and preserve this inspiring encounter with this icon.

Prolific and profound, Manjyot Kaur's repertoire is extensive – essayist, editor, book reviewer, translator (French and Italian), conservationist, and an archivist. Honored for her "continuous commitment to serving the Panth," the writer spoke movingly and with deep humility about her love of Sikhi and her joy in being able to share its treasures through her writings.

Dr. Paul Michael Taylor, Curator of Asian Ethnology at Washington D.C.'s premier Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History, is a well-recognised and much appreciated friend of the Sikh community. It was his vision that brought us in and for the world to glimpse the ground breaking exhibit, "Sikhs: Legacy of the Punjab" which was opened in 2004. Lauded for his "erudite and visionary





Fauja Singh and Gurmeet Kaur.

outlook”, Dr. Taylor credited the active involvement of numerous Sikh partners to the success of the endeavor.

The fourth honoree was unable to join in person, but as the image of a smiling, uniformed, young woman in her twenties flashed on the screen, a deep sense of pride was discernible in the audience. Ranbir Kaur is the first Sikh woman to serve in the US armed forces. Accepting the award on behalf of Ranbir was a family friend and proud mother of the first Sikh woman to join the US Navy. Visibly emotional and proud, Sarvan Singh lauded the patriotism and valour of the young women.

Educators are key partners of Kaur Foundation in its mission of spreading awareness, dispelling misconceptions, and fostering understanding and appreciation of Sikhs in mainstream society. The keynote speaker of the evening was John Krownapple, Head of Cultural Proficiency, Howard County, Maryland Public Schools. John spoke about the “paradigm shift” taking place in schools. Cultural awareness and sensitivity training for students is no longer viewed as accommodating the needs of diverse school populations. Rather, educators view it as valuable assistance in their goal of equipping students with knowledge essential to their successful participation in a world that is increasingly globalized.

All eyes were glued to the screen as it came alive with colourful vignettes from Sikh life. The release of the film ‘Kaur Cultural Safari,’ was met with much appreciation. Made with the express purpose of helping to fill gaps in the understanding of Sikh children at



Jessi Kaur and her sons.

schools, this educational outreach film by director Sandeep Singh has content that demystifies and makes what is unfamiliar easier to comprehend appreciate. The images are indelible: a mother combing her son’s beautiful long hair and tying his *patka*, the father tying his turban, *diwan* and *langar* in a gurdwara and a joyful celebration of *Baisakhi* with *bhangra*. The explanations are clear and in a fun quiz format that creatively reinforce key concepts. The goal of this educational initiative is to place this DVD in every elementary and middle school curriculum in the United States. The DVD also has a work-book which is a resource guide for teachers. This work-book is written by Pushpinder Singh, an elementary school social studies teacher in California and author of ‘The Boy with Long Hair.’

‘Dear Takuya ... Letters of a Sikh Boy’ written by Jessi Kaur, Co-founder of the International Institute of Gurmat Studies, California, and edited by honoree Manjot Kaur, was also released that evening. The protagonist, eight-year-old Simar Singh, opens a window to Sikh culture, traditions and philosophy as he writes to Takuya, his Japanese pen pal. Jessi Kaur has conveyed a wealth of information about Sikhi in a most readable, accessible and fun manner. Kaur Foundation is committed to placing this book in school libraries across the United States.

A live auction was conducted by a professional auctioneer, for many gala attendees it was their first such experience. The exquisite offerings were original artwork by major artists from the Sikh Diaspora. The Singh Twins – Amrita and Rabindra – from England and Manjeet Shergill from Singapore introduced their



Dr. Paul Michael Taylor of The Smithsonian with Mirin Kaur of The Kaur Foundation.

works in a very personal and accessible manner. The high-energy, humorous and flamboyant auctioneer had the audience riveted and energized as he successfully coaxed and cajoled it to bid generously for a charitable cause. A magnificent collection for silent auction was presented by Bicky Singh of California, founder of the website [sikhpoint.com](http://sikhpoint.com).

In keeping with Kaur Foundation's goal "to build intra-community and institutional partnerships", the event was sponsored and attended by the Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Bolivia to the Organization of American States, Jorge Reynaldo Cuadros Anaya who felicitated the event for "celebrating diversity in its truest sense with members of all faiths represented here." An energetic and dramatic folklore performance by the Embassy of Bolivia dance troupe, decked in vibrant costumes, provided a grand finale to the memorable evening.

Thanking the community for its active involvement and support, Kaur Foundation President, Mirin

Kaur spoke of the effectiveness that comes from "the unity of purpose of this wonderfully diverse group." A quick look around the room brought home her point. Lending their voice and talent were luminaries from many different fields who have contributed enormously "in helping project a positive Sikh identity": film maker Reema Anand, author-architect-artist K.P.Singh, *Spinning Wheel* Film Festival co-founders T.Sher Singh and Dr. Birender Ahluwalia, technology titans Ken and Kavelle Bajaj, media people Pushpinder Singh and Inni Kaur of the prestigious *Nishaan* journal and Baldev Singh Grewal, editor of *Sher-e-Punjab* newspaper, and orthopedic surgeon Dr. Gural Singh Bhuller, also an author and avid art collector.

Mirin Kaur exhorted the gathering to stay fully engaged and committed, quoting the motto of Kaur Foundation that "*it is the responsibility of one generation to plant the seed, so the next gets the shade.*"



Manjot Kaur and Inni Kaur at the OAS building courtyard.

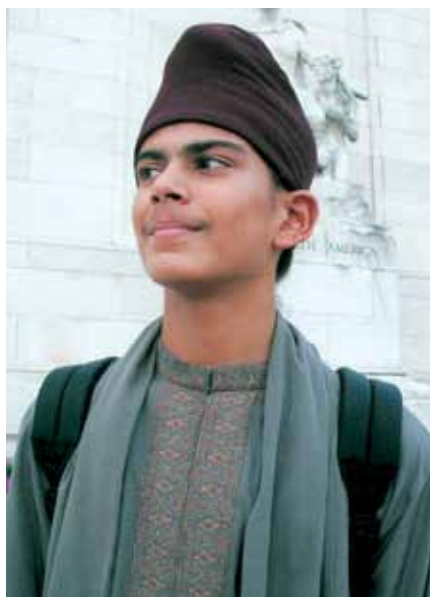


## Spinning Wheel Film Festival

In the auditorium of the Kennedy Center on June 21, Sikh documentaries, shorts and films took center stage. A cinematic examination of Sikh life and culture that promotes universal themes of human rights, global peace and acceptance was the pervading theme.

The young film director Angad Singh, eloquently and thoughtfully answered questions about his film 'One Light.' (*Ek Noor*) A film that celebrates the oneness of humanity and aims to transform, connect and inspire everyone.

*The Making of Liverpool*, a film written, directed and produced by the Singh Twins with the support of Arts Council of England made its USA debut at the Festival.



Angad Singh, whose documantry film 'One Light' (*Ek Noor*) was outstanding.



The lovely Singh twins, Amrita and Rabindra.

The magnificent Kennedy Centre for the Performing Arts, at Washington DC.



*Monty for England*, inspired, *In Search of My Tartan Turban*, rocked, *Roots in the Sand*, took us on a journey. Reema Anand's *Sewa, Paris to Tapovan*, was heart-wrenching. She spoke passionately about Sardar Bhagwant Singh and his *sewa*. She left us with a though-provoking question, "Why are there not more Sardar Bhagwant Singh's?"

The last film of the Festival was from the pen of Khushwant Singh's classic novel *Train to Pakistan*. There was not a dry eye in the audience as scenes of 1947 came to life.

Inni Kaur



# iLead Retreat: Planting the Youth Leadership Seed



Nestled in the scenic and peaceful setting of Charles Town in West Virginia, USA, iLead Retreat 2008 brought together 60 Sikh youth for a week of mutual learning and community-building. The 350-acre retreat center lies in the beautiful Shenandoah Valley. Its tranquility, simplicity and natural lushness make it a site most conducive to exploration and contemplation. The area is rich in history. Charles Washington, brother of the first U.S. president, George Washington, founded this town.

iLead is unique among Sikh youth camps for its focus is on leadership development. This Kaur Foundation initiative is for age groups 10 yrs – 13 yrs and 14 yrs – 17 yrs. The daily schedule includes interactive leadership presentations, focus on leadership principles as lived and taught by our Gurus and embodied in the

*Sri Guru Granth Sahib*, daily *Diwan*, Sikh history and *Kirtan* classes. Sports and fun activities are also included in this programme with the retreat favorites being campfire and talent night!

Choice workshops are another distinctive offering at the retreat. Depending on their interest,

iLeaders could choose to enroll in journalism, film or art. Topics for group discussions relevant to the youth range from difficult conversations to understanding different perspectives, role switching to minorities and the media, teen philanthropy and role of each individual in community development.







Special invitee and speaker Emily Jackson, an 18-year-old world champion sports kayaker, made a visibly deep impression on the retreat participants. iLeaders were inspired by the *sewa* undertaken by this highly successful and motivated teen in using her prize money to fund a school in Africa while living modestly herself.

The 'Trust & Confidence' team development took the entire group to the Hemlock Overlook in beautiful Clinton, Virginia. The daylong programme took the participants through unforgettable experiences like the Zip Wire and the Peanut Butter Pit that involved overcoming fear, and working cooperatively as a team to accomplish difficult tasks.

This Doing=Learning approach yielded three high quality end

products. Led by award winning journalist Anju Kaur of SNN (Sikh News Network), the Journalism workshop students transformed themselves into able teams of reporters, photographers, editors, layout designers et al. The newspaper produced was aptly named 'The iLead Post.' This newsletter is a fascinating read, replete with inside scoops.

Fourteen-year-old Angad Singh, director of the acclaimed documentary 'One Light,' was in charge of the very popular Film making workshop, in collaboration with writer-producer-director, Adrian Bernal, of CNN *enEspanol*. iLeaders worked diligently on different aspects of film making such as camera work, lighting, interviewing, transcribing, music selection and editing. They made and presented an 8-minute piece



for a documentary shot at the retreat titled "Roots and Wings," that had everyone eagerly anticipating the film.

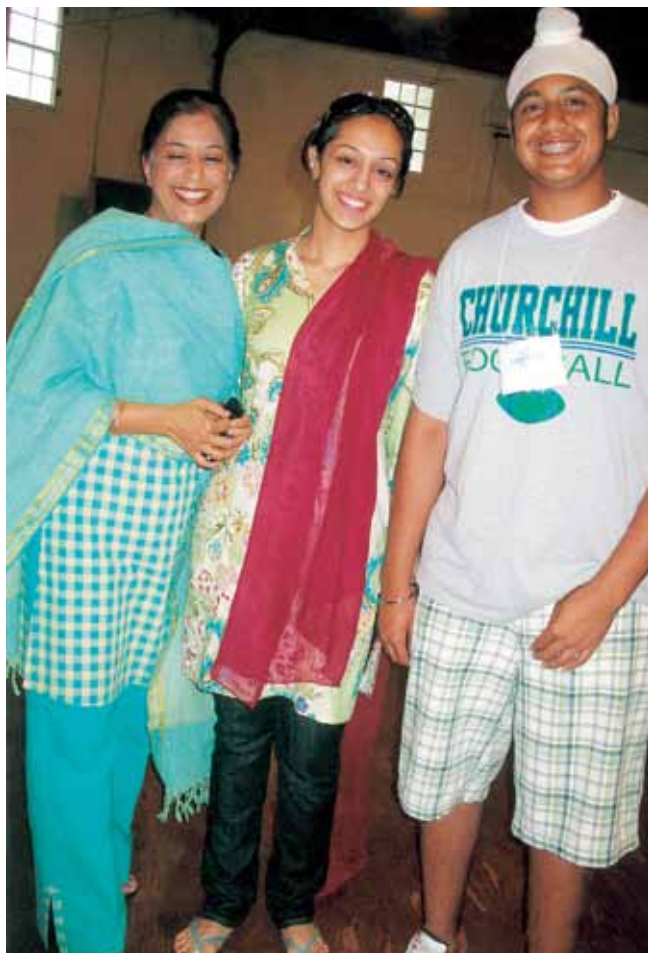
Manjeet Shergill, the renowned artist from Singapore headed the Art workshop. She exhorted students to focus on originality in self-expression. Art educator Dan Masi, guided iLeaders through the conceptualisation and painting of a striking piece called *Children of One God*. The students began by sharing with each other which core concept and imagery in *Sikhi* spoke deeply to them. The painting is a labour of love, evoking feelings of deep reverence.

The *gurmata* classes focused on the shared treasure of Sikhs, the *Sri Guru Granth Sahib ji*. Word-by-word, the theme *Shabad's* meaning and message

was discussed and reflected upon. The *Gurmat* segment organiser and lead instructor Rubin Paul Singh, a young but veteran camp organiser himself, made an offer : anyone so inclined could join him at 5:30 am for *Nitnem*. Youth counselors and iLeaders helped each other out with learning to play and sing the *Shabad* and the *kas* on the *tabla*. Satparkash Singh, a *tabla* and vocal music maestro, provided professional *tabla* instruction. The beauty of the music was enhanced by the talented iLeaders playing the *dilruba*, *sarinda*, piano, violin, flute, guitar, saxophone and trumpet.

Talent Night was the big show! Spoofs of life at the retreat that poked good-natured fun at organisers, counselors and iLeaders, had everyone in splits. Songs ranging from Punjabi favorites to rap, guitar and piano performances, and high-energy *bhangra* as well as classically elegant *Odissi*, made for a lively and highly entertaining evening.

The orange glow of the campfire lit up the night sky. It was an enchanting scene with fireflies adding to the beauty of the night. Camp songs were sung,



smores were relished and pictures capturing these happy moments were taken. Dilbagh Singh gamely allowed his friends to smear birthday cake on his face in celebration of his special day. Youth counselors were overheard strategising how they would get their excited charges to unwind for bedtime!

The retreat was radiant in bold red as the iLeaders donned on their special retreat t-shirts. It was the last day, and families had been invited to the final performance. There was a palpable sense of confidence and pride as each iLeader spoke on stage on leadership lessons learned – *sewa*, selflessness, taking ownership of community needs, having a vision and working determinedly toward that goal and working as a team.

The melodiously sung theme *Shabad*, by the iLeaders, spoke of our good fortune in being blessed with the priceless treasure of the True Name in *gurbani* (*hum dhanwant bhagat sachh naaey*), a treasure that is inexhaustible and multiplies manifold the more it is shared : *khavai kharchai rul mil bhayee, tot na aavai vadho jaaee*.

*Sikhi* emphasises the importance of being good stewards of the earth. In that spirit, iLeaders planted two apple trees on the grounds as a give back. Just as these trees will grow, bear fruit and provide shade we hope that our iLeaders will take on roles of leadership and serve as needed, expanding their horizon and lending a bigger voice to the community, helping being the change... through measured steps.

**Harsharan Kaur**

*[All photographs taken on the first day at Charles Town, West Virginia by Pushpindar Singh]*



# Legacy of Bhai Rup Chand



Near contemporary painting of Guru Har Gobind Sahib, who blessed Bhai Rup Chand. There is corroborating evidence appearing in Gurbilas Patshahi Chevin recording that Bhai Bidhi Chand brought an artist for making the painting. Similar paintings exist at the seat of Bhai Bidi Chand's descendants at Sur Singh near Amritsar.

As an individual, he served five Sikh Gurus and generations later, his descendants have continued to spread the word of the Gurus and propagate Sikhi. The Bhai Sahibs of Bagrian anointed Maharajas and continued the tradition of serving *langar* to all for nearly four centuries.

The family's service to Sikhi and the Panth is Bhai Rup Chand/Singh's legacy.

The story of Bhai Rup Chand, a close, trusted and devoted Sikh of Sri Guru Hargobind Sahib was to become legend that one day in April 1630 when he with his father (Sidhu) were harvesting their small holding in wilderness of the Malwa near a place called Tuklani.

Heat of the April midday sun was intense and being overcome by thirst, they left the field and repaired to where a goatskin *mashk* (bag) was hanging from a branch in the shade of a neighbouring *Jand* tree. Its water was exceptionally cool, sweet and cool indeed but the two, moved with religious devotion, pronounced it as nectar, an offering to the Guru and refrained from drinking it. The heat grew ever more intense, their thirst more aggravated till they almost fainted with exhaustion, but neither father nor son would touch the water.

The Guru was then staying nearby at Daroli. During the intense heat of the day, the Guru felt the call of his devotees and hurried to Sidhu's fields. On reaching, he took the goatskin bag from the tree and sprinkled water on faces of the two, so reviving them. He then partook of the water, sharing it with father and son. Moved by their love and devotion, the Guru presented them with his own sword, horse and robes of honour.

Sidhu came from a family of Rajputs from the Marwar area of Rajputana. The first significant name in his ancestry is that of Raja Bhartu who had, about the mid-12<sup>th</sup> century, laid the foundation of Bharatgarh as his capital. He was succeeded by his son Sandher who in turn was succeeded by his son Rattan Pal.



*Wooden pillar, piled into the ground as foundation of the village.*



*The manji upon which Bhai Rup Chand was anointed by Guru Hargobind Sahib.*

Then, at the time of Bhadan Pal, the son of Raja Rattan Pal, Altmash, the Sultan of Delhi, invaded their country with overwhelming force and completely defeated them. After this, many Rajput tribes, rather than submit to Mughal rule, left their homes and hearths and migrated to other parts of India.

Badhan Pal joined the coalition of Rajput tribes who opposed Altmash and was involved in several

battles whence he was slain and his son Pun Pal, observing that many of his allies were leaving the country also migrated with his family and a band of followers to south western Punjab, where Mughal rule was not yet firmly established. His moves met with opposition from the Virk tribe near the river Ravi, so he kept moving further south and settled down in the neighbourhood of Bhatinda, at the present site of Kaljharani. He fortified the place and with this as stronghold, took advantage of weaknesses of the local Governor of Bhatinda to appropriate the lands around Kaljharani. In the course of a few years, he established an independent principality of his own.

The family remained in peaceful possession of this principality for some generations. On the death of Raja Pun Pal, his son Ganesh Pal became the Raja. Except for a few hostile engagements with some neighbours, there was little fighting as was the situation with his son Bijai, content with consolidating their influence in the territory adjacent to Kaljharani, devoting their time to agriculture. Thence onwards, the line had an uneventful existence for four or five generations. Raja Sultan, sixth in descent from Raja Bijai Pal, had to contend with a confederation of his neighbours and his son, Raja Tula, had some trouble with the Governor at Bhatinda. Vicissitudes of fortune beset Tula and by the time his son Sada assumed charge, much of their territory was lost.

Events with far-reaching consequences occurred during the lifetime of Sidhu, son of Sada. Sidhu married Bibi Surti, the daughter of Bhai Aaqal, a devoted disciple of the fourth Guru, Guru Ramdas Sahib. It was not long before Bibi Surti, herself a devout follower of the Guru, prevailed upon her husband to meet the sixth Guru, Hargobind Sahib. After Sidhu had the Guru's audience at Daroli, so overwhelmed was he by teachings of the Guru, he abandoned his former mode of worship and embraced Sikhism. This change of religion was cause of much friction and unpleasantness in the family, who, like most Rajputs of those days, worshipped Sakhi Sarwar. Finding the situation in Kaljharani ever more irksome, Sidhu finally resolved to separate himself from the clan. Accompanied by his wife and some of his immediate followers, he migrated eastwards and settled at the place called Tuklani.

In 1614, a son was born to Sidhu and Surti. The couple took him to Guru Hargobind Sahib, the sixth Guru, for the *naam karan*, or naming ceremony. The Guru was much pleased with the handsome child and named him Rup Chand.



The same *Jand* tree stands at the site even today and to commemorate the blessing of the Guru on both father and son, a Gurdwara (Jand Sahib) has been built there. Considering the Guru's gifts as too sacred for their own use, with deep reverence Sidhu and Rup Chand placed the sword and robes upon their heads and led the horse with a rope to their home. The Guru was greatly touched by their devotion and respect. He blessed them with the prophesy that their word would be more potent than the sword and that they need never use the weapon, but keep it in trust for the Guru's descendants. It were these very weapons that Bhai Rup Chand presented to Guru Gobind Sahib, the Tenth Guru in 1706 at Dina Kangar and are now preserved at Gurdwara Mata Sundariji at New Delhi. Some four miles from the place, the Guru laid the foundation of a village honouring his devoted Sikh, named after the young Rup Chand, on the 16<sup>th</sup> Baisakh, 1687 Bikram, or 1630 AD and directed Bhai Sidhu and his son to move to that place. The wooden pillar piled into the ground by the Guru when laying the foundation (mohart) of the village, still stands at the site of what is Bhai Rupa.

Like Bhai Sidhu, Rup Chand continued in his devotion and service to the Guru and to his faith. In the month of August 1631, Guru Hargobind Sahib, with 3,000 warriors again visited Bhai Rupa and stayed there for three months. The Guru, in recognition of his devotion, honoured Rup Chand with the title of Bhai – his own brother – and put him in charge of spiritual welfare of the new Malwa region and the country south of the river Sutlej.

Bhai Rup Chand was the second such respected Sikh after Baba Buddha ji, who served the house of Nanak from 1506 to 1631. A Gurdwara presently

marks the place the Guru stayed during this visit. The family has ever since had the privilege of being called the Bhai-ke family, the head of the family known as Bhai Sahib.

The Guru appointed Bhai Rup Chand as his apostate in the region of Malwa. The ceremony for his anointment to the respected position of propagator of the Sikh faith was performed at Bhai Rupa. The cot on which Rup Chand was made to sit by the Guru for this anointment is preserved by his descendants at Bhai Rupa. The Guru mandated Bhai Rup Chand to maintain a free kitchen (*langar*) to feed the needy and symbolically gave him a long serving spoon (*karchha*) to begin the *langar*. He was also given the responsibility of spreading Sikhi in the world, for which he was presented with a double- edged sword (*khanda*) as token of authority. This could very well have been the first enunciation of the concept of 'Deg' and 'Teg', key elements of practiced Sikhi. Both these relics are preserved with reverence by his descendants at Bagrian in Sangrur district of the Punjab.

Bhai Rup Chand and his youngest son, Dharam Chand, accompanied Sri Guru Tegh Bahadur Sahib to Patna. From there, Dharam Chand accompanied the ninth Guru on his extended mission to the East in Assam while Rup Chand stayed in Patna in service of the family, during which time, Sri Guru Gobind Sahib was born.

It was in 1654 that the seventh Guru, Guru Har Rai, visited Bhai Rup Chand. Two young children named Rama and Triloka, sons of one Phul were presented to the Sikh Guru as needy children, they were blessed by the Guru and grew into prosperity. Their



*Karchha (ladel) given to Bhai Rup Chand to start the langar at Bhai Rupa, by Sri Guru Hargobind Sahib in 1635.*



*Birdcage of Koels kept by Guru Hargobind Sahib, at Bhai Rupa.*

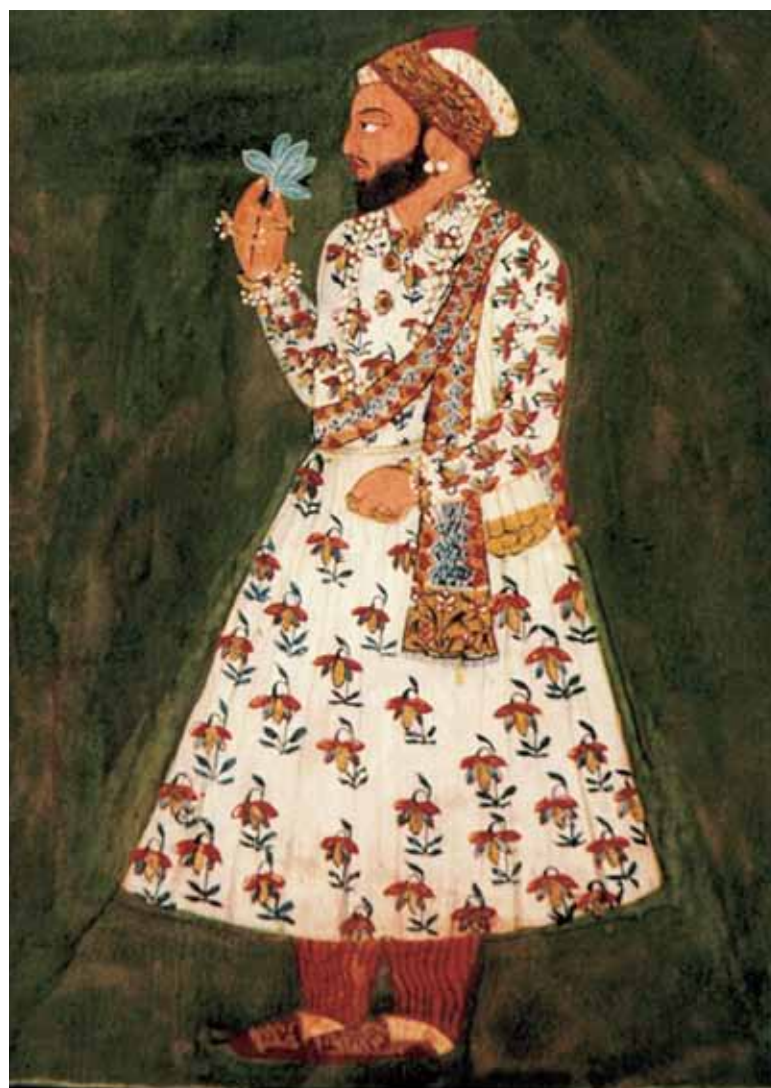
progeny flourished and in the course of time, they were to become the Maharajas of Patiala, Nabha and Jind, the Phulkian States. Holding Bhai Rup Chand in high regard for his benign act and grateful for their induction to the Sikh faith, the Phulkian families maintained close and reverential relationship towards the descendants of Bhai Rup Chand and preferred to have all their religious ceremonies, such as coronations and weddings conducted by his descendants, who were heads of the family at Bagrian. This tradition has continued.

Bhai Rup Chand spent his entire life in propagating the mission of the Sikh Gurus and serving common people. Amongst the Sikhs, his status remained extremely venerable. His service and piety was given high regard by the Gurus. Bhai Rup Chand had the supreme privilege and honour to conduct the nuptial ceremony (Anand Karaj) of the Tenth Master, Sri Guru Gobind Singh Sahib with Mata Jito ji at Guru Ke-Lahore near Anandpur Sahib in 1677. His descendants, who continue living in the village of Bhai Rupa, possess a large serving spoon made of copper, which is said to have been used while preparing that days *langar* by Bhai Rup Chand.

The wood-burning fireplace, where the first charity kitchen (*langar*) of this family was established in times of the sixth Guru, still exists in the village, this site being less than a hundred yards from the Gurdwara where the sixth Guru stayed for about three months while at Bhai Rupa. Brought up as a member of the Guru's own, Bhai Rup Chand was given the honour of being one

of the four pall bearers who carried the cortege of the Sixth Guru at Kiratpur in the year 1644.

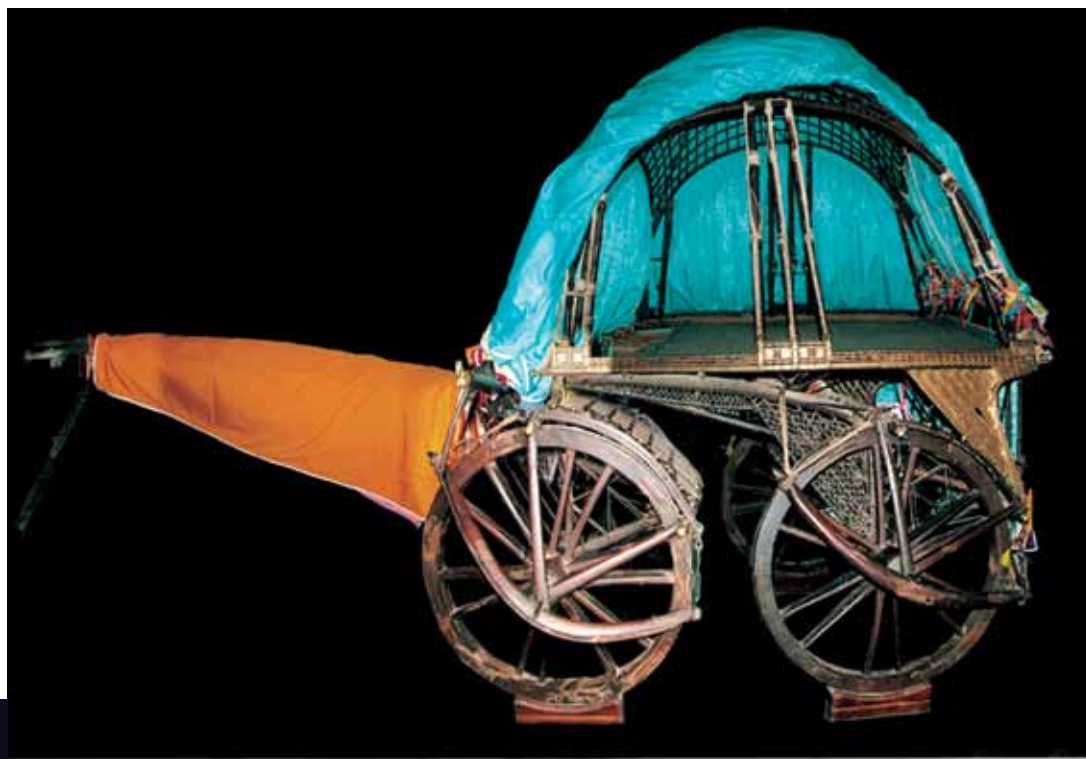
After leaving Anandpur in 1705, following the battle of Chamkaur and when Guru Gobind Singh Sahib, reached Kangar in Malwa in early 1706, he stayed at a place called Dina. Here, Bhai Rup Chand made him offerings of money and war material and also presented the sword given by the sixth Guru which was to be kept in trust for a later Guru. Bhai Rup Chand and his seven sons were formally baptised (Amrit Sanskar) at the sacred hands of the tenth Guru. Bhai Rup Chand then offered two



ਸ੍ਰੀ ਗੁਰੂ ਹਰਿ ਰਾਏ ਜੀ

*Guru Har Rai Sahib*





This 'Rath' was crafted by one Khuda Bakhsh of Srinagar and presented to Sri Guru Ram Das at Amritsar. This was used by Mata Ganga ji, wife of Sri Guru Arjan Dev. Later Baba Ram Rai travelled in it to Delhi for the meeting with Emperor Aurangzeb, from where it was taken to Dehra Dun by him. Bhai Gian Singh, grandson of Bhai Rup Chand brought it to Bhai Rupa as per Ram Rai ji's wishes.



Hukumnama of Guru Gobind Singh Sahib, asking the family of Bhai Rup Chand to bring men and material to Anandpur.

of his sons, Bhai Param Singh and Bhai Dharam Singh, to be in personal service of the Guru. Bhai Dharam Singh was directed to disseminate the Sikh faith with a sword of authority given to propagate the Sikh way of life amongst the people of Malwa. This sword is reverently kept at Bagrian by his descendants.

Members of the family of Bhai Rup Chand were called upon by Guruji to accompany him on his journey to the Deccan. This Hukamnama, a royal epistle to this effect is kept at Bhai Rupa. Two brothers, Bhai Dharam Singh and Bhai Param Singh thereafter went on the journey to Nander. The Guru was immensely pleased with their

devotion and service but at a place called Madhosinghari in Rajasthan, directed them to return home to carry on the mission of the Gurus. After the brothers came back and presented themselves before Bhai Rup Singh, he admonished them and would not allow them to stay on unless they produced some proof that they had not deserted the Guru at his time of need. The brothers then went back and reunited with the Guru in the Deccan, a long way south. The Guru was surprised and touched by Bhai Rup Chand's devotion and their own love and attachment to him. This time Guruji gave them an autographed prayer book, which he always carried in his waist sling, and a small *kard* (sword) along with the Guru's *karcha* and the double-edged sword (*khanda*). These articles remain in Bagrian. After the Guru's passing away at Nander in November 1708, Bhai Dharam Singh returned to the Punjab and informed his father about the sad turn of events. In shock, Bhai Rup Singh (Chand) soon passed away, at the age of 95 in 1709. The village where he was cremated is now known as Bhai ke Samadh (memorial to the Bhai).

Responsibility of carrying on the traditions of Bhai Rup Chand passed on to Bhai Dharam Singh, who as a religious leader commanded great respect amongst the Sikhs. He was called upon by Banda Bahadur, the legendary Sikh leader to join his forces to fight the oppressive ruler of Sirhind in 1714. Bhai Dharam Singh, along with his brother Bhai Karam Singh led the Sikhs of Malwa in the decisive battle that took place at Chappar Cheri near the present day Chandigarh. The Mughal Governor was killed in battle, the establishment of the Nawab of Sirhind Wazir Khan being destroyed. Bhai Dharam Singh thereafter returned to Bhai Rupa. Most Sikh leaders of this time, who participated in this conflict, soon carved out territories as fiefdoms which later took the



(Left to right): Sri Sahib given by Guru Tegh Bahadur Sahib to Bhai Rup Chand; Khanda given by Sri Guru Hargobind Sahib to Bhai Rup Chand; Sri Sahib given by Sri Guru Gobind Singh Sahib to Bhai Dharam Singh.

shape of Misls during the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century, becoming the nucleus of various Sikh states in Eastern Punjab. Bhai Dharam Singh however took no territory whatsoever, annexed no land but went back to propagating the Guru's ways, true to his father's tradition.

In 1717 Dharam Singh's son Dayal Singh shifted his residence from Bhai Rupa village and founded a new village known as Dayalpura Bhaika some 4 kilometres away (now in Bhatinda district). Rest of the family continued to live in Bhai Rupa, but over the years some moved out and settled in various villages of Malwa. However, wherever they moved, the Bhaikas maintained the tradition of langar. Bhai Dayal Singh took the sacred relics given by the Gurus to Bhai Rup Chand with him and started

another langar at Dayalpura, continuing the family tradition as per wishes of the Sixth Guru. This langar continues to be run today by his descendants.

Of Bhai Dyal Singh's sons, Bhai Guddar Singh was the best known, particularly remembered for his piety and charitable disposition and who added considerably to the power and prestige of the family. He was earnestly devoted to the spread of Sikhism. His activities were not confined to the Malwa only, for he travelled far and wide to preach the gospel of Guru Nanak. There is even a Gurdwara in Peshawar (NWFP) named after him. As he was mostly away on tours, the service of langar was looked after by his wife, and consequently this came to be known after her name "Mai Rajji's" langar, both at Bagrian and Dayalpura.

In 1754 the Governor of Jullundur, Adina Begh Khan and the Punjab Commander-in-Chief, Sadiq Begh Khan, came to Dayalpura and, impressed by Bhai Guddar Singh's piety and influence, transferred the lands around Bagrian (now in Sangrur district of Punjab) to Bhai Guddar Singh as donation to his langar.

Raja Gajpat Singh, ancestor of the rulers of Nabha and Jind, often sought the presence of Bhai Guddar Singh at Dayalpura. The Raja was an apostate from Sikhism, had no male issue but the Bhai Sahib soon re-baptised him and brought to him back to the Sikh fold. The Raja was worried as he had no son and the line of succession could well be at an end. However, the Bhai Sahib and his consort, Mai Rajji, prayed that even if they were to be deprived of their own children, the Raja should be blessed with an off-spring. Bhai Guddar Singh had no children, but the Raja, in due course, became the father of many a son. Raja Gajpat Singh remained for a long time at Dayalpura, in the company of Bhai Guddar Singh and also built a fort at Dayalpura for the Bhai Sahib. However, when Bhai Guddar Singh came to know that a girl was born to Raja Gajpat Singh's wife and that the child, according to the evil custom of those days, was buried alive, he at once rushed to Badrukhan and severely reprimanded them for their cruel and un Sikh-like act. He went to the place where the baby was buried and dug her out, miraculously still alive. The Bhai Sahib blessed the baby and asked her parents to treat all children male and female alike, and to take good care of the little girl whom, he said was destined to be the mother of a great sovereign. That girl, Raj Kaur, later married Sardar Mahan Singh Sukarchakia and became the mother of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, Ruler of the Punjab.

After Bhai Guddar Singh died in 1768, Bhai Mohar Singh shifted his permanent residence from Dayalpura to Bagrian. In 1808 when Maharaja Ranjit Singh swooped over the Cis-Sutlej territories, levying exactions on the chiefs and rulers, it was Bhai Mohar Singh who dissuaded him from harassing the Phulkian States. It was through the efforts of the Bhai Sahib that Maharaja of Patiala agreed to enter into a symbolic brotherhood with Maharaja Ranjit Singh, which finally made Bedi Sahib Singh successful in a compromise

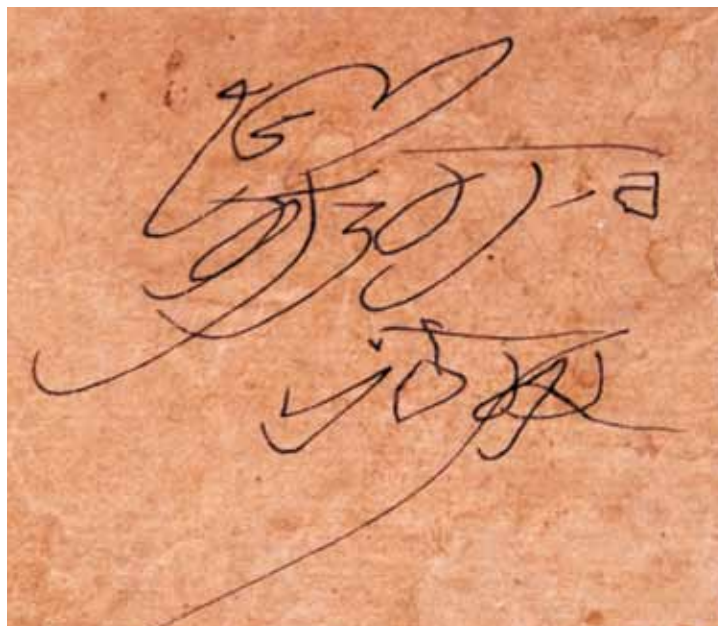


between them. Similarly, Nawab Attaullah Khan of Malerkotla had to pay only a tribute and was no further troubled by Maharaja Ranjit Singh, after the Maharaja was reminded by the Bhai Sahib that the Nawab's family was blessed to rule by the Tenth Guru. Maharaja Ranjit Singh paid a visit to Bagrian and presented the Bhai Sahib several villages, including Sadhowala and Sujana. He also donated five hundred maunds of salt for the langar, as an annual contribution. Raja Fateh Singh of Kapurthala, who accompanied Maharaja Ranjit Singh also presented the village of Gangrali to the langar.

By this time, the family had grown to become an influential and powerful independent state and was regarded as one of the two most important Houses in Malwa. One was Aleka, that is Patiala, house of the descendants of Baba Ala Singh, and the other Dayaleka, the House of descendants of Bhai Dayal Singh. Bhai Mohar Singh's wife, Mai Gohar, too became famous for her charities in Bagrian just as Mai Rajji had done at Dayalpura before her.

Bhai Bahadur Singh, being spiritual leader of the Sikhs (with Maharaja Ranjit Singh's family looking up to him with great honour and respect) took no part in the ensuing Anglo-Sikh campaigns. After defeat of the army of Sarkar Khalsa (Lahore) and the occupation of Lahore by the English, the Bhai Sahib lost his status as an independent chieftain; most of his property was confiscated by the British and Bhai Bahadur Singh was reduced to virtual penury. He was so troubled by the fall of Sarkar Khalsa that he confined himself to his fort and did not leave until his own passing away. Trumpets and drums, the symbols of independence, and cart-loads of arms, had been taken away. Bhai Bahadur Singh had been specially known for his piety and missionary work amongst the so-called depressed classes, had brought thousands of them into the Sikh fold, bestowing on them equal status with his co-religionists. Throughout Sikh history, the Bhai Sahibs of Bagrian have been symbols of devotion, dedication and service to the Panth and its flag bearers.

It was later during the time of Bhai Sampooran Singh, his son, that a small portion of the vast estate of his ancestors was restored, after more than 10 years.



Autograph of Sri Guru Gobind Singh Sahib on the Gutka given to Bhai Dharam Singh at Nanded.



Hukamnama of Banda Bahadur, addressed to Bhai Dharam Singh, summoning him to join the Khalsa forces in battles against the Nawab of Sarhind.

During the first four decades of the twentieth century, Bhai Arjan Singh's influence as a Sikh leader was highly respected. He enjoyed prominence as the defacto Sikh religious head. During the Delhi Durbar, held in December 1911 to commemorate the coronation of King George V and Queen Mary as the Emperor and Empress of India, he was asked to be in attendance of Sri Guru Granth Sahib to be taken out in procession on an elephant from the Red Fort at Delhi and intended to go to site of the Durbar. However, on reaching Gurdwara Sisganj Sahib, which was enroute, Bhai Sahib stopped the elephant saying that the Guru's destination was the Gurdwara and would not go to the Durbar of a mere human being, be it the Emperor of India or the King of England.

He contributed immensely to the Sikh reform movements, especially the Singh Sabha Movement, Gurdwara reforms and later became supportive of the national freedom movement. He was the first president of the Chief Khalsa Diwan, a position held for fifteen years. Bhai Arjan Singh passed away in 1946.

Thereafter his son Bhai Ardaman Singh (1899-1976) took over responsibility of maintaining the family tradition. He would regularly tour the villages of Malwa propagating Sikhi and conducting Amrit Sancahar. Educated at the Khalsa College at Amritsar and by traditional religious teachers, he was a pragmatic interpreter of Sikhi. With influence of personages like his teacher, Professor Teja Singh, association with the great scholar Bhai Kahn Singh of Nabha, a close family friend, and the company of his saintly father, Bhai Arjan Singh, he emerged as the epitome of a true Gursikh. He was known as an upright scholar who provided direction to Sikh thought during some of the most difficult days, particularly the emerging role and position of the Panth in independent India and provided a-political leadership in the spiritual tradition of his illustrious forefathers. Bhai Ardaman Singh passed away in 1976 leaving behind three sons Bhai Haridhan Singh, Bhai Ashok Singh, Bhayee Sikander Singh and two daughters.

As per family practice the eldest son Bhai Haridhan Singh took over responsibility of maintaining the family tradition. After a prolonged illness he passed away in 1996. During his younger days, he had been an active nationalist and worked in close association with Sardar Sardul Singh Caveskar, who was then Vice President of the forward block under Netaji Subhash Chander Bose.

Bhai Ashok Singh is a well known figure amongst Sikh intelligentsia and was President of the Institute of Sikh Studies, Chandigarh. Bhayee Sikandar Singh, an MBA from the University of Western Ontario in Canada, is deeply involved in Sikhi and its propagation and is on the editorial board of the *Nishaan*, the quarterly illustrated journal dedicated to the cause of the community, in India and the diaspora.

The present keeper of the tradition at Bagrian is Bhai Jujhar Singh, son of Bhai Haridhan Singh. The tradition of *langars* started under directions of Sri Guru Hargobind Sahib in 1634 at Bhai Rupa remains continuously maintained at Bagrian and Dayalpura Bhaika.



Bhai Arjan Singh performing ardaas during the Sikh Educational Conference at Amritsar, 1938.



Bhai Ardaman Singh performing the ardaas for Gaddi Nashini of Maharaj Rajbir Singh of Jind, 1948.





## Eco-Philosophy of Guru Granth Sahib

**T**he Philosophy of *Guru Granth Sahib* emerged in the socio-historical context of 15th to 17th centuries in the north western part of India's subcontinent. During the period referred, the ecological and environmental problems were not as acute as we experience today. As popularly known, the 'ecological crisis' came to the forefront only along with the Industrial age particularly in the Western hemisphere. However, it is remarkable to find that *Guru Granth Sahib* contains a very well articulated eco-philosophy that can meet the challenges posed by the modern age. The ecological and environmental concerns of Sikhism are not something external or incidental to the philosophy of Sikhism. On the other hand, Sikh philosophy as it is found in the hymns of the Gurus or in *Guru Granth Sahib* contains in its very basis an eco-philosophy.

This presentation is an attempt to elucidate this concept and to show that such a profound eco-philosophy is structured in the philosophy of *Guru Granth Sahib*.

### The Principle of Hukam

The very opening paragraph of *Japuji Sahib* formulates, in unequivocal terms, the basic postulate of the entire philosophy of *Guru Granth Sahib*.

*How to become true (Sachiar) to the Creator?*

*How to break through the wall of illusion?*

*It is through obedience to His Ordinance and Will".*

(SGGS: 1)

The positive concept expressed here is *Hukam*, or the Divine Ordinance. *Guru Granth Sahib* holds the view that 'by obedience to the *Hukam*, the Divine Ordinance, a human being becomes loyal to God.

The concept of *Hukam* is formulated in *Japuji Sahib* and elsewhere in terms of a perfectly coordinated Cosmic Order. Nature, i.e. the ecological system, is the paradigm in which the principle of *Hukam* is formulated. This does not mean to say that *Hukam* is the pure objectivity of Nature, as has been postulated in the Western scientific thinking. *Hukam* organically combines the moment of objectivity and subjectivity; in other words, objectivity and subjectivity divided and counter-posed are unknown to Sikh thought. The subjectivity involved in the concept of *Hukam* is the Subjectivity of God, or the Will of the Creator. The Subjectivity of God that is involved in the making of the concept of *Hukam* is the Design and Command of





God. Thus, with the introduction of the concept of Hukam, the Gurus have 'spiritualised' the otherwise raw and objective Nature.

The principle of Hukam informs that God has bestowed abundance of wealth to Nature, and therefore to Mankind, indeed to all creation:

*"Infinitely the creation receives from Him sustenance  
He is the Ordainer*

*By His Ordinance the Universe He runs.*

*All creation seeks boons of Him*

*Endlessly does He confer these"*

(SGGS:2)

*Countless are God's attributes,*

*Endless their count*

*Innumerable His doings, His bounty".*

(SGGS:5)



Hukam does not perceive the Cosmic Order as Mayaic – or as passive. It is true and holy, full of varieties, dynamism and the wonders of beauty. A long hymn in Asa-di-Var celebrates the variety and wonder of the cosmic order.

*"All creation on one thread has He strung".*

(SGGS: 1108)

Creation is permeated with a symphony of Divine Shabda; all God's creation plays astral music:

*"Endless the instruments, the notes, the players who laud Thee"*

*"Innumerable the musical measures and the symphonies"*

*"The musicians orchestrating Thy praises:"*

*Air, water and fire laud Thee"*

(SGGS:6)

According to the order of Hukam, the social or the human world is a part of the cosmic world. The human world is the extension of the spiritualised cosmic existence and is the law of Hukam:

*"Air is the vital force; Water the progenitor*

*The vast Earth the Mother of all*

*Day and Night are nurses, fondling all creation in their lap*

*Of all, the righteous Judge weighs the merit and demerit Himself"*

(SGGS: 8)

*"He created Night and Day, seasons and occasion*

*So also Air, Water, Fire and the Nether Regions*

*Amidst these has He fixed the earth, the place for Righteous Action*

(SGGS: 7)

With moral and just actions, the human world completes realising the law of Hukam. By never forgetting and always remembering the Name of God, the human world apprehends the law of Hukam. By being dynamic, inter-related and mutually supportive the divine music reverberates in the universe.

**Dr. N. Muthu Mohan**

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Watering the plants at Talwandi Saboo: Sardarni Harsimrat Kaur, with Harpal Singh to her left.

# The Nanhi Chhaan movement

Encouraged by the tremendous inspirational success of the Nanhi Chhaan movement in the Punjab, the Delhi government too has extended its support to the twin causes of eradicating female foeticide and deforestation.

The Lt Governor of Delhi, Tejendra Khanna, formally launched Nanhi Chhaan at the Sacred Heart Cathedral in Delhi on 22 March 2009. Gracing the occasion were eminent personalities, His Holiness Reverend Vincent M. Concesso, Archbishop of Delhi; Harpal Singh, Chairman, Nanhi Chhaan Foundation; Arun Maira, Chairman, Save The Children; and Ravi Singh, Secretary General & CEO, World Wild Fund-India. The Nanhi Chhaan Stall at the site was inaugurated by Dr. Isher Judge Ahluwalia, Chairperson, ICRIER.

"The Delhi Government is glad to support the twin causes of the Nanhi Chhaan Foundation. Through the Delhi Parks & Gardens Society and other arms of the government, we will give all help for the protection of the girl child and for preserving Delhi's green cover. I am particularly glad to know that Nanhi Chhaan will start similar initiatives at many places of religious worship, schools and institutions", said Tejendra Khanna.

With parts of Delhi recording a gender ratio of 800 women per 1,000 men – a ratio that is lower than the country average – the drive against female foeticide and infanticide demands urgent attention and action. To address this concern, the Nanhi Chhaan Foundation, a not-for-profit organisation and a brainchild of Harpal Singh (Mentor & Chairman





*Harpal Singh at the Nanhi Chhaan launch in New Delhi, March 2009.*

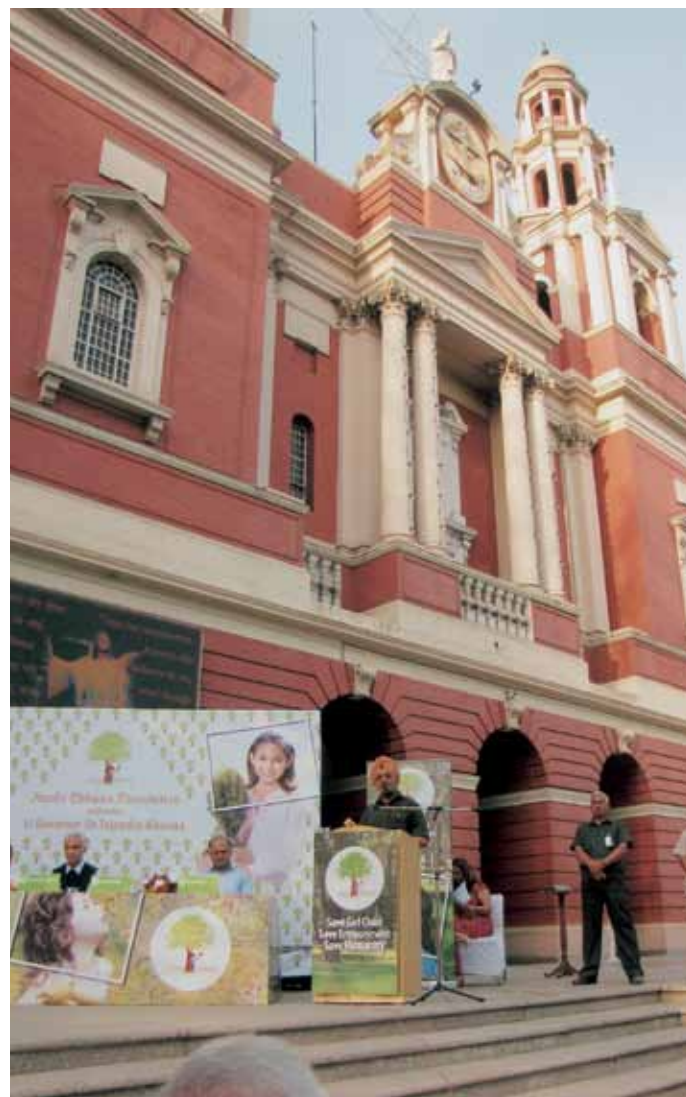
Emeritus Fortis healthcare limited, Chairman Nanhi Chhaan Foundation, Impact Groups and CII Northern Region ) decided to do things differently – by using the power of faith. The same power would also be used to address the agenda on preserving the environment.

Harpal Singh added, “We are trying to get the citizens to emotively connect with the challenges of the girl child and a depleting forest cover. By using the positive power of all faiths, we seek to appeal to a cross-section section of Indian society to help restore nature’s balance. It is inspiring to see schools, industry, banks and NGOs coming forward to help the cause. Nanhi Chhaan is becoming a movement that is capturing the citizens’ hearts and minds like never before. Can you imagine that this year lohri was passionately celebrated for the newly born girls in Punjab? As you can see, the social envelope has already moved...”

As a symbolic gesture, families that came to attend service at the Sacred Heart Cathedral were given plant saplings as religious offerings to honour girls coming into families either as newborns or brides.

The function on 22 March was attended by people from all walks of life. The presence of children from government schools and privately-run institutes, such as the Shriram School, The learning Tree, Vasant Valley and Salwan Public School, added youthful flavour to the occasion.

Nanhi Chhaan now plans to establish its secular credentials and a pan-India presence by taking this initiative to other places of worship, cutting across all religious and communal barriers. Vital for the success of this movement is the active support of civil society institutions.



*On the steps of the impressive Sacred Heart Cathedral in New Delhi*

Arun Maira, Chairman, *Save The Children*, said, “Girls and trees are the care givers that nurture us. Without them the world will be a very unpleasant place to live in, and unsustainable too. So, care for girls, care for the environment, and the blessings of one’s faith are symbolically combined. I am proud to be associated with this initiative.”

“The protection of the environment and the girl child by using the power of religion is a great message. It manifests the highest qualities of the human spirit, and combines thought and action, with benefits for present and future generations. WWF-India is honoured to be a part of this initiative,” added Ravi Singh, Secretary General & CEO, World Wildlife Fund, India.





*Little girls, who will grow up to be mothers in time, with the saplings given to them by Mrs. Tejinder Khanna.*

## Mothers and Trees

Two issues on the social agenda of the country require urgent and transformational attention. The first is an adverse gender ratio and the second is the degradation of the environment. For this, protecting the girl child and preserving trees is vitally important if human life is to be preserved on the planet. Most importantly, it has to be done in a fundamentally different way.

The Nanhi Chhaan Foundation was set up to address these objectives as part of its vision and mission. In an inspiringly new approach, the Foundation seeks to make a positive impact for protecting the girl child and for preserving trees through the positive power of faith. The initiative cuts across all segments of society and faiths and invokes citizens to urgently act to raise awareness and to actively participate in corrective actions. In a symbolic gesture, families who visit their respective places of religious worship receive plant saplings as religious offerings whenever a girl enters their family either as a newborn or as a *bahu* (bride). Both little girls and saplings are nature's 'greatest givers' and by receiving saplings from places of religious worship, it is hoped citizens will imbibe the message of their preservation with divine reverence.

The distribution and ritualistic planting of these saplings in homes, schools, factories, institutions, parks and the like will be used as occasions to spread awareness, raise debate and propel citizens to recognise the horrors of female infanticide, female foeticide and the destruction of forest cover. Most importantly, citizens need to recognise that nature's two great givers, mothers (when girls grow up) and trees are facing unprecedented destruction. And the continuation of such harm will seriously threaten human life itself.

That Nanhi Chhaan has touched an inspirational chord is evident from the response it has evoked in a short time since its launch on 27th August 2008. From Shri Harmandir Sahib and Shri Damdama Sahib Gurudwaras and from schools, over 4.5 lakh saplings have already been distributed to date. Similar launches are soon proposed at several places of religious worship, including the Dargah at Ajmer Sharif, the churches in Delhi and from temples in the states of Punjab, Haryana, Rajasthan and Delhi.

Many institutions of civil society, including schools, industry, the CII, banks, etc. are coming forward to be a part of the movement. The CII has offered to adopt it as a National Programme. Many schools have started diverse initiatives around the objectives of Nanhi Chhaan. The Punjab National Bank has begun opening special bank accounts under the Nanhi Chhaan umbrella. The list of ideas and initiatives is growing rapidly. The response is emotive and in it there are the makings of a national movement.

The Nanhi Chhaan movement needs the support of industry, NGOs, civil society institutions and the government to address critical issues on the social agenda.

*For further information, log on to  
[www.nanhichhaan.com](http://www.nanhichhaan.com)*



**SAVE GIRL CHILD**  
**SAVE ENVIRONMENT**  
**SAVE HUMANITY**



Boys from the Guru Granth Sahib Vidhya Kendra, Mehrauli entering the India Islamic Cultural Centre on Lodhi Road.

## Guru Granth Sahib The Epitome of Interfaith

In the months leading to the 300<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Gur ta Gaddi Diwas, the Delhi Minorities Commission and *Quest for Knowledge Foundation* organised an interfaith seminar on 20 September 2008. Most appropriately, this was held at the India Islamic Cultural Centre, on Lodhi Road in the heart of New Delhi and was attended by many leading citizens of the capital.

The programme was coordinated by Dr Rawail Singh, Secretary of the Punjabi Academy and began with a beautifully rendered Shabad Kirtan by students of the Mata Gujri Public School in Greater Kailash.

Speakers were Archbishop Vincent M Consassio, Archbishop of Delhi, Dr Mufti Mohd Mukaram Sahib, Shahi-Imam Fatehpuri Masjid, Dr AK Merchant, Trustee of the 'Lotus Temple', Acharya Dr Sadhvi Sadhna of the Acharya Sushil Muni Ashram, Swami Shantatmananda, Secretary of the Rama Krishna Mission, New Delhi, Dadi Mistry the Zoroastrian Leader, Swami Onkarananda of Sukpirh in UP, S Davinder Singh Kwatra, Vice President Delhi Sikh



Left to right : S Manjit Singh, Swami Shantatmananda, Dadi Mistry and Dr Sadhvi Sadhna.

Gurudwara Management Committee and Dr Surjeet Kaur Jolly, Principal Shyama Prasad Mukherjee College, Delhi University.

The valedictory address was by Kamal Faruqi and vote of thanks proposed by Arnold James.





Shabad Kirtan on stage of the India Islamic Centre.

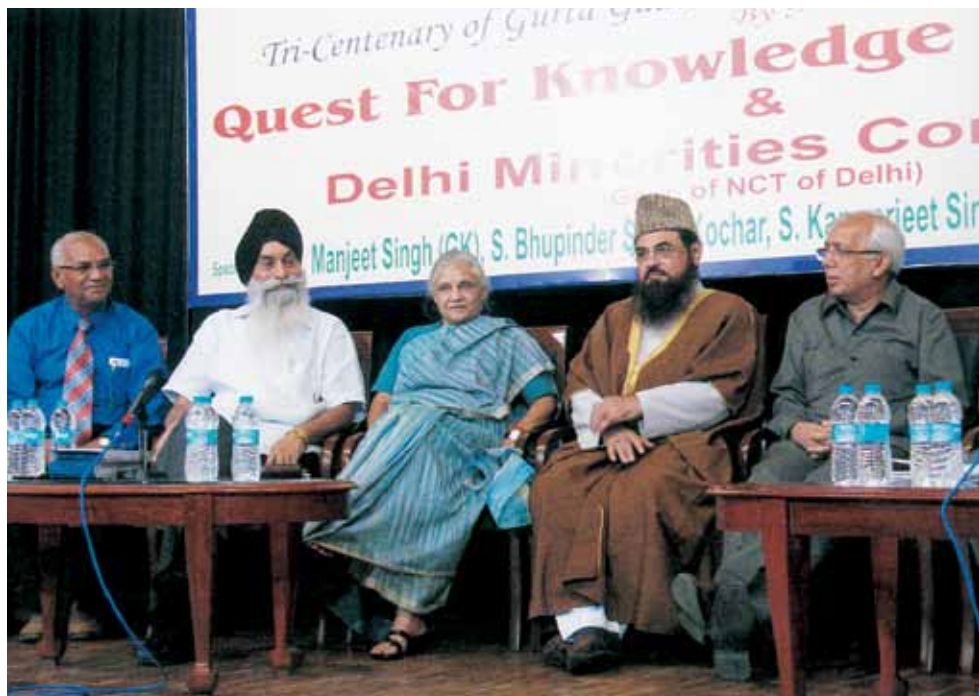
## Guru Parkasham

The former President of India, Dr APJ Abdul Kalam, composed a poem 'Guru Parkasham' while enroute to Amritsar :

*Many many years ago  
Our Gurus lit the lamp  
And the Parkasham was born  
Converging power of the soul  
This light of truth from the land of five  
rivers.*

*Has orbited around the sun  
Along with the earth that carried it as  
Sindhur.*

*This earthly Parkasham is so powerful  
On the universal message of one God.  
Four hundred orbits have gone in time  
The great Parkasham has outglowed the sun  
As it orbits around the universe,  
Which bows in enhanced reverence  
And salutes the earth, for all that it carries  
That greatest Parkasham  
Guru Granth Sahib*



Mrs Sheela Dikshit, Chief Minister of Delhi flanked by S Pushpinder Singh of the Minorities Commission and Dr Mufti Mohd Mukaram Sahib.



## Sarb Dharam Samelan

The Managing Committee of the Sri Guru Singh Sabha at Greater Kailash II organised an Interfaith Meeting (Sarb Dharam Samelan) at the Gurdwara Sahib on 2 November 2008. S Khajinder Singh Khurana, President of the Afghan Hindu-Sikh Welfare Society and Chairman of Guru Angad Dev Library & Study Centre introduced the speakers, amongst whom were:

Prof. Darshan Singh Khalsa (former Jathedar Sri Akal Takhat), Swami Agnivesh (President World Council Arya Samaj) Dadi Mistry (President Parsi Anjuman Delhi), Archbishop Vincent Consassio (Archbishop of Delhi) Dr Mufti Mohd. Mukaram Ahmad (Shahi Imam Fatehpuri Masjid Delhi) Dr MD Thaumass (Director Spritual Assembly Baha'is of India) Chetan Sharma (Bureau Editor Punjab Kesari) S Trilochan Singh (Member Parliament) Sardar Manjeet Singh (President Shromani Akali Dal Delhi) Chosphel Zotapa (World Budh Centre) Sadhvi Sadhna Jain (Fellowship of Religions) Sardar Satnam Singh Uppal (Vishva Ekta Manav Seva Mission) Acharya Swami Jyoti Hari (Amritsar) and Ezekiel Isaac Malekar (Hony. Secretary, Judah Hyam).



Gurdwara Sri Guru Singh Sabha, Greater Kailash-II.

In his discourse, Archbishop Vincent said: "What we have in Guru Granth Sahib ji is collective wisdom which will go from generation to generation. The principles that Guru Nanak Dev ji followed were meditation in the name of God, honest earning and sharing. I remember two Sikh carpenters working for us, both of them elderly and most attached to their work. They were honest to the core and were totally committed, I realise that they imbibed teachings of Sri Guru Granth Sahib. They must have meditated much in the name of God".

Swami Satpreet Hari said: 'Allah ki kar bandhgi' : in Guru Granth Sahib there is call for everyone to perform prayers as per their religious following. Guru Arjan Dev gave us Guru Granth Sahib in which freedom is given for one to follow their faith. Guruji included hymns of different faiths and sects without reference to any caste-race-religion. Guru Arjan

Dev gave all equal respect in Guru Granth Sahib, which is the only guide for the entire world".

According to Shri Brijesh ji Kabir Panthi : "Sikh panth is bharti panth. People of India have great respect for our Sikh Gurus. Guru Arjan Dev ji has done the greatest service in compiling Guru Granth Sajib ji where are included the hymns of Hindu and Muslim saints, with no reference to caste and religion. In Guru Granth Sahib, Guru Nanak and Kabir ji are both *nirgun asri* saints, both uniting society. Kabir bani is enshrined in Guru Granth Sahib".

Sadhwi Guru Chiaya Jain said that with completion of 300 years of Gurta Gaddi of Sri Guru Granth Sahib ji "we



S. Khajinder Singh.

are here to celebrate but even after another 1000 years, people of different religions will continue to celebrate since the entire world has greatest of respect for Guru Granth Sahib's universality. Religion means tolerance. Ego brings suffering, tolerance is a balm. I can state that the entire world should be Sikhs, not because I am



sitting among the Sikhs here: *Sikh* mean *shish* or student and every one is a student, learning till the very end”.

In his talk, Isacc Malika said that he had been in Nanded just two days earlier along with leaders of different religions. “Message of the Guru Granth Sahib is so very important for the entire world, has special meaning for different religions. Guru Arjan Dev compiled Guru Granth Sahib. Guru Tegh Bahadur sacrificed his life for the freedom of all faiths, martyred by Aurangzeb in 1675. Guru Gobind Singh ji sacrificed his four sons, father and mother for faith and later, canonised Guru Granth



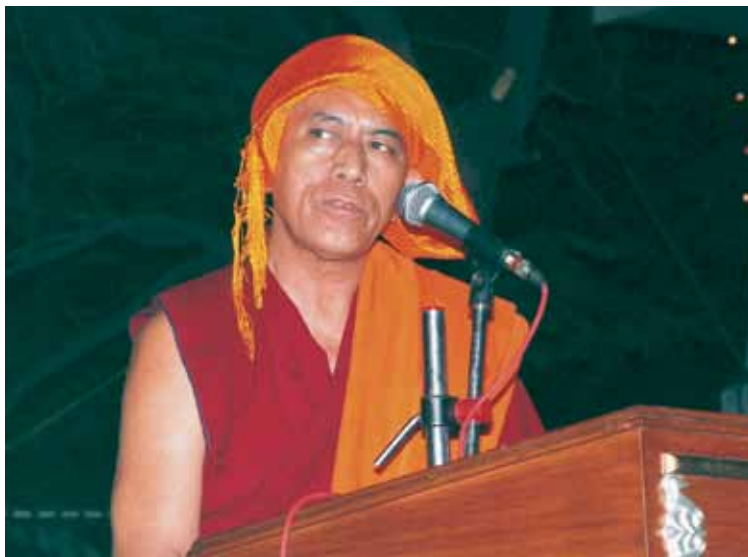
Swami Agnivesh.



Swami Satpreet Hari Nirmali.



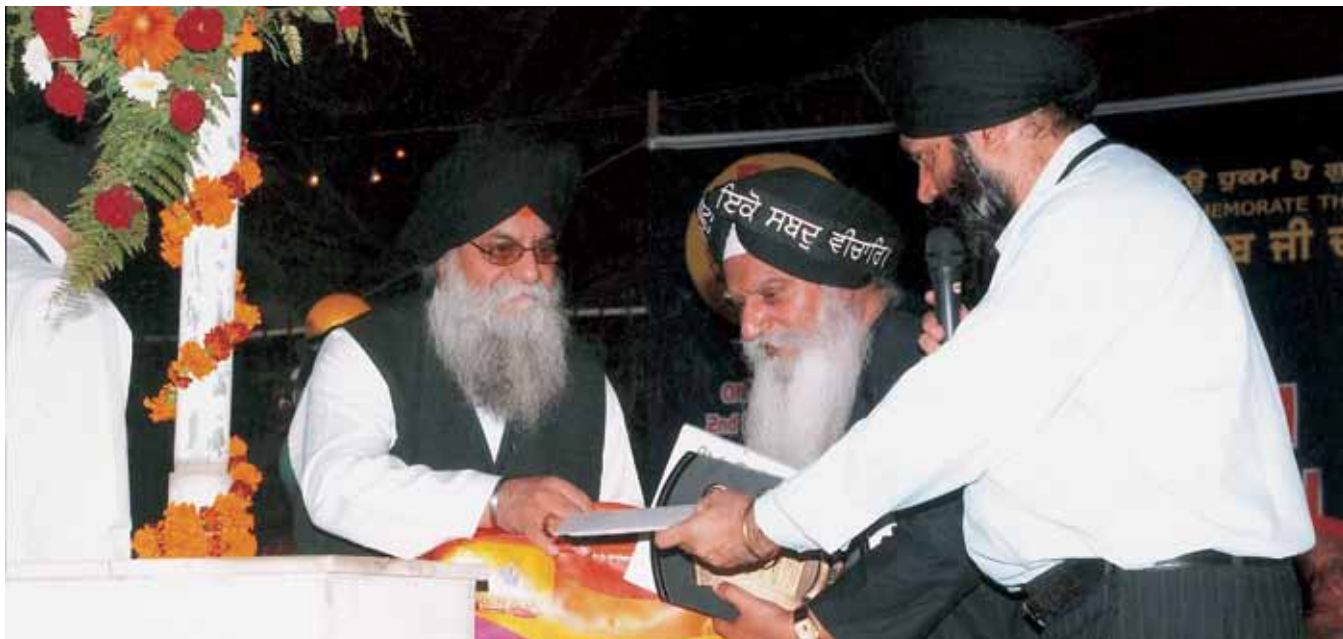
Rabbi Ezekiel Isaac Malika.



Chospel Zotupa, World Budh centre

Sahib which will forever be the living Guru. Langer is a wonderful tradition of the Sikh panth. During my stay at Hazoor Sahib I saw hundreds of langers in different camps. My opinion is that if other religions follow the langer tradition, no poor person will ever go hungry”.

S. Trilochan Singh congratulated the management committee of the GK-II Gurdwara Sahib “who have organised Sarb Dharam Samelan to convey Guru Granth Sahib’s message. Guru Granth Sahib belongs to the whole universe. I was in Nanded Hazoor Sahib for five days. Prime Minister Dr Manmohan Singh initiated the Sarb Dharam Samelan there, where leaders of all religions were present. Langer-Sangat-Pangat is also about



S. Tajinder Singh and Bhai Gurbachan Singh with Professor Darshan Singh Khalsa (centre).

interfaith. You will be interested to know that in Nanded City whose population is 5 lakhs, virtually all of them, along with lakhs of visiting pilgrims partook langer throughout that time. A jatha of 300 muslims, donning traditional green caps, came from Hazrat Nizamuddin at Delhi to attend the celebrations. In Guru Granth Sahib there are many hymns regarding *nimaz bai nimaza kutiya*. 'Those who do not perform nimaz are like dogs', said Baba Farid ji. I am pleased to inform you that the city's name has been changed to 'Hazoor Sahib Nanded'".

Swami Agnivesh ji President World Arya Samaj Council said that "Guru Granth Sahib is a light house for the entire universe. 300 years ago a bugle of evolution was sounded, a light of knowledge was given to the world. The world remembers the sacrifices of Guru Gobind Singh ji and want to follow that divine light in search for a meaningful way of life. Let us do something new, otherwise our celebrating 300 years will be only ritualistic. Guru Gobind

Singh ji canonised Guru Granth Sahib, a universal scripture which calls for equality of all humans. The world remains divided. Two vital problems plague our society today but there is solution in the light of Guru Granth Sahib : 'Kurimar', murderers of girl child before birth, and 'Nahrimar', tobacco and nasha, are challenges for our society. In Guru Granth Sahib is written *Jo kiyo manda akhian jit jami rajan*. Women give birth to great people. So how can men slander women? 300 years back Guru Gobind Singh banned smoking and today the entire world is trying to follow that edict. *Awal alla noor upali kudrat ki sab band ek noor te sab jag upja kaun bali kaun mandee*. Interfaith meetings are getting more regular and I have attended hundreds of such meetings. Representatives of all religions and faiths participate in these, both in India and abroad, stay in big hotels (religious tourism) but I sincerely urge that we make a 'common minimum programme' in the light of Guru Granth Sahib".

Prof. Darshan Singh said "Dharam needs divine knowledge. Dharam is to keep life in order as without 'Gyan' or knowledge Dharam has no meaning. Divine knowledge without the Guru is not possible : the faithful believe that Guru Granth Sahib is the core of all knowledge, an ocean of Gyan. In Guru Granth Sahib, from *iek om kar* to the last *salok*, from page 1 to 1430, each line, each word conveys to us the meaning of mysteries in life. We need religion to guide us. In Gurbani (*nana jio upai ki likh navi dharma bhalia*) Dharam is needed so that persons know of good and bad karams. We need Guru Granth Sahib because man is mentally exhausted, needs guidance (*ahi mann piyaria tu sadha sach samalia*).

O' my mind, always be with the truth (*ahisi karam mulai no kijai ju ant pachtai*); don't do bad deeds which one will surely regret. In Guru Granth, neither race or religion matters (*sarb dharma mai shrisht dharma har ka nam jaat nirmal karam*). The greatest religion is that to praise the Almighty God, *Nirmal Karam*.

**Khajinder Singh**



# Dalit Voices in Sri Guru Granth Sahib

*Can the Subaltern speak?* is the title of a book by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, which is considered as one of the most influential theoretical works in the field of post-colonial studies. The related question is “Are they heard”? Some are of the opinion that the subalterns do not and cannot speak and that they have to be represented by somebody else. Others think that it is not a question of the subalterns not speaking, but a problem of their not being heard.

While going through reviews of this book, I recalled the fact that we, the Sikhs pray to God, *Wahe Guru* “O Thou, the refuge of the downtrodden, honour of the humble, strength of the weak, help those who are powerless” – the subaltern, the Dalit, and, in general, the downtrodden in terms of caste, class, age, gender or office. These expressions for *Wahe Guru* in our *Ardas* are derived from the Hymns in *Sri Guru Granth Sahib* – the visible manifestation of the Lord, holy command Lord, indeed the all embracing Scripture – that includes the hymns (having doctrinal identity with Guru’s own Bani) of several Bhaktas and mystic saints born into whatever castes: weaver, cobbler, barber, butcher, calico printer etc. It is, therefore, logical to expect that *Gurbani* (“*Dhur ki Bani*” – *Word of the Lord*) not only elevates the traditionally lower-placed, but also empowers them to speak for society, and must be heard with veneration.

The primary object here is to highlight the conclusion that *Sri Guru Granth Sahib* categorically provides replies in the affirmative to both the questions raised by Gayatri in her book referred to above. The Gurus not only identified themselves with the lower-placed ones and also spoke for them. They also provided them the highest spiritual pulpit in *Sri Guru Granth Sahib* from which to speak out, with confidence and courage and be heard not merely locally but also globally.

The approach adopted by Guru’s Holy Word to achieve the goal can be summed up thus:

*Firstly:* The ideological break with the age-old Hindu tradition and rigorous practice of *arnasramadharma*. This involved debunking, negating,

refuting and reinvesting with new meanings the quest for an egalitarian society. Most concepts, beliefs and rigidity, superstitions and regressive social and religious practices are of the ancient tradition. *Guru Granth* says: “My faith is for the people of all castes and all creeds from whichever direction they come and in whichever direction they bow”.

*Secondly:* Enunciation of a praxis-oriented and liberal ideology in *Gurbani*, with a view to inspire the subalterns to have self-esteem, confidence and courage to speak out as equal to the higher castes on the basis of having the common Universal Fatherhood of the Lord-*Wahe Guru*. The unique feature of *Gurbani* is its simplified conception of ‘religious’ which was quite different from an incomprehensible mysterious, transcendental godhood beyond human reach, to the one that was real, in flesh and blood, within human reach, where man had a direct access to God, within and beyond, provided he chose to live the life of a *Gurmukh* (God-oriented), instead of a *Manmukh* (self-oriented). The saintly *Gurmukh* from ‘lower castes’ could attain God realisation, while egoist *Manmukh* from Brahmin lineage lost the chance of God realisation in this life.

*Thirdly:* Indeed *Guru Nanak* identifies himself with the lower classes in his public declaration (the *Sakhi* of *Bhai Lalo* - the poor carpenter – and *Malik Bhago* – the exploiter landlord) and through theological pronouncement, such as:

ਨੀਚਾ ਅੰਦਰਿ ਨੀਚ ਜਾਤਿ ਨਚੀ ਹੂ ਅਤਿ ਨੀਚ ॥

ਨਾਨਕ ਤਿਨ ਕੈ ਸੰਗਿ ਸਾਥਿ ਵਡਿਆ ਸਿਉ ਕਿਆ ਰੀਸ ॥

ਜਿਥੈ ਨੀਚ ਸਮਾਲੀਅਨਿ ਤਿਥੈ ਨਦਰਿ ਤੇਰੀ ਬਖਸੀਸ ॥

[SGGS: 15]

*Nanak* seeks the company of the lowest of the low class, the very lowest of the low. Why should he try to compete with the great?

“In that place where the lowly are cared for-there rain down the Blessings in Your Glance of Grace.”

*Fourthly:* In addition, the Gurus recognised in many of their own hymns the spiritual attainments of these *Bhaktas*, as in the following hymn by *Guru Ramdas Ji*:

Ravidas, the leather-worker, praised the Lord, and sang the Kirtan of His Praises each and every instant.

Although he was of low social status, he was exalted and elevated, and people of all four castes came and bowed at his feet.

ਰਵਿਦਾਸੁ ਚਮਾਰੁ ਉਸਤਤਿ ਕਰੇ ਹਰਿ ਕੀਰਤਿ ਨਿਮਖ ਇਕ ਗਾਇ ॥

ਪਤਿਤ ਜਾਤਿ ਉਤਮੁ ਭਇਆ ਚਾਰ ਵਰਨ ਪਏ ਪਗਿ ਆਇ ॥ 2 ॥

ਨਾਮਦੇਅ ਪ੍ਰੀਤਿ ਲਗੀ ਹਰਿ ਸੇਤੀ ਲੋਕੁ ਛੀਪਾ ਕਹੈ ਬੁਲਾਇ ॥

(SGGS: 733)

Namdev loved the Lord; the people called him a fabric dyer.

*Fifthly:* Special institutional arrangements like Sangat (Congregation), Langar (Community Kitchen) and Pangat (sitting arrangement without any distinction of caste, status, etc.) were made effective for creating and promoting an egalitarian society leading ultimately to the creation of Khalsa – the model for an egalitarian society, with four of the “Panj Piaraas,” Five beloved ones, the first to take Amrit (baptism) from Guru Gobind Singh Ji, coming from the then prevalent lower castes. The Gurus blended the four *varnas* (caste categories) into one.

*Sixthly:* Incorporation in Sri Guru Granth Sahib of those hymns of Bhaktas of ‘subaltern category’ that had doctrinal identity with Gurus’ hymns and, further, reflected their self-image, self-esteem, spiritual attainments, confidence and courage in narrating their experiences of injustice suffered at the hands of upper castes. This by itself effectively signified the strong egalitarian spirit firmly embedded in Shri Guru Granth Sahib who, as Guru, engages the divine word in worldly life. The Sikh way of life as prescribed by the Gurbani, including hymns of the Bhaktas, derives its strength “from the practice of egalitarianism, humility and an honest devotion to God”.

Only the constraint of space here limits the analysis of selected hymns of the Bhaktas, to illustrate their manner of speaking to and of being heard by humanity not just locally but globally through Sri Guru Granth Sahib’s propagation, Kirtan recital on the global electronic media and through other means.

A forceful clarion call for the protection of subalterns is by Bhagat Kabir:

ਸੂਰਾ ਸੇ ਪਹਿਚਾਨੀਐ ਜੁ ਲਰੈ ਦੀਨ ਕੇ ਹੇਤ ॥

ਪੁਰਜਾ ਪੁਰਜਾ ਕਟਿ ਮਰੈ ਕਬਹੂ ਨ ਛਾਡੈ ਖੇਤ ॥

[SGGS:1105]

He alone is known as a spiritual hero, who fights in defence of the poor.

Kabir Ji challenged the supremacy of Brahmin’s caste thus:

ਤੁਮ ਕਤ ਬ੍ਰਾਹਮਣ ਹਮ ਕਤ ਸੂਦ ॥

[SGGS:324]

How is it that you are a Brahmin, and I am of a low social status?

Namdev Ji describes the anguish and the humiliation suffered by him when he was asked to leave the temple due to his low caste:

*Cheerfully and sportingly did I come to Your Temple, O Lord.*

ਹਸਤ ਖੇਲਤ ਤੇਰੇ ਦੇਹੁਰੇ ਆਇਆ ॥

ਭਗਤਿ ਕਰਤ ਨਾਮਾ ਪਕਰਿ ਉਠਾਇਆ ॥

[SGGS:1164]

*But when I – Namdev – was worshipping, I was grabbed (by priests) and driven out.*

As Namdev uttered the Glorious Praises of the Lord,

ਜਿਉ ਜਿਉ ਨਾਮਾ ਹਰਿ ਗੁਣ ਉਚਰੇ ॥

ਭਗਤਜਨਾਂ ਕਉ ਦੇਹੁਰਾ ਫਿਰੈ ॥

[SGGS:1164]

The temple rotated in order to give Lord’s glimpse to this devotee.

There is no inferiority complex or self-pity in Bhakta’s Bani,

ਕਬੀਰ ਮੇਰੀ ਜਾਤਿ ਕਉ ਸਭੁ ਕੋ ਹਸਨੇਹਾਰ ॥

ਬਲਿਹਾਰੀ ਇਸ ਜਾਤਿ ਕਉ ਜਿਹ ਜਪਿਓ ਸਿਰਜਨਹਾਰ ॥

[SGGS: 1364]

*Kabir, everyone laughs at my social class*

*I am a sacrifice to this social class, in which I chant and meditate on the Creator.*

ਕਬੀਰ ਜਾਤਿ ਜੁਲਾਹਾ ਓਗੋਂ ਕਰੈ ਹਿਰਦੈ ਬਸੇ ਗੁਪਾਲ ॥

ਕਬੀਰ ਰਮਈਆ ਕੰਠਿ ਮਿਲੁ ਚੁਕਹਿ ਸਰਬ ਜੰਜਾਲ ॥

[SGGS: 1368]

*Kabir, what can my lowly status as a weaver do to me? The Lord dwells in my Heart*

*Declaration of their own spiritual attainments by Bhaktas despite their low caste:*

Ravidas: It is my occupation to prepare and cut leather; each day, I carry the carcasses out of the city.



ਮੇਰੀ ਜਾਤਿ ਕੁਟ ਬਾਂਢਲਾ ਢੋਰ ਢੇਵੰਤਾ ਨਿਤਹਿ ਬਾਨਾਰਸੀ ਆਸ ਪਾਸਾ ॥

ਅਬ ਬਿਪ੍ਰ ਪਰਧਾਨ ਤਿਹਿ ਕਰਹਿ ਡੰਡਉਤਿ ਤੇਰੇ ਨਾਮ ਸਰਣਾਇ ਰਵਿਦਾਸੁ ਦਾਸਾ ॥

[SGGS: 1293]

*Now, the important Brahmins of the city bow down before me; Ravidas, Your slave, seeks the Sanctuary of Your Name.*

*Mutual recognition of the spiritual attainments of subaltern Bhaktas amongst themselves:*

Kabir ji on spiritual attainment of Namdev and Jai dev:

ਸੰਕਰੁ ਜਾਗੈ ਚਰਨ ਸੇਵ ॥ ਕਲਿ ਜਾਗੇ ਨਾਮਾ ਜੈਦੇਵ ॥

[SGGS: 1194]

*Shiva is awake, serving at the Lord's Feet.*

*Namdev and Jai Dev are awake in this Dark Age of Kali Yuga.*

*Ravidas Ji on spiritual attainment of Namdev, Kabir, Trilochan, Sadhana Ji*

ਨਾਮਦੇਵ ਕਬੀਰੁ ਤਿਲੋਚਨੁ ਸਧਨਾ ਸੈਨੁ ਤਰੈ ॥

[ਸ਼ਘਘਸ਼: 1106]

*Namdev, Kabeer, Trilochan, Sadhana and Sain crossed over.*

*Mutual Spiritual Dialogue:*

*Between Namdev Ji and Trilochan Ji:*

*Trilochan says, O Namdev, Maya has enticed you, my friend.*

*Why are you printing designs on these sheets, and not focusing your consciousness on the Lord?*

*Namdev answers, O Trilochan, chant the Lord's Name with your mouth,*

*With your hands and feet, do all your work, but let your consciousness remain with the Immaculae Lord.*

ਨਾਮਾ ਮਾਇਆ ਮੋਹਿਆ ਕਹੈ ਤਿਲੋਚਨੁ ਮੀਤ ॥

ਕਾਹੇ ਛੀਪਹੁ ਛੀਏਲੈ ਰਾਮ ਨ ਲਾਵਹੁ ਚੀਤ ॥ 212 ॥

ਨਾਮਾ ਕਹੈ ਤਿਲੋਚਨਾ ਮੁਖ ਤੇ ਰਾਮੁ ਸੰਮੁਲਿ ॥

ਹਾਥ ਪਾਉ ਕਰਿ ਕਾਮੁ ਸਭੁ ਚੀਤੁ ਨਿਰੰਜਨ ਨਾਲ ॥

(SGGS: 1375-76)

Finally I cannot resist the temptation to mention an incident in the 1920s. While Sri Guru Granth Sahib had granted divine sanction to the equal

rights of the so-called 'untouchables' Sikhs, the traditionalist refused to let them distribute Prasad in the Golden Temple despite the insistence of the Singh Sabha reformers. It was agreed to take the *Vak-Hukum* from Shri Guru Granth Sahib as *Vak-Hukum* is considered as "God's commandment always speaking with power and truth to the situation at hand".

The passage of the *Vak* that was turned to read:

ਨਿਗੁਣਿਆ ਨੋ ਆਪੇ ਬਖਸਿ ਲਏ ਭਾਈ ਸਤਿਗੁਰ ਕਾ ਸੇਵਾ ਲਾਇ ॥

ਸਤਿਗੁਰ ਕੀ ਸੇਵਾ ਊਤਮ ਹੈ ਭਾਈ ਰਾਮ ਨਾਮਿ ਚਿਤ ਲਾਇ ॥ 1 ॥

ਹਰਿ ਜੀਉ ਆਪੇ ਬਖਸਿ ਮਿਲਾਇ ॥

ਗੁਣਗਣ ਹਮ ਅਪਰਾਧੀ ਭਾਈ ਪੂਰੈ ਸਤਿਗੁਰਿ ਲਏ ਰਲਾਇ ॥

[SGGS: 638]

*He Himself forgives the worthless, O Siblings of Destiny; He commits them to the service of the True Guru.*

*Service to the True Guru is sublime, O Siblings of Destiny; through it, one's consciousness is attached to the Lord's Name.*

*The Dear Lord forgives, and unites with Himself.*

With the hearing of this *Vak*, every one was satisfied that the Guru had accepted the converts. The dispute was resolved by this sanction.

The teachings of Gurbani, including the hymns of Bhaktas, have created a firm and conspicuous impact on the contemporary 'subaltern' component of Punjabi society. The caste hierarchy structure does not conform to the Varna system. The Brahmanical ideology is fast fading. Indeed Sikhism remains an important ideological force against the caste system.

The egalitarian ideology of Sikhism has resulted into greater self-confidence and entrepreneurial capabilities leading to significant occupational diversification amongst some of the sub castes, specially in the Doaba area, particularly with caste-free occupations like the surgical industry in Jullundur.

However, the prevailing socio-economic conditions of Subalterns, especially of the "Depressed Schedule Caste" do require very effective upliftment programmes and projects to integrate them into Sikh egalitarian society, as equal partners on the lines envisaged by the Gurus.

Pritam Singh Kohli

# Guru Granth Sahib and Numbers

One God (Waheguru), One Guru (Sri Guru Granth Sahib), One Man (yet Many), beams out the message from the Sikh Scriptures to the world. Before Waheguru created the universe, the galaxies and the planets including our Mother Earth, there was Nothing but Him. This concept of One, Many and Nothing was alive in the mind of early man. The hunter gatherers used this in relation the number of fruit they ate, to herds of animals, or the number of pebbles they played with by the lakeside. Bones and wooden sticks have been found in archaeological digs having notches indicating their records of such counting.

As man started living in groups and evolved into civilisation, the numbers and the way of counting was done became sophisticated. For example, the Babylonian numbers were generated from a system of wedges and angles using a base of ten or sixty and were recorded on clay tablets. One was signified by one wedge, three with three wedges, four with one large wedge overlain by three smaller wedges, nine with three layers wedges and ten with an angle. The Roman number system for counting indicated numbers one to ten was by I, II, III, IV, V, VI, VII, VIII, IX, X and 50, 100 and 1000 by L, C, M, respectively. However the Roman numbering system was cumbersome for writing out the very large and complicated numbers used in astronomy and increasingly, in other branches of science, and the invention in the early 17th century of logarithms finally ended its general use.

In the world of today, the Arb numerals i.e. 0,1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9 (to the base 10) thought of by Indian mathematicians around 500 AD, are the most widely used representation of numbers (except in computers) to carry out counting. The Arabs learnt this system of numbers from the Indians and took it into Europe during the Middle Ages. Although this system was further developed and revolutionised commerce, science and technology in the western world, it was thought to be cumbersome for use in the twentieth century computers. It is the simplicity and strength of Nothing (zero) and One (the so called binary system in which  $1=1$ ,  $10=1010$ ,  $100=1100100$  and so on) that kindled imagination of early man all that time ago that has been harnessed by computers to exchange and

process information in ones and zeroes and lets you watch your favorite TV programme or start chatting with a friend on the other side of the world. A satellite in the sky can beam a signal to unlock a car door. A cell phone from the middle of nowhere can access the desktop computer switched on, a click of the mouse would let you watch your favorite TV programme or start chatting with a friend on the other side of the world. A satellite in the sky can beam a signal to unlock a car door. A cell phone from the middle of nowhere can access the desktop computer at home for information that you so badly need to make a decision. Day to day shopping from the comfort of our home using a computer has become reality. You can manage your bank account or pay your bills or find a new mate online. Digital television, books and photography have arrived. In short, computers have transformed our commerce, education, transportation, science, technology and society in general to a new level and helped us not only to do things which we could not do in the past but also to do them quickly making modern life much faster yet providing greater leisure which we can gainfully employ in remembering God and doing his Simran and reciting Bani.

The numerals which have been used in Sri Guru Granth Sahib (SGGS), however, are not Arab but Gurmukhi (Sifr, Ik, Dho, Tine, Char, Punj, Chee', Sat, Aath, Nau, Dus) which are based on the Indian (Devanagari) numbers, although we must note that this is still a decimal system. These numerals have been used in numerous ways throughout SGGS.

Firstly, Gurmukhi numerals make the layout of SGGS scientifically precise so that it can be followed with ease by everybody. SGGS has 1430 pages and 33 sections. The section at the beginning contains Japji Sahib (pages 1 to 8), a morning prayer of Pauris numbered 1 to 38 and 1 Salok, composed by Guru Nanak. The end section is a collection of miscellaneous verses including the Slokas and Sawayyas of Bhattas. The remaining 31 sections are the Ragas and their divisions, with Sri Rag being the beginning and Jaijaiwanti at the end. At the beginning of each Bani, the name of the composer and the Raag in which it is to be sung is given. For example, on page 917, before the start of the composition, Anand Sahib, the line



says Ramkali Mahala 3 Anand. This means that this Bani has been authored by Guru Amar Das (the third Guru Nanak is referred to as Mahala, 1, Guru Ram Das, Mahala 4 and so on) and is to be sung in Raga Ramkali.

Secondly, words representing numbers have been used throughout SGGS to convey various forms of thoughts. A few examples are given below.

On page 1035, line 10, Guru Nanak while considering the creation and evolution of the universe, states *Na din rain na chand na suraj sunn* (zero) *samadh lagaida*. This means that there was no day or night, no moon or sun, God sat in his primal or *sunn* (zero) state. And when the Guru says *Ik bhandari ik lae diban* (page 7, line 2), he refers to the *Ik* (one) Godhead, the creator of the world, the sustainer and the destroyer. The Guru goes on to say: *Sasai sabh jag sahj upaia un* (three) *bhavan ik joupag* 930, line 3), meaning He created the entire universe with ease and his light permeates the three (*tine*) worlds. Guru Ram Das reasserts that God created the earth, and the *due* (two) lamps of the sun and the moon in *Tudh ape dhar u sajlai chand suraj due* (two) *dive* (page 83, line 6).

If you live through all the *chare'* (four) ages (One Age = millions of years) since creation began or *dasuni* (ten times longer than the sum of these ages, living life is worthless if you do not receive the blessings of God Himself with the glance of His Grace, says Guru Nanak in Japji Sahib as referred to in *Je jung chare* (four) *arja hor dasuni hoe* (Page 2, line 13) and the verses that follow it.

On page 20, line 1, Guru Nanak says *Panch* (five) *bhut sach bhai rate jot sachi man mahi*. In this and the preceding verses the Guru reminds us that man is made of *panch* (five) elements i.e. air, water, fire, earth and ether and remembering Him will colour your mind with His thoughts and memories thus lighting you forever. He also says on page 61, line 14 *Asat* (eight) *dhat patisah ki ghanai sabad vigas* that when making of the human body with the eight metals is done by saying Guru's word, it will live in happiness. However, He reminds us on page 12, line 16, *Chhia ghar chhia gur chhia updes*, that man is subject to *Chhia* (six) schools of philosophy written by six teachers and six teachings – Jaimani's *Mimasa* (Interpretation), Badarayana's *Vedanta* (knowledge part of the Vedas), Kapila's *Sankhya* (theoretical knowledge), Patanjali's *Yoga* (Discipline of Achieving Liberation), Gutama's *Nyaya* (Logic), Kaanada's *Vaisheshika* (Pluralistic Metaphysics) but in subsequent verses He makes it

crystal clear that the forms may be many but Guru of all is One (God).

Guru Ram Das on page 84, line 4 refers to *Sapat* (seven) *dip* (islands) *sapat* (seven) *sagra* (seas) *nav* (nine) *khand* (continents) *char* (four) *ved* (Vedas) *das* *asat* (eighteen) *purana* but goes on to explain that God lives in all these and He is most loving. All living begins and the world around is His creation and they all do His *jaap*. Guru Nanak adds that God can be seen in all ten directions and in all the variety of nature and He will carry you across with his Pauri Das (ten) *athar mai aprampro chinai kahai Nanak iv ek tarai* (page 23, line 19).

Thirdly, and most uniquely, a Gurmukhi numeral forms the first mark in the first verse (*Pauri*) of the first bani, Guru Nanak's Japji Sahib, in SGGS. This numeral is *Ik* (one):

*Ikoankar* (There is only one God) *sat nam* (Truth is His Name) *karta purkh* (He is the Creator) *nirbhao* (He is without fear) *nirvair* (He is without hate) *akal murat* (He is timeless and without form) *ajuni saibha'n* (He is beyond birth and death, The enlightened one) *gur parsad* (He can be known by The Guru's Grace).

With the Gurmukhi numeral One, Guru Nanak proclaims right from the beginning, the strict monotheism of the Sikh religion. The structure of the Gurmukhi numeral One contains the Gurmukhi *sifr* (zero) at the top with a vertical notch coming out of it from the right side which is reminiscent of the old mark of One by early man all that time ago. The Gurmukhi numeral One, can accordingly be taken as a duality of zero and One. It represents Waheguru in its Nirgun (Zero) state and Sargun (1, One) state: *Sargun nirgun nirankar sunn Samadhi ap* (page 290, line 16). The transformation of zero into One occurs with his Word and gives birth to the universe and everything in it (Many) with the God in the centre of it: *Kita pasao eko kavao. Tis te hoe lakh dariao* (page 3, line 17). When He contracts himself into the Zero state the universe and all the things in it are absorbed back into Him (One): *Ape jor vichhore karta ape mar jivaida* (page 1034, line 7). This game (leela) of Zero, 1, Zero, 1 is played as He wills: *Ja tis bhana ta jagat upaia* (page 1036, line 6). In terms of the binary number system, whether scientists with their clever programmes will be able to produce computer simulations of the birth, expansion and contraction of the universe and subsequent births and deaths, nobody on this earth will know.





# The Kila Raipur Rural

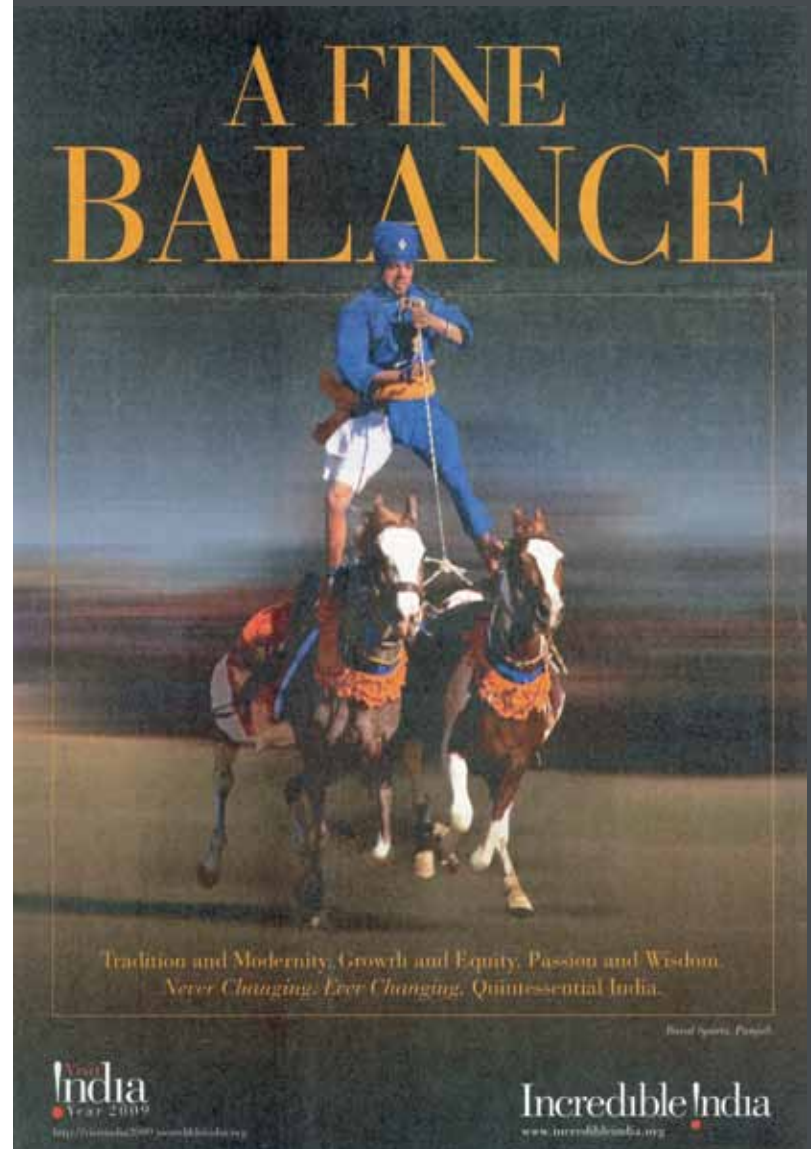
It was in 1933 that the philanthropist Inder Singh Grewal visualised an annual recreational meet where farmers from areas surrounding Kila Raipur, near Ludhiana in the Punjab, would get together and test their corporal endurance. The idea gave birth to the Kila Raipur Sports, now the undisputed leading *Rural Olympics* of the world.

In over six decades the festival has grown from a tentative start to what is an energised, spirited meet, famous worldwide. What was originally just a rural

sports festival has become an annual international event, normally held in the first weekend of February. A dynamic team of organisers – the Grewal Sports Association – has taken yet again another pioneering step forward, providing rural women an opportunity to show their skills also in sports.

This 'festival of the rustics' today attracts more than 4,000 sportsmen and women, both of recognised and traditional sports, the three-day event witnessed by more than a million people. Besides, several million

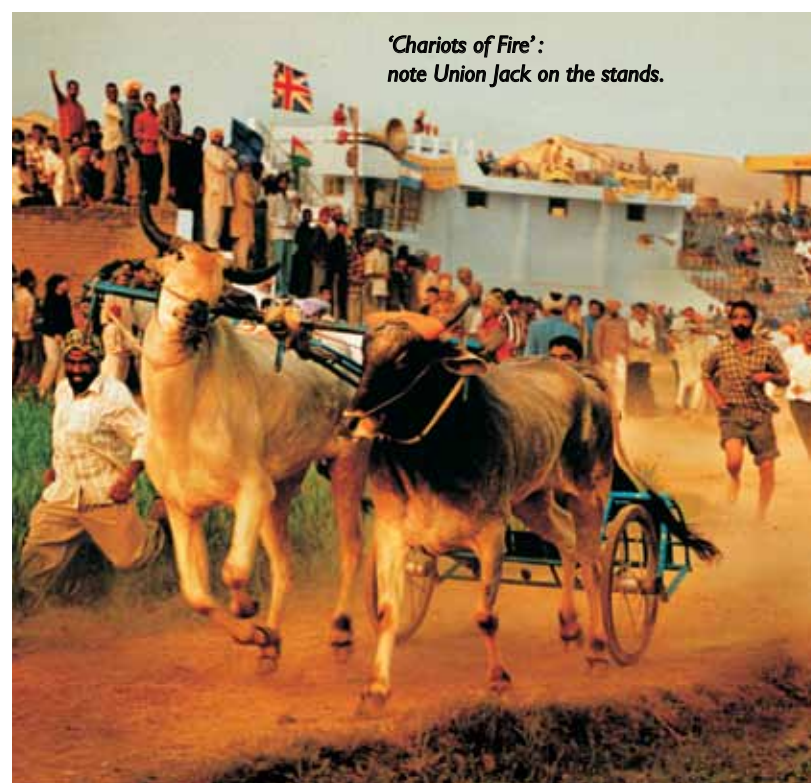




Full page advertisement in the UK-published 'Daily Telegraph', with Kila Raipur as its theme.

others watch it live on television, read about it in the media.

Whether one is in the Punjab or in Toronto or in Southall, many are involved with the Kila Raipur Sports. Participants come from all over the globe. Since it takes several months for Sikhs of the diaspora, in England, Canada or the USA to select, train and send their Kabbadi and tug-of-war teams to this festival, now truly international, planning for destination KILA RAIPUR starts early enough.







*Punjab wins ! British Columbia a close second.*





*'Maa, Tujhe Salaam': doing it differently at Kila Raipur.*





*"A healthy mind in a healthy body – and teeth!"*

When Inder Singh Grewal, and subsequently the Grewal Sports Association visualised such Games, the solitary aim was "a healthy mind in a healthy body", but this has evolved into becoming the forum for excellence in accordance with the Olympic's objective of "Citius, Altius, Fortius". This was also to provide a venue where the young as also veterans could gather to

exhibit their acumen, not only in recognised sporting events but also in traditional rural sports.

So the aim has been always been to look for the best. Those who have been observing this festival from year to year can vouch that they have seen hundreds of potential Olympians and internationals in action on the spartan but adequate

playfields in perhaps the largest Rural Sports Stadium in the country.

For the Grewal Sports Association, it is not only the annual Rural Olympics but also promotion of sports which is given paramount attention. Importantly, the Association sponsors and runs a hockey academy for school boys and presently, budding hockey stars are training at the Academy on a regular basis : 150 of them, of which 25 are given boarding facilities.

The Association plans to expand the stadium, construct a new modern hostel for the Academy, start yet another academy for track and field events and lay a synthetic surface for hockey. Kila Raipur and surrounding villages have made a matchless contribution to the national mainstream of sports in almost all major recognised sports.

These activities apart, the Grewal Sports Association retains the proud privilege of being the pioneer of organised "Rural Sports" in the country, perhaps the only meet which attracts sponsors from multi national companies and where prize money attracts the best of sportsmen and women. The organisers are dedicated, qualified and reputed men who have spent their youthful days on playfields of the village.

No other rural sports meet can match the Kila Raipur sports, either in organisation or in size. All strength to it !

**[All photographs by  
Malkiat Singh]**



# Impact of Guru Granth Sahib on Indian Society

Many a great saviour has appeared on the world scene through time to save humanity from the clutches of the evil forces and to disseminate the spiritual message of God: the source of all virtues. Many a religion has been founded by such saviours, sages and prophets. Each religion has played its part to curb evil and spread dharma, or Righteousness. The greatest need of the present times is that humanity's moral character and socio-economic standard be raised for peace and prosperity and, above all, for creating a God consciousness among all people of the world.

Guru Nanak's faith, popularly known as Sikhism, is the latest of world religions. The current year (2009) is the 540<sup>th</sup> year of Guru Nanak's birth. Comparatively short as the time-span may seem, the Scripture of the Sikh Gurus has an astonishingly original message for humanity, compelling in its logic and modern in its philosophic approach. Indeed Sri Guru Granth Sahib's spiritual message is universal in appeal. It became the sacred book of the Sikhs and created consciousness among them of their being a developed community. It serves as the expository of Divine wisdom, felicity and bliss. Its fascinating hymns, chanted in deep reverence and devotion, inspire the minds of listeners to the lofty ideas of simple living and high thinking. The Granth serves as the symbolic representation of all the Gurus who are considered as only one Seer, Nanak, the light of whose soul passed on to each of his successors one by one.

One of the greatest glories of *Guru Granth Sahib* is its all-embracing character. It is a scripture completely free from bias, animus and controversy. Indeed the uniqueness of the *Granth* in this respect is all the more astonishing when we think of the obscurantism, factionalism and fanaticism of the period in which it was composed. Perhaps, it is the only scripture of its kind which contains within its sacred covers the songs and utterances of a wide variety of saints, savants and bards. It is important to note that a fairly substantial part of the *Granth Sahib* carries the compositions of Hindu *bhagats*, Muslims divines and Sufi poets and 'God-intoxicated' souls in quest of Truth and Love. Of course, their hymns and couplets, rendered in their own language and idioms, are so dovetailed as to find a complete corresponding with themes or motifs in the compositions of the Sikh Gurus. Obviously, the idea of Guru Arjun Dev was to establish the fundamental unity of all religions and mystic experiences. It was, so to speak, an integral congress of mind and souls, operating on the same spiritual beam. To have, thus, elevated the songs of the *bhagats*, the *Sufis* and the *bhatts* to the status of the *logos* was to salute the power of the *Word* whatever it might

take to reveal the glory of God. It may be noticed that the *Guru Granth* contains the compositions and utterances of the high-born Brahmins and the proud Kshatriyas, as also of the lowly Shudras and the agriculturist Jats. This was done at a time when the caste-system in India had almost paralysed the conscience of man.

The revolutionary egalitarianism which such a step symbolised has thereafter-become the creed of the Sikhs. Above all, a poetic and mystic collage bespeaks the essential humility of the Sikh mind, for humility has been given a place of pride in the table of virtues dawn up by the Gurus. *Guru Granth Sahib*, then, is a *sui generis Scripture*. It is indeed a magnificent compendium of the religious, mystic and metaphysical poetry written or uttered between the 12<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries in different parts of India. It is also, at the same time, a mirror of the socio-logical, economic and political conditions of the day. The satire on the reactionary rulers, the obscurantist clergy, the fake fakirs and the like, is open, uncompromising and telling. In showing the path of spiritual salvation, *Guru Granth Sahib* does not ignore the secular and social life of man. It conveys the message of ritual-free thinking and living, and stresses values which are ethical. It rejects all formalities and ritualism. It stresses the significance of the poise and balance in life. There is equal stress on the physical and spiritual well being of individual and society and a balanced combination of knowledge, action and devotion. In the teachings of *Guru Granth Sahib* due reverence is given to the body since it is sanctified and regarded as the abode of the Lord.

Essentially, *Guru Granth Sahib* preaches the fatherhood of God and brotherhood of man. It lays emphasis on the equal status of man and woman in society. It warns against all type of exploitation and firmly conveys the message of social equality. It spurs man to recognise the light of God in all creatures because there is no equality in the next world. The caste distinction is manmade. God is manifest in all the creatures, Bhai Gurdas testifies to the effect produced by the Guru's teaching on the caste system. He writes that all the four castes have become one. All disciples of the Guru belong to the saintly realm.

It is no exaggeration to say that *Guru Granth Sahib* is universal in its outlook and propagates a global ideal. It rises above the ritual fasting, and speaks against the use of drugs and intoxicants. It advocates the excellence and utility of human life, the necessity of character, the inculcation of love, truth, contentment, humility, etc.

Indeed, *Guru Granth Sahib* gives us the true picture of an ideal life.

Prof. Sukhdial Singh

# They Also Ran



## Unified Games 2009 Pingalwara, Manawala

*F*irst Unified Sports Games 2009 were organised by Chandar Sekhar Kohli in association with All India Pingalwara Charitable Society in Manawala Complex of Pingalwara on 31 March, 2009. Chandar Shekhar Kohli an NRI from Dubai alongwith his NRI group from USA, got together with Pingalwara to organise the inaugural event.

The inspiration behind these games was to juxtapose normal, mentally challenged, handicapped and hearing-impaired section of society at one platform in the sports field, also to sensitise the normal population about the sensitive and special needs of this neglected segment of society.







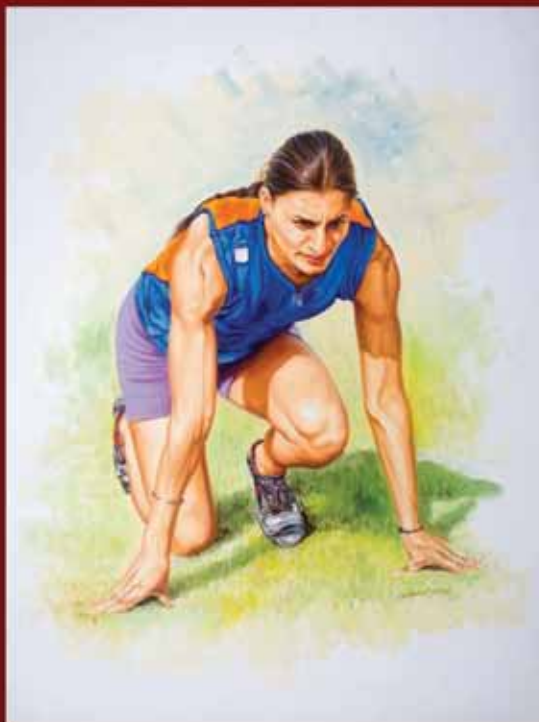
The games were inaugurated by Prof. Dr. Jaspal Singh Sandhu, Dean Faculty of Sports Medicine, Guru Nanak Dev University at Amritsar. The games got a great start through the entertainment events organised by the special children of Pingalwara. Large number of residents from Pingalwara, students from the Khalsa College and Guru Nanak Dev University took part in the inaugural event.

Dr Inderjit Kaur President, All India Pingalwara Charitable Society in her address appreciated the efforts of CS Kohli in organising such a momentous undertaking and hoped that such events would become an annual feature so as to make people aware about the special needs of children.

A large number of NRIs from the USA and Dubai especially Amarjit Singh Bal, Iqbal Waraich, Joginder Pal Dhingra, Dr. HS Randhawa, Dy. Director Sports GNDU Amritsar, Col. Darshan Singh Bawa Administrator of Pingalwara, Sunil Aggarwal from Ludhiana, Jagdish Bagga, Dr. Jagdeepak Singh, Rajbir Singh Members Pingalwara Society and Baljit Mahajan were present at Manawala on that special day.

# Sikh Calendar

In their inimitable style, The Sikh Foundation International, of Palo Alto in California, have issued this unique calendar for 2009, the 12 months depicting famous Sikh athletes both men and women, who have done their nation proud.



  
THE  
SIKH FOUNDATION  
*International*  
Kapany Collection

**Sikh Fine Art Calendar 2009**  
Sikh Sportspersons Of International Fame



## HOME TO HOME



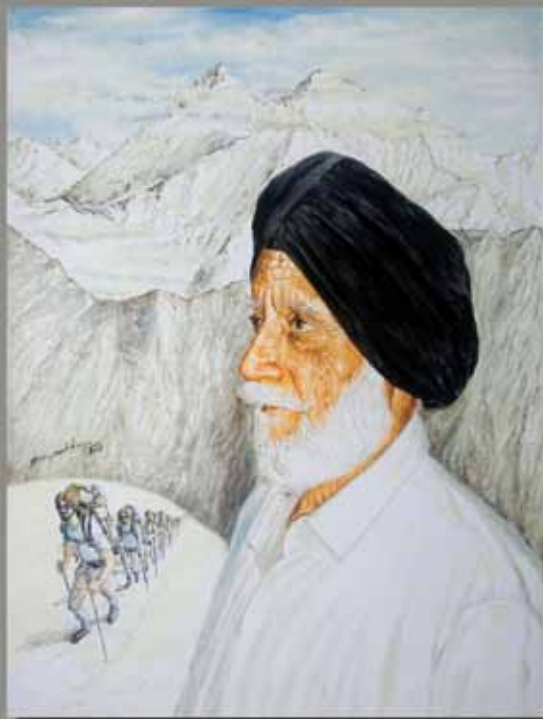
**Tara Singh Heriana** In 1996, he walked from London to the Golden Temple in the Punjab state in India. His journey took him 101 days and he covered 14,000 km walking through England, India, Pakistan, Afghanistan and India. Through his walk, he aimed at increasing the awareness of peace and brotherhood amongst the community.

## THE FLYING SIKH



**Milkha Singh** Represented India in each of his 40 Olympic Games in 1948 at Rome and in 1952 at Tokyo. He won the gold medal in the 400m race at the Commonwealth Games in 1950 and at the Asian Games in 1951 and 1954. He was the President of India National Olympic Committee from 1995.

## CONQUERING EVEREST



**Captain M.S. Kohli** He is a legendary cricketer and a former captain of the Indian national cricket team. He led the team to victory in the 1983 Cricket World Cup. He is also a mountaineer and has climbed several peaks, including Mount Everest. He is a member of the Indian Mountaineering Foundation.

## MARATHON MAN



**Panna Singh** He is a legendary marathon runner. He has completed over 100 marathons and has set several records. He is a member of the Panna Singh Marathon Foundation.

# Hola Mahalla, 2009



An enlightened person has no identification: their values are universal and in tune with the timeless state of existence. This timeless state of existence can be given any name like *Akal Purukh, God, Raam, Rahim, Hari, Parmaatma* etc. But these names point to the same ultimate truth. It is useless to worship any name unless it becomes your own experience.

In our own times, developing countries like India have brought tourism into the forefront, owing to the twin advantages of employment generation and capacity to earn foreign exchange. Recent studies, however, have also pointed out the negative effects such as the cultural erosion (of one's own identity), materialism, increase in crime, social conflicts, overcrowding (of the tourists?) and environmental deterioration, which have not only proved counter productive in some cases but have also led to strong opposition, especially in the case of the sexual based-tourism as has developed in Thailand and other under-developed countries, including even India (which involves profit seeking adults enslaving the young and innocent children of many 'third world countries'). The only remedial measures to this is adherence to the development of community / religious tourism and its allied branches.

In this article an attempt is made to study the prospects and impact of such community / religious tourism and its potential to develop and prosper. The case study is related to the Sikh community's celebrations of Hola Mahalla at Anandpur Sahib (the birth-place of the Khalsa in 1699) in the Punjab, an event that coincides with the Indian festival of Holi celebrated all over North India. This article concludes that community-oriented tourism, such as ones similar to Hola Mahalla, can bring economic benefits which promoting partnership with others even as we protect the unique Sikh cultural heritage. The paper briefly discusses the history of Hola Mahalla festival, which has been declared a State festival by the Government of Punjab and also analyses the importance of community tourism and impact on economic and socio-cultural environment vis-à-vis the host community and tourism development.

Hola Mahalla, or simply, Hola is a Sikh festival, which takes place on the first of the lunar month of Chet, which usually falls in March. This follows the Hindu festival of Holi; Hola is the masculine form of the feminine noun Holi. Mahalia, derived from the Arabic root hal (alighting, descending), is







# On the Road to Anandpur Sahib





a Punjabi word that implies an organised procession in the form of an army column accompanied by war drums and standard-bearers, and proceeding to a given location or moving in state from one Gurdwara to another.

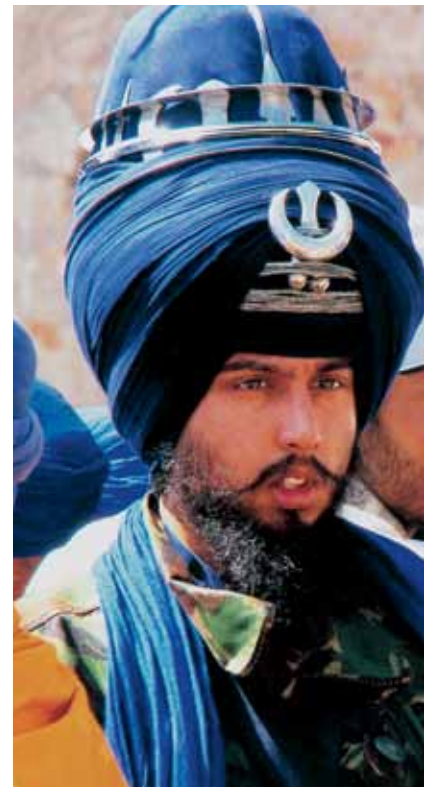
This custom originated at the time of Guru Gobind Singh (1666-1708) who held the first march at Anandpur on Chet vadi 1, 1757 BK (22nd February, 1701). Unlike Holi, when people playfully sprinkle coloured powders, dry or mixed in water on each other, the Guru made Hola Mahalla an occasion for the Sikhs to demonstrate their martial skills in simulated battles. This was probably done forestalling a grimmer struggle against the imperial power following the battle of Ninnohgarh in 1700. Hola Mahalla became an annual event held in an open ground near Holgarh, a fort across the rivulet Charan Ganga, northwest of Anandpur Sahib.

The popularity of this festival may be judged from the fact that out of five Sikh public holidays requested by the Khalsa Diwan of Lahore in 1889, the Government approved only two—Hola Mahalla and the birth anniversary of Guru Nanak. Hola Mahalla is presently the biggest festival at Anandpur. It will be appropriate here to briefly discuss the town and the participants of this festival.

## Anandpur Sahib

Anandpur ('City of Bliss') is situated on one of the lower spurs of the Siwalik Hills in Ropar District of Punjab and is well connected with the rest of the country both by road

and rail. It lies 31 kms north of Rupnagar (Ropar) and 29 kms south of Nangal Township. Being one of the supremely important pilgrimage centres of the Sikhs it has been reverently called Anandpur Sahib. It was here at Anandpur that on the Baisakhi of 1699 that Guru Gobind Singh gave birth to the Khalsa and baptised the original *Panj Piare* and inaugurated the order of Saint-Soldiers (holy warriors) who pledged their dedication to defend, not only Sikhs, but their fellow countrymen and their religious rights as well, in the tradition of one of India's greatest martyrs Guru Tegh Bahadur who gave his life in the defence of Hinduism on behalf of the Pandits of Kashmir.



The Order of the Khalsa, at the command of Guru Gobind Singh would henceforth be distinguished by five symbols, the Five Ks, viz. *kesh* (unshorn hair), *kangha* (comb), *kachcha* (pair of shorts), *kara* (steel bracelet)

and *kirpan* (sword) so that they could easily be recognised by anyone under attack. Sikhs were further instructed to live to the highest ethical standards and always ready to fight tyranny and injustice.



use of arms, horsemanship, tent-pegging, and other war-like sports.

## Warlike sports of the Nihangs

Originally known as Akalis, the *Nihangs* or Nihang Singhs are endearingly designated as Guru's Knights or the Guru's beloved. They still carry the military ambience and heroic style that was cultivated during the lifetime of Guru Gobind Singh. Nihangs constitute a distinctive order among the Sikhs and are readily recognised by their dark blue (indigo) loose apparel and their ample, peaked turbans festooned with quoits, insignia of the Khalsa and rosaries, all made of steel. They are always armed and are usually seen mounted heavily laden with weapons such as swords, daggers, spears, rifles, shoguns and pistols.

The word Nihang can be traced back to Persian Nihang (alligator, sword) or to Sanskrit Nishanka (fearless, carefree). In the



## Hola Mahalla festival

Having been the abode of the last two human Gurus of the Sikhs for more than 20 years, Anandpur Sahib was witness to many momentous events in Sikh history, including the Hola Mahalla festival, which is now an annual feature. The festival has lost much of its original military significance, but Sikhs in large numbers still assemble at Anandpur Sahib on this day and an impressive and colourful procession is taken out in which the Nihangs, in their traditional panoply, form the vanguard while parading their skills in the

former sense, it seems to refer to the reckless courage that members of this order displayed in battle. In Guru Gobind Singh's writing, *Var Sri Bhagauti Ji 47*, it is used for swordsmen warriors of the vanguard. Whatever may be the origin of the word Nihang, it signifies the characteristic qualities of the clan-their freedom from fear of danger or death, readiness for action and non-attachment to worldly possessions. During the eighteenth century, one of the confederate armies of the Dal Khalsa, constituted of the Nishanvalia misl chief, Naina Singh, whose style of tightly tied tall turban with a dumala gained



currency and those who adopted the style were called Akali Nihangs.

The self-discipline and privilege they gained of convening at Akal Takht general assemblies of the Khalsa, brought the Nihangs into importance far out of proportion to their numbers or political authority. At the time of Maharaja Ranjit Singh (1780-1839), the Akali Nihangs maintained their independent existence. Their leader Phoola Singh Nihang, then custodian of the Akal Takht, was the voice of the religious and the moral conscience of the State, and at times he even censured and chastised the sovereign himself.

The Nihangs today are divided into several groups, each with its own *Chaoni* (cantonment), but they are loosely organised into two Dals (forces): Buddha Dal and the Taruna Dal. These names were initially given to the two sections into which the Khalsa army was divided in 1733. Buddha Dal has its Chaoni at Tawandi Sabo in Bhatinda District, while the main Chaoni of the Taruna Dal Nihangs is at Baba Bakala in Amritsar District.

The week long festival of Hola Mahalla concludes at Gurdwara Holgarh Sahib (which stands on the site of Holgarh Fort), one and half km northwest of the town across the Charan Ganga rivulet. It was here that Guru Gobind Singh introduced in the spring of 1701 the celebration of Holla on the day following the Hindu festival of Holi. Unlike the playful sprinkling of colours as is done during Holi, the Guru made Holla an occasion to demonstrate skills in simulated battle, which is presently demonstrated by the Nihangs.

The Nihangs assemble in thousands at Anandpur Sahib in March every year to celebrate Hola Mahalla. On this occasion they hold tournaments of military skills, including mock battles. The most spectacular event at the Hola Mahalla is the magnificent procession of Nihangs on horses and elephants and



on foot, carrying a variety of traditional and modern weapons and demonstrating their skill in using them. The Hola Mahalla festival is unique and distinguishable from other festivals in that the Nihang have tried to preserve the traditional form and content as established during its inception, and strictly observed by the Akalis for more than three centuries.

The martial arts exhibited by the Nihangs provide a picture of their skills and traditions to the visitors as well as the tourist. Because of its great historical, socio-religious and military significance, the Hola Mahalla festival can impressively contribute to a greater awareness of Sikh heritage as well as foster sustainable development of community tourism.

Anandpur Sahib can be developed as a tourist destination not to please a particular community but to develop it as a centre of India's rich socio-cultural heritage devoted exclusively to the appreciation of physical abilities of a martial people. It will naturally sustain national and international tourism.

A culturally conscious policy to develop Hola Mahalla as a tourist even should be formed by the State to focus on promoting cultural heritage while providing greater economic benefits to a larger section of the local population. The policy suggested can bring equitable economic benefits, increased community participation, all round development of the area and above all, the preservation of India's cultural heritage.

*Based on the article by Dr MS Ahluwalia, former Professor and Chairman, Department of History, H.P. University, Simla with over 30 years of teaching experience at the post-graduate level. Presently he is Senior Fellow at Indian Council of Historical Research, New Delhi. Dr. Ahluwalia has authored six books and currently two books are under publication. He actively participates in international conferences presenting papers on varied topics including history and Sikhism.*

**Photographs by Karanjit Singh**



## Guru ka Langar

The Hola Mahalla annual festival is held at Anandpur Sahib and now replicated at other Gurdwaras worldwide, was started by the tenth Sikh Guru, as a gathering of Sikhs for military exercises and mock battles on the day following the festival of Holi at Anandpur Sahib. It exhorts people to be valorous and imbibe defence preparedness, concepts dear to the Tenth Guru who was at that time defending the Sikhs from doubly perfidious attacks by both the mighty Mughal empire and the petty hill kings.

On this three-day grand festival, mock battles, exhibitions, display of weapons, etc. are held followed by kirtan, music and poetry competitions.

The participants perform warlike feats, such as *Gatka* (mock encounters with real weapons), tent pegging, bareback horse-riding, standing erect on twin galloping horses and various other feats of bravery and skills.

There are a number of Darbars where the Sri Guru Granth Sahib is present and kirtan and religious lectures take place. On the last day a long procession, led by Panj Pyaras, starts from Takhat Keshgarh Sahib, one of the religious seats, and passes through various important Gurdwaras like Qila Anandgarh, Lohgarh Sahib, Mata Jitoji and terminates at the Takhat (Keshgarh).

For the hundreds of thousands of people visiting Anandpur Sahib, langars (voluntary community kitchens) are organised as a part of sewa (community service). Raw material including wheat flour, rice, vegetables, milk and sugar are provided by the villagers living nearby. Women volunteer to cook and others take part in cleaning utensils and other manual tasks that need to be carried out. Traditional food is served to the pilgrims while sitting in rows on the ground (*Pangat*).





# Recognising Excellence

A galaxy of eminent Sikh men and women were honoured at Chandigarh late last year for their contribution to society in general and the Sikh community in particular, by the Sikh Council on Religion and Education (SCORE), a U.S.-based NGO for "the promotion and preservation of Sikh culture". 250 specially-invited guests from all over the Punjab and Delhi were at this lunch event titled, *Excellence Among Sikhs*, held at the Taj Hotel, Sector 17, Chandigarh.

Those honoured included Rabbi Shergill, the well known sufi singer, environmentalist and social activist; Dr. Saran Singh, Editor of 'The Sikh Review' from Kolkata; Baba Balbir Singh Seerchewal, who cleaned the Bein river associated with Guru Nanak at Sultanpur Lodhi; Ranjodh Singh, head of Gurmukh Singh and Sons, from Ludhiana; Arpana Caur, the internationally renowned artist and daughter of famous writer Ajit Caur; Dr. Inderjit Kaur, head of the Pingalwara Institution in Amritsar; the Nishkam Sikh Welfare Council, the Delhi-based NGO which has

done great humanitarian service since 1984, and the young and innovative entrepreneur Harinder Singh in establishing an enterprise '1469' at New Delhi.

The programme started with a spiritual rendering in the sufi style by Dolly Guleria, daughter of Surinder Kaur, the famous Punjabi singer who had passed on last year. Dolly's singing created an atmosphere of serenity and set the tone for the event.

Sant Balbit Singh Seechewal, who had spearheaded the campaign of cleansing the 'Kali Bein' rivulet in recent years, stated that 'Gurbani' has great material for us to learn on the laws of nature and to understand the human being's relationship with the environment. He challenged the audience to work for betterment of the natural environment as part of Sikhi.

Dr. Inderjit Kaur, who inherited the mission to serve through the 'Pingalwara Trust' after Bhagat Puran Singh, said the path that the Saint had chosen to serve the needy with total selfless approach was very difficult for a common man. "Bhagat Puran Singh who created

rooms for the poor and sick, had no room of his own", Dr. Inderjit Kaur said. She remarked that this manner would encourage NGOs and self help groups and hopefully "facilitate funding for noble causes."

Well known industrialist Ranjodh Singh of Gurmukh Singh and Sons, honoured for running educational and social institutions in the Punjab, said it was important for the Sikh community to promote education among the youth so that "they can excel in various fields." Ranjodh Singh is one of the leading industrialists of the Ludhiana area.

Harbhajan Singh of Nishkam Singh Welfare Council, a social organisation that had adopted many children and widows after the 1984 anti-Sikh pogrom in India, stated that "the real service that Sikhs could do to mankind was to create resources for the poor and the needy and generate opportunities for children of the deprived families." He also reminded the audience about the opportunity to serve the Sikligars and Vanjara Sikhs who are not well versed in Sikh principles and are yet a waiting recognition from the mainstream Sikh community.

Arpana Caur was characteristically humble in her acceptance speech. She shared as to how she is inspired by Guru Nanak in her artistic impressions and thanked SCORE and the audience for the honour.

Rabbi Shergill electrified the audience with his frank talk and challenged Sikh youth to be proud of their heritage. He rendered his famous song 'Bulla kee jaane main kaun', to major acclamation from the audience. "I am proud to be a Sikh; such awards will motivate other Sikh youth to stick to the principles of Sikhism and work for welfare of the community."

Sardar Saran Singh IAS, former Chief Secretary to the Bihar Government and Secretary with Government of India, was presented the 'Lifetime Service Award' in abstentia for his great efforts in publishing *The Sikh Review* after his retirement from service.

An award of excellence was presented to the enthusiastic young entrepreneur Harinder Singh for establishing an imaginative enterprise named "1469", creating in distinct style art and other objects highlighting verses from Gurbani, popularising and preserving traditional heritage. "1469" is the birth year of the founder of Sikhism, Guru Nanak.

S. Tarlochan Singh, Member of Parliament and former Chairman, Natinal Commission for Minorities, presided over the function. Former Union Cabinet Minister Sukhdev Singh Dhindsa was chief guest. In his address, Tarlochan Singh said that Rajwant Singh

had taken an admirable initiative of recognising and honouring those persons and organisations which are selflessly doing good and constructive work for betterment of the Sikh community.

Sardar Sukhdev Singh Dhindsa said that by honouring some praiseworthy personalities and institutions, Rajwant Singh has elevated the entire Sikh community. He exhorted the Sikhs to religiously follow and act upon the noble principles enshrined in Guru Granth Sahib.

Other guests included Makhan Singh, Chairman Guru Arjan Dev Institute of Technology and Management, Dr. Inderjit Kaur, former Vice Chancellor of the Punjab University, Patiala, Bhayee Sikander Singh of Bagrian, former Chandigarh mayor Harjinder Kaur, Vice Chancellor of Guru Granth Sahib University, Dr. Jasbir Singh Ahluwalia, Youth Akali Dal President, Kiranbir Singh Kang, Rana Inderjit Singh of Gurmat Gian Missionary College, Balvinderpal Singh of Guru Gobind Singh Study Circle, Sukhwinder Singh of Vismaad Group, Man Mohan Singh Kohli of the Aroma Hotel at Chandigarh, Baltej Singh Mann of the Punjabi University, Roopinder Singh, Assistant Editor of the *Tribune*, Bijay Singh of SGPC, Mr. Kohli from London and Sarabjit Singh of the Sukrit Organisation and the prominent Lawyer, Gur Rattan Pal Singh.

Dr. Rajwant Singh, Chairman of SCORE, stated that "This event is an opportunity to recognise those individuals who have contributed to society in general and also who have become role models for our youth. This would highlight the contributions of Sikhs in strengthening the nation. We are very proud in honouring these distinguished personalities who have presented the Sikhs in a very positive manner in various fields." He said the personalities who were honoured have created and spread a positive image of the Sikh community worldwide.

SCORE has organised similar events in Washington DC to highlight the contribution of Sikhs in America, and enhanced a presence of the community in the American political system. 300 distinguished guests from all over America were at the annual event in June 2008 including over 20 elected leaders of the United States Congress who attended the event. In previous years, keynote speakers from Congressional leadership at SCORE's Capitol Hill Dinner have included prominent leaders including Senators Hillary Clinton, Richard Lugar and Charles Schumer.

SCORE has worked closely with the White House and U.S. Congress on Sikh issues in America.

*Dr. Rajwant Singh*





# artifacts

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