

NISHAAN

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NAGAARA

God's Multiple Voices

**Sikh Day
Parade in NYC**

**Gurdwaras in
America's Capital**

The Fate of India

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Editorial

Hearing the Voice of God

God is self created, self existent. Before Creation, He was the One Absolute (ੴ).

He was not only Existence (ਸਤ), but also Essence (ਨਾਮ). Then, stirred by an inner urge, He unrolled His Creation. What was it that stirred within Him that made Him to create? Guru Nanak, in *Vār Asā* informs us of that divine stirring, when he says:

ਆਪੀਨੈ ਆਪੁ ਸਾਜਿਓ ਆਪੀਨੈ ਰਚਿਓ ਨਾਉ ॥
ਦੁਖੀ ਕੁਦਰਤਿ ਸਾਜੀਐ ਕਰਿ ਆਸਣੁ ਡਿਠੋ ਚਾਉ ॥
ਦਾਤਾ ਕਾਰਤਾ ਆਪਿ ਤੂੰ ਤੁਸਿ ਦੇਵਹਿ ਕਰਹਿ ਪਸਾਉ ॥

He Himself created Himself; and Himself assumed his *Nām*.

In the second place, He fashioned the Creation. Seated within it, He beholds it with delight. You Yourself are the Giver and the Creator; In order to dole out Your Love, You created this vast Expanse.

– SGGS p.463

Thus, His intention to *give out* (His Love) became the cause for His Creation. It need be appreciated that being Love, it was as Love that He also became pervasive in His Creation. Guru Gobind Singh in *Jaap Sahib* affirms this:

ਜੜ੍ਹ ਤੜ੍ਹ ਦਿਸਾ ਵਿਸਾ ਹੁਇ ਫੈਲਿਓ ਅਨੁਰਾਗ ।
Here, there and everywhere He became pervasive as Love. – Verse 80

Then, it appears, in Him arose the need to establish personal relationship with His Creation. So, He became the Person – the Creator Person (ਕਰਤਾ ਪੁਰਖ). This personal God has since been conversing with His Creation. In what language does he converse?

Guru Nanak tells us:

ਕਾਖਿਆ ਕਾਓ ਅਪਾਰ ।
Infinite Love is His tongue. – *Jap ji* verse 4

To experience the infinity of His Love alone is tantamount to receiving His message. Love is the sweetest tongue in which one can converse with another. And that is what exactly our God does:

ਮਿਠ ਬੋਲੜਾ ਜੀ ਹਰਿ ਸਜਣੁ ਸੁਆਮੀ ਮੋਰਾ ॥
ਹਉ ਸੰਮਲਿ ਬਕੀ ਜੀ ਓਹੁ ਕਦੇ ਨ ਬੋਲੈ ਕਉਗਾ ॥
ਕਉੜਾ ਬੋਲਿ ਨ ਜਾਨੈ ਪੂਰਨ ਭਗਵਾਨੈ ਅਉਗਣੁ ਕੋ ਨ ਚਿਤਾਰੇ ॥

So sweetly speaks my Friendly Master,
Ad lib have I tested Him; still, never would He speak harshly.

He even does not know any bitter words;
My Perfect Lord does not even notice my faults.

– SGGS p. 784

Love makes the *separate* presence of ‘another’ impossible. In Love, personalities just dissolve into one another. Separation simply evaporates. When the Guru experienced his own dissolution in Divine Love, he and the Lord surely would have become one. God must have infiltrated into his being so fully that, inebriated with the thrill of that experience, the Guru must spontaneously have poured out his songs. These songs came out in the language of the people. Guru Nanak himself testifies that:

ਗੁਰ ਮਹਿ ਆਪੁ ਸਮੋਇ ਸਬਦੇ ਵਰਤਇਆ ॥

You incorporated yourself into the Guru’s being; and through him doled out Your Word.

– SGGS p.1279

This word (*bānī*) the Guru sang to eulogise His Fearless Lord. Then beckoned others to join him:

ਜੈ ਘਰਿ ਕੀਰਤਿ ਆਖੀਐ ਕਰਤੇ ਕਾ ਹੋਇ ਬੀਚਾਰੇ ॥
ਤਿਤੁ ਘਰਿ ਗਾਵਹੁ ਸੋਹਿਲਾ ਸਿਵਰਿਹੁ ਸਿਰਜਣਹਾਰੇ ॥੧॥
ਤੁਮ ਗਾਵਹੁ ਮੇਰੇ ਨਿਰਭਉ ਕਾ ਸੋਹਿਲਾ ॥
ਹਉ ਵਾਰੀ ਜਿਤੁ ਸੋਹਿਲੈ ਸਦਾ ਸੁਖੁ ਹੋਇ ॥੧॥ ਰਹਾਉ ॥

In that house where the Praises of the Creator are chanted and contemplated upon,
In that house, sing the Songs of His Praise; and remember the Creator Lord.

Sing the Praise of my Fearless One.

May I be a sacrifice unto the Song of Praise that ushers eternal peace!

– SGGS p.12

Thus was God’s Word coded in common language. God seems to also have sanctioned the linguistic expression of the Guru’s experience:

ਜੈਸੀ ਮੈ ਆਵੈ ਖਸਮ ਕੀ ਥਾਣੀ ਤੈਸੜਾ ਕਰੀ ਗਿਆਨੁ ਵੇ ਲਾਲੇ ॥
As the Word of the Lord comes to me, so do I express it, O Lalo.

– SGGS p.722

The Gurus’ *bānī* is the voice of God

ਇਹ ਥਾਣੀ ਮਹਾ ਪੁਰਖ ਕੀ ਨਿਜ ਘਰਿ ਵਾਸਾ ਹੋਇ ।

This Bani is of the Supreme Being; it takes one into the home of his inner being.

– SGGS p.935

This Word is living and active. It is an unsheathed double-edged sword that pierces your very being if you open your heart to it. It is double-edged in the sense that it slays your usual self and also awakens you to a higher level of consciousness.

Listening to God

Our loving God does not merely talk to us. It is His desire that we also talk to Him. To hear our prayers, our *ardās*. Even our complaints and grudges; they please Him. We may talk to Him, but seldom have patience to wait for hearing his response. Are we really desirous of hearing Him? Do we really stay awake after praying? Or do we tend to slip back into our mundane preoccupations immediately following our prayers?

Today's age, wedded to rationalism and cognitive analytical thought, mocks at one who claims that he hears God. But saints heard Him, the Gurus and Bhaktas heard Him. There are some, even now, who hear Him. Many among us hunger to Hear Him. Yet to most of us, He appears to be frustratingly silent.

Do you really want to hear Him? Then it is quite possible, you may be hearing Him already, or He is giving you the longing to hear Him. If so, tune to Him. Let it happen spontaneously. God does not talk to our heads – these are incredibly filled up with useless debris. He does not talk to our physical senses either. They are clogged with stupid feelings and hungry desires. He communicates with us through our spirit, our *atma*. We, however, do not know where our *atma* is. Nor do we know how to be led by it.

Be sure that God is forgiving and charitable. Do not be burdened under any guilt. If you have ever erred, however seriously, you still can't outdo the generosity of His givenness. Bhakta Ravidas, addressing God, says rather cheekily, yet so truly:

ਜਉ ਧੈ ਹਮ ਨ ਧਾਧ ਕਰੰਤਾ ਅਹੇ ਅਨੈਤਾ ।

ਪਤਿਤ ਪਾਵਨ ਨਾਮੁ ਕੈਸੇ ਹੁੰਤਾ ।

Had we not committed any sins, O Infinite Lord,
How would You have acquired the name: 'Redeemer
of sinners'?

– SGGS p.93

So be assured of His limitless forgiveness. Yet, be humble. Real humility is being open to be guided by Him and to enjoy His Will for us. At first thought, God's Will appears to be alarmingly oppressive and restrictive. One is afraid that one might be commanded to do something embarrassing. Trust Him. No one knows you better than He does. None, other than Him, has your best interest at heart. Fearing God's will is irrational and stupid. He is warm and fascinatingly charming. Let us be prepared to carry out His Will trusting that He loves us and His Love is infinite.

Whoever experienced His Love also found Him awesome. God also speaks to us by awakening a great sense of awe. I am not talking only of the awe produced by His thunder and lightning, fire and wind, or cloudburst and volcano. Every particle of His creation awakens awe mingled with Love. So too with the human heart.

ਨਾਨਕ ਜਿਨ ਮਨਿ ਭਉ ਤਿਨੁ ਮਨਿ ਭਾਉ ॥੨॥

O Nanak, those whose minds are filled with Awe,
They alone have the love of God in their heart.

–SGGS p.465

One morning, I was in the city's main park. I heard a very pleasant squeak from behind. There was a parakeet perched on a *champā* bush. I had never seen such a beautiful bird before. I was grateful that it had called me by that wonderful squeak. Perched by its side were two little black birds. They were gazing round silently but vigilantly. I was filled with amazing peace and incredible attraction to them. I found myself singing:

ਸਾਵਲ ਸੁੰਦਰ ਰਾਮਈਆ । ਮੇਰਾ ਮਨੁ ਲਾਗਾ ਤੋਹਿ ।

O my dark and beautiful Lord, my mind is simply
attached to You.

– SGGS p.335

I could not stir. I was simply mindful of the global glory of God.

ਬਲਿਹਾਰੀ ਕੁਦਰਤਿ ਵਸਿਆ ।

ਤੇਰਾ ਅੰਤੁ ਨ ਜਾਈ ਲਖਿਆ ।

I am a sacrifice unto Your Creation
in which You pervade.
Your limits cannot be known.

– SGGS p.469

Unfortunately, our agenda is always far shallower than God's. We only want a 5-minute session with Him, while He likes us to look for a lifetime of ever increasing intimacy with Him that should culminate in an eternity of incomprehensible closeness.

Hearing God requires sharpening our spiritual hearing so that we should be able to discern His voice.

His voice can emerge also out of the holy congregation, for

... ਵਿਚਿ ਸੰਗਤਿ ਹਰਿ ਪ੍ਰਤੁ ਵਸੈ ਜੀਉ ।

In the holy Congregation, the Lord Himself abides.

– SGGS p.94

Let us be sure that God is always speaking to us. His awesome deeds and His breathtaking Love are ever in conversation with us. Only we have to learn to respond to Him. In case we want to hear him in the tongue with which we are familiar, we should turn to *gurbānī* and to *sādh saṅgat*. To them also we should only respond through our spirit.

JSN

Poetics of Guru Granth Sahib



Poetics today refers to the general laws of literary production. These laws include hermeneutics of life that vary from culture to culture according to its history; and the conventional as well as contrived devices used for articulation and communication. The devices carry the burden of interpretation. Since all the poets of Sri Guru Granth Sahib share the hermeneutic of life and devices, it is possible to talk about the poetics of this Granth. The variations of the poets are only details of their shared repertoire.

In the West, the debate about Poetics was systematised by Aristotle in his work entitled *On the Art of Poetry* in which he distinguished poetry for its plot or mythos and defamiliarised metaphoric diction. When Aristotle was establishing the specific devices of poetry, he was answering Plato who had understood the cosmos as a large ensemble of eidos

that can be intuited rationally. The poetry that did not help in this rational intuition was castigated by Plato in his Republic. To further differentiate poetry Aristotle in his work *On Interpretation* distinguished between propositional or apophantic and non-propositional or non-apophantic speeches. The clash between the two kinds of knowledge has continued in the West even in the writings of Wittgenstein (1889-1951). His *Tractatus* accepts “propositions” containing basic simples as ultimate to know the world, even to know what is “unsayable.” Roman Jakobson, a prominent 20th century theorist of poetics, in his essay “Linguistics and Poetics” theorises the structure of poetry as focused on the message for its own sake. In other words, a poem does not push any propositional truth, it is ‘hesitant’ about it in its poetic specificity. Todorov in his *Introduction to Poetics* extends poetics to linguistics and semiotics to assert the difference of poetical laws.

The poetical laws that organise the sacred poetry of Guru Granth Sahib are free from the Western kind of philosophical and schizophrenic problematics. Its central experience and interpretation of cosmic life is in *Sahaja* that can be translated into English as cosmic balance or cosmic spontaneity. The ultimate purpose of human life in the Guru Granth Sahib is to realise and practice *Vismad* or cosmic wonder originated and epitomised by Waheguru, literally meaning the Guru of Wonder. One has to be in a *Sahaja* relationship with Him and then reorganise interpersonal relationships, politics, society and economics in that cosmic wonder. But what is significant about this message is that the *Vismad* or *Sahaja* state is not bifurcated into knowledge and non-knowledge, propositional and non-propositional. In *Gag Dev Gandhari*, Guru Nanak Dev says:

*Only she pleases the Radiant who is enlightened.
The one enlightenment are simultaneous in Sahaja.*

– SGGS p.459

Love and enlightenment are simultaneous in *Sahaja*, without any conflict. In *Rag Bhairo*, Kabir says: *My being is Ecstatic, the mind has gradually begun to absorb in Sahaja.*

– SGGS p.1158

The form that the poets of Guru Granth Sahib have invented for revealing the Guru of Wonder and His illumined but problematic creation has been named as 'Sahaja Katha'. It can be translated into English as narration (Katha) in cosmic spontaneity. Katha is also exegesis. Words of the story-plot-mythos are quite inadequate because those are shaped by the imaginary and are structured in the cause-effect relationship. At least, that is the Aristotelian sense. But 'Sahaja Katha' is not a tightly structured logical discourse. It cannot be so because of its overarching theme and presence of Nadar/Karm or Divine Grace and Kindness.

Kindness is a gift, it can come without any chain of cause and effect. It gives the *Sahaj Katha* a quantum characteristic. Physicists Max Planck and Niels Bohr had established in 1901 and 1913 respectively that the universe is constituted by moving material radiant objects that do not follow any cause and effect linearity; they move in "leaps". The leap theory is not very far from Nadar that defies any calculation. Some of the lexical and syntactic aspects of the Katha time to explode into *Anhad Nad* (Unstruck Symphony) disturbing the movement of the poetic line to create a

higher harmony. In *Rag Suhi*, Guru Arjan Dev says:

*Sahaja Katha of the radiant is very sweet.
Only rare ones visualise it.
It exceeds with song, sound, play and meetings.
It is beyond life's sounds and pleasures.
It is a rain of the True Quintessence's Nectar.
This Katha is learnt from the Guru.*

– SGGS p.739

It is obvious that *Sahaja Katha* is quintessential in elaborating the higher abstraction of life. It could be like a mathematical construct at one level and at another an abandon of "song, sound, play and meeting." Some post-modern theorists of poetical laws like Derrida, Lyotard influenced by Wittgenstein's "game" theory of language, have given significant importance to the role of play. Through the play of opposed signifieds or conceptual images of signs, one dimensionality of a sign is annulled, the sign becomes multidirectional or multisignifying. The poets of the Granth have used this tensorial lay, especially to redefine or re-articulate their major sign: Akal Purakh or Waheguru. For instance Waheguru commands or places everything in Hukam. In *Japuji* Guru Nanak Dev says:

*It is due to Hukam that beings take forms.
All function within the Commandment, none is outside.*

– SGGS p.1

But at the same time the same commanding Guru of Wonder also has countless musicians around who ply musical instruments and sing the Lord's praise. The commanding character appears to be at variance with the fluidly musical character. The play makes the sign more complex and paradoxical.

The Katha of Guru Granth Sahib has been distinguished from the Katha of the Vedas. In *Raag Sarang*, Guru Angad Dev says in a powerful tone that the Vedic Katha is shaped by the thoughts of charity (*punn*) and sin (*pap*), consideration of heaven and hell, the deceptive caste-hierarchy. (*Sahaja Katha's* round and shaping thought are different. This Katha is "ambrosial, quintessential, enlightening and contemplative" according to the Guru. In *Raag Maru*, Guru Arjan Dev says that the narration is about the non-narratable or *Akath*, and it is narrated by He Himself. In other words the identity of the poet disappears. It becomes one with

the Guru of Wonder, the Timeless Person. Rather than annihilation of identity as is with Buddhism, it is enlarged and integrated with the Light and becomes *jot meh jot*. We can also say that *Sahaja Katha* is the narration of Waheguru by Waheguru Himself. It is also 'Gohaj Katha' which means the mystery of what is.

In *Raag Gauri*, Guru Arjan Dev has said; "Sahaja Katha is a pool of Nectar, the one who imbibes it is relishfully filled". Whereas in the Aristotelian mythos such balances and therapeutically treats lack, the *Sahaja Katha* positively fills, it gives even literal joy and peace or "such". The one who constructs *Sahaja Katha* or is the narrator attracts *vairagis* day and night. *Vairagi* in the conventional sense is one who is detached but in the Guru Granth Sahib, means a disciplined person who is also yearningfully in love with Akal Purakh who Himself is "Rasik Bairagi – the relishfully detached," and pre-inscribed. The narrator of *Sahaja Katha* is the narration of "Rasik Bairag". It is a different kind of emotive experience that cannot be described in the language of English or in the known Indian idiom. "Rasik Bairag" is the emotive experience, unique in poetry of the Guru Granth Sahib.

How to express the unique emotive experience of "Rasik Bairag" in the *Sahaja Katha*? Articulation of the Guru Granth Sahib is the answer. Obviously to theorise the meeting of the seemingly opposed emotions of Rasa or relish and Bairag or detachment, the Indian Rasa poetics were not adequate. If we combine the Rasa theory of Bharat, the Dhvani theories of Anandvardhana and Abhinavgupta, they come to an integral notion of Rasa Dhvani, the suggested Camatkar, meaning crossing the boundaries of denotative (*abhida*), contextual (*tataparya*) and implied (*lakshana*) meanings. The relish or Rasa that arouses from the Dhvani or suggested meaning will be alaukik or supernatural but will not preserve the co-presence of Rasa and Bairag. The signs appear to be contradictory but in the words, the "Rasik Bairag" that constitutes the *Sahaja Katha* has both the components in it: Relish (*Rasa*) and Enlightenment (*Gyan*). Kabir says in *Raag Gauri*, "The one who is ecstatic of Sahaja drinks the divine rasa along with knowledge and contemplation".

Another feature of the *Sahaja Katha* is that it makes possible luminous opening of the "lotus" in the interior of the listener or devotee. The blossoming lotus is symbolic of ancient Buddhism, enthusiastically used by the Sahajyani Buddhist yogis contemporary to the Bhakti movement. With arrival of the nirvanic moment, the lotus opens luminously. The *Sahaja Katha*, through its several devices, makes this opening happen in the reader's or seeker's mind. A contemporary theorist Derek Attridge calls this kind of happening "an event."

In *Sri Raag*, Guru Nanak Dev says: "The lotus has luminously opened inside, filled to the brim with Nectar" (*antar kamal pargasya amrit bharya aghai*) (Shabdarth, 26). The Guru further says "the lotus has luminously opened, Sahaja contemplation has begun," In *Raag Sorath*, Guru Amar Das has said "When the lotus luminously opens, it absorbs in the Beloved's Love, the Unstruck Sabda is played. In fact the verb used is in the past tense: *vajaya*, indicating that the Unstruck Sabda has been experienced. Further, "The body and mind have become pure and absorbed in Truth of the True." The *Sahaja Katha* is not only a witness but also transformational. If transformation has not occurred, the lotus has not opened in the heart, and so according to Bhagat Trilochan in *Raag Gujri*, "there is no justification for becoming a monk".

For articulating and combining such witness with transformational effect, the Katha has used several devices. The most vital one is the poetic line of excess. The poetic line of excess here means sound-combinations that cross all semantic and paradigmatic boundaries. The words are border-crossers. For instance in Japuji when Guru Nanak Dev says in Pauri 10: "Hearing Him equals the bathing of sixty eight holy places/Hearing Him gives the concentration of Sahaja" the Guru's Hearing exceeds its meaning, it also clashes with several paradigms related to Brahmanical and yogic beliefs. Such excess is further extended by repetition. Repetition substantially adds to excess when in Pauri 10, infinity is invoked through the word "Countless":

Countless (Your) Names, countless dwellings

Inaccessible, inaccessible are Your countless spheres

– SGGS p.4

In Punjabi, the words used are *asankh* and *agamm*.

Repetition is a very powerful in the *Sahaja Katha*. We know from Nietzsche's philosophy of "eternal

recurrence" that it is "continually creative". In every moment repetition reveals an undisclosed aspect of the Other. A Jewish French philosopher Levinas calls the undisclosed aspect of being as 'ipseity selfhood', it is love vibrating over and over. Gilles Deleuze, another French philosopher, considers repetition as "singular". It is private, meditational and universal.

Another distinctive feature of *Sahaja Katha* is that it is set to several kinds of music. For instance Guru Ram Das's *Karhale* is a representative example of this kind of experimental hybridity to reveal excess. *Karhalas* were the songs of haunting tunes sung by some unknown traders usually riding camels. The hymns composed by the Guru are also assigned to *Raag Gauri Purabi* of contemplative consciousness and awe. The music of Punjabi language, the tune of *Karhale* and *Raag Gauri Purabi*'s notes have been combined in a symphonic structure. When the Guru addresses the mind as *Karhala* with the restlessness of a camel and asks it to discipline itself for meeting the Beloved, such asking in three kinds of music produces a complex semiotic, integrating emotion discipline and immediacy. The sign *Karhale* is transformed into a sign expressing cosmic restlessness in a haunting phonology.

The various signs used by the poets of the Guru Granth Sahib are also historically mediated. When meeting with the Divine Beloved occurs, energy begins to flow unchecked, but is expressed through signs that are based in historical consciousness, sensitive to what is going on. When Guru Nanak Dev says in *Raag Majh*: "You alone are the banker, the rest of the world is a trader" and Guru Arjan Dev utters in *Raag Asa*: "The True Guru is the banker and disciples are traders, Capital of the Quintessence and account the cumulated Truth". The signs are conscious of exchange and capital transactions not only in India but also in other continents. The distinction of this sign usage is that its significance is being transferred. The trade that was profit oriented and became the base of modern capitalism, has been given the Guru's ideal or "ought" related meanings extending to the Divine Beloved and a higher ethics. Guru Arjan Dev in *Raag Majh* and Guru Nanak Dev in the same *Raag* use the sign *bohitha* or ship. "The sea, waves, anxiety of the world are crossed in the ship of the Guru."

Travels over the oceans in ships had become quite common in the times of the Gurus. Explorations of Asia and Africa were already shaping European

imperialism and future Empires. An Arab traveller Ibn Batuta visited India in the 14th century whereas the Portuguese Vasco Da Gama came in the 15th century. The historical sensitivity of the Granth makes its narrative mediative although when meeting with the Guru of Wonder occurs, it is direct, leaving behind all mediations. The constant burden of mediation and directness gives these signs a specificity that can be interpreted by combing historical and phenomenological disciplines.

Another marked feature of the *Sahaja Katha* of Granth Sahib is that it continues its concern for reconstructing the present with the future. For that reason it is critical of those who are blocking the flow of the Divine Beloved into social networks. Guru Nanak Dev's severe criticism of the "blood suckers of human kind" is given in *Raag Majh*. Bhagat Parmanand's disapproval of the "violent" who have not purified themselves by the mediation of saints is a very representative example of the socially conscious signifiers that function with the utopia of constructing the "pure" or *nirmal* mind to be fully human and be with the Divine Beloved.

Certain signs that had become symbols of false and decadent beliefs and degrading women were given alternate concepts. In *Asa di Var* Guru Nanak Dev explodes the myth of *Sutak*, birth time impurity. The Guru calls mental greed and false speech as *Sutak*. Birth and death are understood as happening within the Divine Beloved's command. Guru Amar Das in *Raag Suhi* redefines *Satis* as those women who do not burn themselves on the pyres of their husbands. He says that *Satis* are those who are destroyed by the separation of the Beloved.

This paper suggests that no construct of the poetics of Sri Guru Granth Sahib interdisciplinary efforts are to be made. The potential laws that emanate from the Granth, especially from its original form *Sahaja Katha*, need insights from quantum physics, literature, music, philosophy anthropology, psychology and semiotics.

The poetics of the Granth Sahib should really be named as Transpoetics.

Gurbhagat Singh

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"How To Hear God's Multiple Voices"?

Bhai Baldeep Singh, the Founder and Managing Trustee of the ANAD Foundation invited Dr. Balbinder Singh Bhogal from York University, Toronto, to give the first in a series of lectures at the Amaltas Hall of the Indian Habitat Centre on 21 April 2007. The very well attended lecture was titled: *How to hear God's multiple voices: the silence of obedience and expectation*. It pursues the urgent contemporary question of how to engage with the 'other'. The lecture was organized into three contrasting pairs: desire vs. begging/service, silence of obedience or silence of expectation, and theatrical speech vs. dramatic speech.

Dr Balbinder Singh differentiated between the indirect practice of speaking about something as against the mode of speaking to someone. Characterising the former as an ideological construct which forms 'Sikh-ism' as a system of belief, doctrine and theology, he called for a re-understanding of, and return to, Sikhi in the latter more direct form of communication, as a way of connecting with other. For Dr Bhogal this is significant since he argues, 'listening and being heard are the foundation of all ethics'.

Dr Balbinder Singh placed truth not in a realm of knowing but doing - a praxis between people and thereby kept clear of the relativist stance. This allowed him to explore a different approach to scripture, shifting from an impersonal context of fixing textual meaning, to one of an ongoing personal communication concerning an ethical relation to the other. While cherishing Sikhi as a celebration of difference, he pointed out how the poetic genre of Sikh scripture lacks the imperative mode of legislating laws - which are given in prose. He argued that an over reliance on the focus upon something may lead to the commodification of the Guru Granth Sahib, whereas a return to scripture as a speaking to someone cultivates an openness to listen to the voice of the other.

In his response Dr Akhtarul Wasey (Dept. of Islamic Studies, Jamia Millia Islamia) argued that there may be a subtle coercion in the mode of speaking to someone if it is understood as 'mutually transformative'. "Why should at all there be a need for any transformation whatsoever in someone who has a firm belief in the truth of one's faith? The very act of dialogue presupposes that the two or more people coming together to share their perceptions about their faiths have firm faith in their religion being true". Bhogal, however, argued from the point of humility and



Dr. Balbinder Singh Bhogal interacting with a member of the audience.

unknowing that is amply demonstrated in Sikh sacred writings where the truth cannot be fully known nor owned by any one group or religion, as for him, truth is a joint project across cultures, not the prerogative of any one. Although Muslims do not believe in coercion, they do engage in persuasion. Following Bhogal's argument, the relevant question would be: does not the art of persuasion also demand a silence of obedience?

After Dr Akhtarul Wasey's response, Professor JPS Uberoi invited the various discussants of the panel for their comments. Dr Jaswant Singh Neki talked about the limitations of both sensory and mental faculties, which are paradoxically only complete when they are closed off and one withdraws to an interior space of consciousness beyond the five senses and the mind. He argued that when one is in tune with consciousness itself beyond the mediation of the mind and senses the possibility of new or 'revelatory' and universal experiences arise. Rather than locate truth only within (*simran*), Bhogal foregrounded the importance of an ethical relation to the other (*seva*), but it is clear that both 'remembrance of God/Truth' should not be done at the expense of serving others.

Similarly, Baba Sarabjot Singh Bedi talked about the importance to realise who one is and that God's multiple voices lie within - an observation that Bhogal's talk did not cover. Though this insight (that the multiplicity of God's voices do not lie



Artist Kamleshwar Singh presents his poster with a caricature to Dr. Balbinder Singh Bhogal.



Professor Jeet Pal Singh Uberoi and Dr. Jaswant Singh Neki.



Devatma Kaur, Nirinjan Kaur and Luigi Hari Tehel Singh.



Bhai Baldeep Singh introduces his student Devatma Kaur to Baba Sarabjot Singh Bedi.

only on the outer realm) seems to side-step the main focus of Bhogal's lecture (how to come to terms with multiple revelations 'given' to different communities) it highlighted the perception that the truth is not limited in time and space but continues to reveal itself through those who listen to the voice within and find no contradiction among the voices who are in tune with truth though they express themselves in different languages.

Professor Bhagwan Josh (Centre for Historical Studies, JNU), visibly inspired by the lecture, discussed how it reminded him of Professor M.S. Diwana's radical lectures in the 1960s that struck up an innovative and revealing relation between Guru Nanak and Modern American Poets like Alan Ginsberg and Walt Whitman along the theme of human alienation. Professor Josh argued that underlying both disparate camps was also an appeal to a certain 'connectivity' which is always expressed 'creatively' and that those that are 'awake' share a common world, yet those that are asleep are lost in worlds of their own making. Bhogal emphasised that



Baba Sarabjot Singh Bedi, Prof. J P S Uberoi and Dr. J S Neki.

amongst those that are awake, the Sikh vision of the 'common world' is always inclusive of difference and diversity – hence the multiple and non-Sikh voices of the Guru Granth Sahib.

Dr Renuka Singh commented upon some points of similarity and difference between Buddhist and Sikh beliefs and practices. She pointed out how a silence of



Dr. Jaswant Singh Neki with Devatma Kaur.



Prof. Akhtarul Wasey, Baba Sarabjot Singh Bedi and other members of the audience.

expectation could be understood as a future-orientated discourse, which may forsake a listening in the present moment. However, Dr Bhogal's delineation of the silence of obedience and expectation through examples of dialogue always prefigures an engagement in the present. In terms of an ethics of relation she asked what better model could there be than that of the mother and child relation, pointing out that a child remains in silence for a long time before uttering its first words. Such attentive and transformative listening forms an interesting model for inter-religious dialogue that resonated well with the key theme of Dr Bhogal's lecture of not only hearing God's multiple voices but also learning how to speak them. In other words, despite the fact that the female voice is missing from the Guru Granth Sahib, the feminine mode is very much present in the acknowledgment that we are all brides of the one male God.



Ustad R Fahimuddin Dagar, Founder Trustee of ANAD Foundation, honoring Prof. Akhtarul Wasey.



Bhai Baldeep Singh, Founder and Managing Trustee of ANAD Foundation, introducing the lecture.

Professor JPS Uberoi chaired the discussion and by way of conclusion remarked that scriptures are never scriptures independent of the communities that make them sacred: it is the congregation (sangat) which transforms the Adi Granth (Primordial Book) into the Guru Granth Sahib. This supports Dr Bhogal's contention that the academic study of scripture should focus less on doctrines and more on the lived practice of tradition, that is the shift from talking about something to talking to someone.

The lecture left many with the request that similar evenings should become regular events on the Delhi Calendar. Kavi Tejpal Singh Tulsi, a trustee of the board for the Anad Foundation, summed up the emotion well, when he said that it was "the most rewarding evening" of his life.

God's Multiple Voices

The silence of obedience and expectation

*H*ow to hear God's multiple voices?
Listen.

If the subject is God's multiple voices, then it is natural to assume an inter-religious dialogue. To some extent I want to explore what makes inter-religious dialogue religious? Is it merely people from one religion talking to people from another religion? Or is there a specifically religious way to interact with others? Are we merely talking about religion, as though it were an object whose contours we can define? Or, are we attempting to talk to each other in a religious way that makes our dialogue mutually transformative? In the case of forums like this one are we merely talking about religion or are we practicing religion in our dialogue? My assumption to start with is that there can and should be a religious dimension to dialogue, that it should move beyond talking about something to talking directly to someone.

Throughout this talk I will focus on the Sikh tradition and its scripture. This is not to promote Sikhism as the tradition with all the answers, but rather to utilise this tradition and its scripture because inter-religious dialogue in play, and the way other traditions and religions are treated therein, offers us a new way to rethink interreligious dialogue. In particular, the Sikh tradition and scripture introduces the possibility to shift the framework from a focus on theology, doctrine, belief, indeed "religion" (the rather impersonal talking about something universal and abstract), to another framework that reflects a personally engaged praxis with the other in the living contexts of the everyday (the consequence of talking directly to someone). Within the Sikh tradition there is a remarkable resistance to 'talking about something' and an almost wholesale focus on 'talking to someone'. This bias is crucial and its significance has too often been overlooked.

James Carse, a retired professor of English at Columbia University, New York, writes,

*In declaring our beliefs we talk about something,
in crying out for help we speak to someone.*

This is fundamental to realise in terms of the Guru Granth Sahib; its style, typical of the *bhakti/bhagati* genre, is the cry of help to someone and not a declaration of beliefs about something. It is often assumed that to have an interreligious dialogue, one has to have something to talk about, rather than engage in an ethics of speaking directly to someone. Thus the Guru Granth's intimately personal cry to a lost lover and His embrace is transformed into an abstract philosophy about some theology; whether named monotheism, monism, pantheism matters little.

The Japji which prefaces the Guru Granth Sahib is the closest Guru Nanak came to talking about the Way [walking the truth] – yet even there it constantly returns to the trope of the indescribable. That is to say, the Gurus fully understood that whichever about is pursued in whichever genre, it is always shot through with the unsayable: the third stanza (*pauri*) of the Japji states,

*No matter how much anyone tries to explain and
describe them,*

the actions of the Creator cannot be counted.

ਸਭਨਾ ਲਿਖਿਆ ਵੁੜੀ ਕਲਮ

Indeed, in the same verse, Guru Nanak asks:

*Who knows how to write this account [of the Creator's
creation]?*

ਏਹੁ ਲੇਖਾ ਲਿਖ ਜਾਣੈ ਕੈਏ

Just imagine what an immense scroll it would take!

ਲੇਖਾ ਲਿਖਿਆ ਕੇਤਾ ਹੋਇ

And then immediately shifts from the indirect about to the talking to someone directly ie. God:

What power! What fascinating beauty!

ਕੇਤਾ ਤਾਨੁ ਸੁਆਲਿਹੁ ਰੂਪੁ ॥

And what gifts! Who can know their extent?

ਕੇਤੀ ਦਾਤਿ ਜਾਣੈ ਕੋਣੁ ਕੁਤੁ ॥

*You created the vast expanse of the Universe with One
Word!*

ਕੀਤਾ ਪਸਾਉ ਏਕੋ ਕਵਾਉ ॥

Hundreds of thousands of rivers began to flow.
ਤਿਸਤੇ ਹੋਏ ਲਖ ਦਰੀਆਉ ॥

How can Your Creative Potency be described?
ਕੁਦਰਤਿ ਕਵਣ ਕਹਾ ਵੀਚਾਰ ॥

I cannot even once be a sacrifice to You.
ਵਾਰਿਅ ਨ ਜਾਵਾ ਏਕ ਵਾਰ ॥

Whatever pleases You is the only good done,
ਜੋ ਤੁਧੁ ਭਾਵੈ ਸਾਈ ਭਲੀ ਕਾਰ ॥

You, Eternal and Formless One!
ਤੂੰ ਸਦਾ ਸਲਾਮਤਿ ਨਿਰੰਕਾਰ ॥

Note how the tone changes when we ourselves talk about something compared to when we talk directly to someone. Imagine talking to a philosopher and then to your lover. Out of a passionate love Guru Nanak speaks directly to God and to the lost soul in all of us, mimicking that very lost soul himself.

I want to discuss three conceptual pairs that spring from this difference of talking about some thing or to someone. All of these are taken from the 1985 work of James Carse's *The Silence of God*. These are: desiring or begging, the silence of obedience or the silence of expectation, and theatrical or dramatic speech.

First Pair: Desire or Begging?

When it comes to the religious, we are beset with a bewildering diversity. I want to highlight a particular problem that rarely gets asked and that is: Why does the One Universal God never speak univocally nor universally, assuming, of course, we can talk about something or someone as the "One Universal God" given the existence of Buddhism and Taoism. Indeed this "one universal God" speaks through a particular person, or thing, at a particular time, within a particular language, located in a particular place and culture. If we are to hold on to the notion of the universal One here, we would have to work into that notion some relation to the obvious plurality – *ek* is always *anek*. That is to say, one would have to accept that the One always speaks with many voices. Or, am I wrong? Perhaps there is one true revelation, and God has only spoken once, to one people. If so, how are we to decide amongst the Torah, New Testament, Quran, etc, let alone amongst the respective communities that have all given to birth outstanding figures? Or, perhaps there have been multiple revelations and it is a matter of degrees: all we have to do is decide which one is truer than the others. But surely Jews would nominate the Torah, Christians the New Testament and so on. To hear God's multiple voices requires

a little more of us than these backward and tired avenues of exclusive self-centredness.

The Sikh scripture and tradition provides an opportunity to think otherwise. For the Sikhs, plurality is a fundamental principle, given that the Guru Granth Sahib itself accepts this plurality within its own writing the 'revelations' given to others, that is non-Sikhs, Namdev, Ravidas, Kabir, Sheikh Farid, to name a few. The point here is that one must view the One God through the many. One cannot view this One God through any one singular narrative on its own. This is a radical and revolutionary insight. If we are seriously in love with, and yearn to know, the One Universal Being, then that very love behoves us to go beyond our own tradition, does it not? Because relying on our own tradition, will only grant at best a partial truth – after all we are not talking about a finite object, but the infinite nature of existence. Is this not a critique of those scriptures that claim exclusive ownership of the truth? This is not, however, to lay the claim and the blame for exclusive notions of Truth at the feet of Jews, Christians and Muslims alone. But rather to acknowledge within these traditions the structural shifts that characterised their expansion from speaking to someone to speaking for and over people about something such as the "good news" or the "miracle of the recitation". This is highly significant and relevant to today's time and context, especially in contrast to the Judeo-Christian-Islamic mono-theistic traditions – from which the terms 'religion', 'monotheism' and 'morality' derive.

Perhaps the unavoidable plurality and inherent intertextuality implied by this new trajectory of thinking, was always the case, such that in the history of the growth of various monotheisms a move can be discerned that shifts away from the heterogeneous towards the homogenous. I would like to reframe that move in terms of the shift from speaking to someone directly to speaking about something indirectly. Compare for example Jesus' conversations with his disciples and Paul's later theology. Or, Muhammad's communication or recitations with Gibriil as compared with the later theologies developed by various philosophers and their traditions of interpretation. In other words there seems to be an unavoidable shift from the complexity, diversity and ungeneralisability of talking to someone from specific contexts, to the relative simplicity of talking about an agreed upon system of belief or doctrine, regardless of persons and contexts.

The revelations that form the Guru Granth Sahib occurred over five centuries, and so come from diverse

sources: 6 Sikh Gurus form Gurbani, 15 Sants form Bhagat-bani, yet the voice of the ordinary person is also included: in the verses of 12 eulogists or court poets, as well as 4 devotee-minstrels of the Guru's family, including three hymns by Guru Nanak's Muslim friend and musician, Mardana. These 37 individuals come from vastly different backgrounds and castes. The Guru Granth Sahib includes the voice of a weaver, a barber, a cobbler, a farmer, a prince, a calico-painter, numerous fakirs, vaishyas and siddhas. As such the Guru Granth Sahib bridges the Abrahamic traditions via the Muslim Sufi voice as well as the multiple Indic voices (be they Brahmanic, Vaishnavite, Buddhist or Tantric). It is hard to ignore that Sikh Scripture is profoundly heterogeneous. This uniqueness pertains to the insight that the Guru's voice contains the voice of the other as its own. This reflects the risk, opportunity and wonder of living with others, since the voice of the other is always plural, unpredictable, and quite often, otherwise.

Whilst the Guru Granth Sahib evidences a new plurality of voices in resonance and harmony, Sikh history also houses this newness in practice. For example Guru Nanak traveled for more than two decades meeting people from vastly different contexts, languages, traditions and practices. His wisdom thus does not speak of textual, doctrinal learning, but lived engagements, and years of direct communication with the other: person to person. He walked his talk and listened to the responses. His vocabulary and views are a rich harvest of those engagements. Notably Sikh scripture and tradition reflect a long series of personal engagements with the complexity of lived traditions. It seems to me that the lived event of engaging with the other is the foundation of Sikhi, not a doctrine. And when that engagement becomes true, then there is no other (*avar na duja*) since every other reflects God.

The Sikh One then is a plural One. A "singular" voice expressed through difference and multiplicity in harmonic resonance. Guru Nanak keenly understood that the voice of the Guru cannot be owned by any one group alone: the True Guru is profoundly human but also completely cross-cultural. The speaking of the Guru thus inevitably transgresses any and all boundaries (of caste, language, tradition). And this insight sets the Sikh Gurus clearly apart from past Prophets and scriptures, although, it must be said, that the voice of the female is missing – since all 37 of those included in the Guru Granth Sahib are men. Transgression of tradition, of patriarchy,

of caste, of divisive notions of purity/impurity is, however, significant. This is because law is the essential structure of the boundary. Yet the Sikh Gurus resisted forming a body of law, injunctions, creeds, commandments; instead their law or divine ordinance (*hukam*) cannot be written, and this is because love (*bhagati*) was their focus, and love transgresses and dissolves any and every boundary. Love is not and can never become Law – that much is obvious to those that have entered any relationship intimately.

The fact that Mardana's 'ordinary' voice is not silenced by the power of Guru Nanak's 'extraordinary' voice, relates a key openness to the voice of every human being. Indeed, that his voice makes it into the voice of the Guru Granth Sahib, supports my argument that Sikh scripture concerns a mode of personal address that evokes a response; it is not about agreement but reciprocation. In other words Guru Nanak's explanatory silence is a deep and profound one that encourages an expectancy of another voice to come and simultaneously celebrates the otherness of the voice always already present. The Sikh voice of revelation does not obliterate Mardanas, or the Bhattas, but expects reciprocation that most if not all other forms of revelation undermine, disallow, or consciously overwrite. The Guru Granth Sahib encourages a reciprocation of between and across voices through song, conversation, communication, and practical engagement. This is to say that the Guru's voice is always already speaking through each and every form – but we need to cultivate a selfless listening to hear it and voice it.

This openness to the voice across traditions, peoples and languages – what I am summarising as the 'voice of the other' as necessary to comprehending the truth of the one universal being – can be condensed in a simple statement: One could say that form is revelation. This is because Guru Nanak sees God everywhere, *jaha dekha taha deen diaalaa*, every form sings of Him. However, Form as revelation cannot be contained, since Form as God is ever new, ever fresh: *sahib mera nit nava sadaa sadaa dataaruu*. As a consequence just as God is unsayable so is His form as creation unnameable. Form therefore always contains the possibility of the 'otherwise'.

Guru Nanak could hear God's multiple voices because he was open and attuned to this infinite form in the most practical way: he embarked upon four major journeys to meet the other in all its social, religious, and linguistic diversity and richness. For

him, form and event are the key sources of true revelation: the Satguru speaks *hukam* through the event of forms. Given this insight of form and event as revelation of satiguru, Guru Nanak understood well how the ordinary could become the extraordinary, the 'secular' could become the 'sacred'. This is why Sikhs constantly conflate, juxtapose and interpenetrate opposed boundaries – between Hindu pantheism, Muslim monotheism and Buddhist emptiness, the saint, householder and the warrior-king, that is to say that the boundaries of religious, civil and state power are dissolved by a sophisticated and nondual overlapping. In short, the Sikh vision provides a profound affirmation of the song of life.

Thus the Guru's or God's voice is always a collective endeavour – and collective here resists formulation under any one group, ideology or practice. No group could ever claim to own the truth or the True ones exclusively. The true belong not to a religion, nation nor country, but to a 'world-body' not yet imagined. *Sat-sangat*, the company of the true is a radical political philosophy in as much as it is a revolutionary religiosity: it means that being a Sikh, i.e., being true, one has to join hands with the other, however far afield.

So it is quite clear that the Sikh notion of the One God includes many voices – it is not an exclusive God nor a Jealous God, but a God that incorporates otherness as part of its self-definition: a Sikh cannot be a Sikh without loving the other. However to include the voice of the other is not an uncritical enterprise. What is criticised is when the universal is claimed by one particular people over others. There is no relativism here, where you have your truth and I have mine. On the contrary, Sikhi fundamentally demands an ethical praxis of relating to the other.

The Sikh scripture thus begins by embracing the diversity of creation, and assumes an inter-religious dialogue right from the beginning. This, I think, is unprecedented in the history of religious sacred writing. What are the implications of this insight?

If we are to speak to someone rather than about something, then the first thing that must not happen is to talk to someone about one's own scripture as universally applicable, but listen to the voices of the other as possibly constitutive of one's own truth. In other words, we have to learn how to substitute desire with begging, theology with prayer.

Using theology or doctrine to make supplication possible is to get things the wrong way round. The

Gurus had no interest in theology per se, they were solely dedicated to speaking to the divine from their hearts in praise, song, supplication, petition and prayer (*ardaas*). What we are talking about here is the attitude of the beggar and the disposition of the servant. Begging and seva are genuine according to their origin not their content. The religious seems to be concerned with our ability to beg and serve from a selfless heart and not from formulating prayers that sound like instructions for God, nor from performing 'good deeds' mechanically. As Carse notes, "Begging comes from need, [and as such] only the poor can be beggars." We could add that *seva* comes from those that lack a sense of self-interest, thus only the selfless 'nobody' can truly serve.

This is a significant distinction in terms of the mode of expression in the Sikh Scripture which is primarily in the form of prayer spoken to someone rather than as a theology of speaking about something – hence the resistance to systematise or theologise its contents as distinct from the poetic need to speak to someone and be heard. If theology reflects a desire to understand, explain, own and know truth, then begging and serving imply pain, loss, need, necessity, compassion and wonder at the Unknowable.

As such Desire reflects a speaking about something – which often leads to speaking for, over, and across others. It is therefore a secondary and dispensable mode. The ego's desire is always about and for itself. This infatuation is a blindness to the other and the needs of the moment. Such that when someone desires something from you, it is easy to detect its secondary and dispensable nature, as a parent of two boys I know this well!

But *Begging* and *Serving* reflect a 'speaking' to someone – and as such represent primary and indispensable modes of engaging with the other; the former concerns our own needs, that latter focuses entirely on the needs of those being served. Both begging and serving are forms of prayer. When my son, who is hanging on for dear life over a cliff's edge, cries "Daddy help!!!", then, he is praying. For in prayer we beg for what we cannot live without, and yet cannot obtain by our own devices. The reason most people do not pray is simply because they do not feel themselves to be that close to death, and thus believe they have time to talk about and ask for things.

Guru Nanak says,

(*Guru Granth Sahib: 1410, Raag: Salok Vaaraan te Vadheek, M1*)

O my mind, do not waver or walk on the crooked path; take the straight true path.

ਰੇ ਮਨਡੀਗਿ ਨ ਡੋਲੀਐ ਸੀਧੈ ਮਾਰਗਿ ਧਾਉ ॥

The terrible tiger is behind you, and the pool of fire is ahead.

ਪਾਛੈ ਬਾਘੁ ਡਰਾਵਣੇ ਆਗੈ ਮਗਨਿ ਤਲਾਉ ॥

My soul is skeptical and doubtful, but I cannot see any other way to go.

ਸਹਜੈ ਜੀਅਰਾ ਪਰਿ ਰਹਿਓ ਮਾ ਕਉ ਅਵਰੁ ਨ ਢੰਗੁ ॥

O Nanak, as Gurmukh, dwell with your Beloved Lord, and you shall be saved.

ਨਾਨਕ ਗੁਰਮੁਖਿ ਛੁਟੀਐ ਹਰਿ ਪ੍ਰੀਤਮ ਸਿਉ ਸੰਗੁ ॥

That is a moment of prayer not philosophy. If every situation in life is actually like this rather dramatic picture then one would not think to hard about things, one would cry out for help as a matter of dire urgency. Carse writes, "What I desire I cannot beg for because my existence is not at stake." Thus prayer or religious speech is an indispensable mode of communication. When Guru Nanak says we have four days (Adi Granth: 689) to live – our existence is truly at stake, but will we cry for help? Or, will we hide safely behind the comforts of silent obedience? Who would stand publicly as a beggar in a silence of expectation? In other words, who is truly in love?

Speaking about something or speaking for someone is seen in the desire to name, fix and therefore possess and repeat a message or theology across the world. But what is religious about a statement of belief? Is it merely an attempt to manufacture order before we act? The religious cannot be sorted out before action, it is integral to every action. What is the use of demonstrating our understanding about God, if we do not act with virtue and engage with others? The outcome will be a desire about something (the commodification of the Adi Granth into an object of desire that people can own, repeat and disseminate world-wide) and not to a life-or-death petition to someone. The difference between the two is vast.

Sikh praise and petition in the Guru Granth Sahib is a primary mode of speech. It is absolutely vital to cry out to God, that is pray for help, at least acknowledge His Doing as the only Doing. My son demonstrates an absolute helplessness, and the crucial need for help. Adults rarely cry and pray like children, they are too convinced of the efficacy of their own egos. Yet the Sikh Gurus constantly refer to their own helplessness and their utter need and dependency upon God's grace and will. The Gurus see quite clearly how we all hang on the

cliff's edge of life's every situation – and most of us don't cry for help but struggle vainly on (in blind ignorance).

However, it is not easy to beg, to open up to the vulnerable space of humility for it is far easier to shift to an impersonal space of talking about something. Or in terms of *seva*, one need only reflect how much easier it is to serve one's own interests. This is why many people reject the religious. They want proof before they believe – they want the demonstration of one theological truth before they will commit, and this is never answered because, as in life, Carse notes, one cannot "avoid the embarrassment of standing there before [God's presence] with nothing but a longing heart." Another way of understanding this is that we do not hear a voice but acquire a voice. This is because when speech is prayer it is said in an unmistakeable voice. The difference between my son and Guru Nanak is that my son cries out of fear whereas Guru Nanak sung out of wisdom accepting whatever occurs as God's doing and that being always 'good': *jo tudh bhaavai saaii bhalii kaar*. This fearlessness and trust gave Guru Nanak a new voice, such that his hearing the voice of God was also an acquiring of a voice beyond self interest.

In this respect, revelation is not so much about the passing on of God's Word, as learning what speaking really means, a speaking beyond the selfishness of the 'I'. This transforms how one communicates to others, which is much more personal, direct and intimate. Sikh revelation demonstrates a mode of speaking more than it delivers us a particular belief system – whose point is to get us to sing about our wondrous and indescribable Lover in collective harmony, rather than proselytise about Sikh monotheism and morality. The Sikh scripture is inclusive and sets up an expectation for a response. It is not an absolute authority that speaks over and silences all: it expects a response and waits to hear a voice that often sings through tears.

What revelation aims at is not content, endless lists of rules and regulations, systems and definitions of what this reality is really about, because this results in taking away the responsibility to suffer the truth as one's own project. If we were told the answers we would never pray for help in the exams of each situation. Praying for (God's) help is necessary to be true. This is not an injunction as something one must remember to do, but arises from an existential wisdom born from the repeated experience of the failure of the ego's will in contrast to a higher ordinance – eventually, some realise that one has to submit to God's will – precisely because it is unknowable.

The Sikh Gurus in the Guru Granth Sahib do not explain nor clarify the mystery of things, but awaken us to the mystery. Walter Benjamin's astute insight is helpful here: "Truth is not a matter of exposure which destroys the secret, but a revelation which does justice to it." The Guru Granth Sahib is a revelation that does justice to the wonder of life – it does not expose its secret. In other words, truth is not merely about this or that, but rather concerns a primary and existentially intense mode of becoming. Its poetic begging avoids a philosophical prose that desires to capture the essence of things. The attitude of the beggar is utter humility that arises from an ecstasy of wonder – which works against any possibility that we could ever present ourselves as speakers of absolute truths. Indeed, there can be no inter-religious dialogue with such an exclusive attitude; rather than invite a free response, it demands an absolute silence of obedience.

Second Pair: Silence of Obedience or Silence of Expectation?

ਮੋਚੈ ਮੋਚਿ ਨ ਹੋਵਈ ਜੇ ਮੋਚੀ ਲਖ ਵਾਰ ॥

By thinking, He cannot be reduced to thought, even by thinking hundreds of thousands of times.

These opening lines of the Guru Granth Sahib [similar to the Tao Te Ching]: has the Word (of God) as that which cannot be spoken as the Word (of God) i.e. when Guru Nanak receives and gives the Word of God, he is very careful to make clear that this Word cannot be given as the Word of God – highlighting that revelation must be understood in a very particular way. When the Guru Granth begins with the notion that the Word of God cannot be spoken as the Word of God, then there is always a silence that goes along with every word sung and written. This theme of undescribability, or the non-literalness of the Word of God is found even in the Abrahamic traditions.

The Truth or the Word of God cannot be given without also being qualified in some way or other. This provides an important deconstructive limit to all that is and could be said about its meaning, and denies legitimacy to all potential theologies that would pretend to have captured what scripture really means, whether done by Sahib Singh or Bhai Vir Singh, or me. For Sikhs, speech (divine or not) cannot lessen the mystery of life. However, ignoring such a limit, believing that speech can capture God or Truth produces a Theology of Sikhism which promotes an authoritarian silence of obedience. As Carse notes, "The Silence of obedience is that form of silence which brings our speech to an end". We defer

responsibility to those who have been deemed superior to us. What would initiate a silence of expectation in the Sikh tradition, and thus revive our own voices? Well, to recall for Guru Nanak, God, Truth, the Way remains a profound open-ended mystery and wonder. When *vismaad*, or *Wah, Wah, Waheguru*, is remembered then a silent expectation begins to grow quite naturally – one which humbly opens to *hukam* more earnestly and freely.

In this regard scriptures, to varying degrees and emphasises, can become those kind of texts that do not so much tell us what is real, as expect a response from us to complete whatever it is they are saying. In other words the mode of scripture is more a silence than a speaking. And that silence is a silence of expectation: God as the Lover is waiting for our response. Guru Nanak is not an entertainer, he's a beggar, beseeching God, with the strong implication that we too should beg for God's truth, guidance and illumination.

Thus, if we understand revelation less as hearing a voice and more as acquiring a voice (beyond the ego), then it becomes clear that scripture is also a silence, a patient listening. But it is a precise kind of silence, however, one that makes true speech possible. This is what is required today; not those that shout they have the exclusive truth, but true speakers. Even in everyday interaction, I am in an all too real sense utterly dependent upon the silent listening of the other to be able to speak at all. Carse argues "It is not because I think, but because I am heard, that I am." Thus how we hear God's multiple voices, or the voice of the other, is actually crucial to the integrity and transformation of our own voice. In this regard listening and being heard are the foundations of all ethics. This is why Carse argues that "A genuine silence of expectation can occur only when one person listens to another in a circumstance of equal and shared humanity".

Here the goal is not merely to repeat the speech of those that have gone before us, but to speak in our own voice to someone directly. The silence of obedience on the other hand, produces a speech in the imperative mode that is inherently contradictory. It is speech meant to end speech. When the King speaks you must be silent; God's revealed speech is different, He expects our response. The imperative speaker has no one to speak to, only persons to speak for – or persons whose voice is but an extension of the Master's. Sikh scripture largely lacks the imperative mode, it does not wield a list of "thou shalt nots", as I have said, it is not law giving; rather than demanding obedience, it expects another voicing – hence the thousands of songs and

raag structure of the Guru Granth Sahib. Where else is the silence of expectation most acute than when lovers communicate? It should be obvious that the Guru Granth Sahib is a casket of love letters sung to the Supreme Person. And all those in love know that the primary mode of that love is an expansive song full of the silence of awaiting a response.

Carse argues that speech in the expectant mode is not contradictory but reciprocal. In speaking to you expectantly I do not intend to bring your speaking to an end, but to bring my own speaking to an end – and to bring it to an end in such a way that it makes your speaking possible. The reciprocity consists in the fact that if you do not respond to what I have said, I have not spoken to you at all. God, Sikh Gurus, Bhagats and Sants want a response, not obedience. They want you to join in the song cries for the Beloved. Sacred writing is not given as the Word of God literally because God is always the supreme Listener – enwrapped in the most profound silence precisely to give birth to true speakers. Just as the *shabad* tends towards *anahad shabad*, so too do names tend towards the Nameless. One is not therefore only to listen to scripture for the answers, but respond to the call of God's silence with one's own developing and ongoing answers, actions. How can you truly join in the cultivation of a voice beyond *haumai*, if you do not yet feel the pain of this lost Lover's silence? Most people live under security blankets of shallow contentment that allows them to be indifferent and passive observers of life's various and shocking happenings and I include myself here, for it is much harder to respect God's silence with true spontaneous and creative actions, than it is to merely obey in silent deference to the views of those in power.

The true response is always tied to an intervention, an irruption, a new configuration of forces that reflect deep engagement and concern. As Carse notes:

"It is always the case that when someone listens to you with genuine openness you will find a voice to say what you have never been able to say before, and did not know you could have said."

What would the Guru Granth be if no one responded to it? A mantric heirloom?

It is impossible to read scripture without interpretation. Yet, interpretation is actually the way readers disclose their understanding and connect with others. Interpretation is listening or refusing to listen. The point of interpretation within the framework of a silence of expectation that connects to someone, is not to

discern the truth of the text for all to see and praise. But to interpret the text in such a way that it draws others to the text and inspires them to respond to its deep silent call (Carse). The Guru Granth Sahib like other scriptures does not contain great truths as such, but a style of writing and a mode of engagement that searches us and questions us more deeply. Scripture does not lead us to shout its truths from the roof tops, but quite the contrary, it leads us to a richer silence. It is that subtle yet comprehensive silence that yearns to be shared, because that silence is a form of listening without which communication with the other is not possible.

The voices of the Guru Granth Sahib then do not demand that we create a theology of monotheism out of them. The prevailing interpretation of Sikhism as a 'moral monotheism' operates in such a way that it speaks over those 37 voices contained in the Guru Granth; in other words this interpretation does not only command a silence of obedience from us, but it also silences those within the text as well. Rather, the Guru Granth Sahib is solely concerned with the silence of expectation. By speaking to us as a Guru, it demands a response from us by creating a new voice within us. The Adi Granth is a Guru that speaks to us directly and personally. It is not a treatise about the nature of God, let alone a doctrine of monotheism. Each new page of the Guru Granth Sahib does not reduce the mystery of truth, God, reality, but shows just how much more inexhaustible that mystery is. And it is this wonder that is the ground of begging or prayer. When in epiphany you realise that your map of the world was all wrong – simply your map – then you beg for guidance: for the terrain of life is actually experienced as unknowable and unpredictable.

Central to Sikh scripture is not a belief in God per se, but the necessity of lose the self *aap gavaiaai*. This is the root to speaking to someone, and as such the foundation of any and all interreligious dialogue and interaction; this will help us hear God's multiple voices: losing the self as a mode of becoming-in-the-world; there can be no religious dialogue with selves. Thus interreligious dialogue must bring into the centre of the picture the egos in dialogue: this should be a moment of acute embarrassment, of fear and trembling. For it is easy to talk about theology, it is rather more difficult to live one's beliefs.

Third Pair: Theatrical or Dramatic Speech?

The silence of expectation is a power and listening is its raw energy source. Carse writes, "If I genuinely trust you, I can expect you to do exactly what I do not want,

but exactly what I need for growth". Thus from God, over whom we can exercise no control whatsoever, we can expect only surprise. Turning to God we risk all that we have, not that we will lose our lives, it is rather that we will lose our lives for the sake of new life.

Theatrical speech occurs when we have already determined what the listeners are to hear. We deliver our speech as though it were a script... it does not matter which persons are in the theatre, or if anyone is there at all. On the other hand, dramatic speech occurs when we relinquish all control over our words as mystics do, and therefore cannot know in advance how they will be received entering a space of mutual reciprocity and co-creativity. Theatrical speech leads to the amplification of one voice over others; dramatic speech seeks a resonance of voices.

Unfortunately the lecture's monological form is that of theatrical and amplified speech, rarely do elements of drama enter. That is why Bhai Baldeep Singh has organised respondents and discussants to this lecture: hopefully questions from this august panel and you all here will reveal what dramatic speech is all about.

Unlike the silence of obedience which institutes a theatrical script, Sikhi (learning how to walk in time without I) operates on an expectation that creates a dramatic address. With Vaisakhi just gone by, one is hard put to find a more eloquent and forceful summation of this whole lecture, than in Guru Gobind Singh's dramatic address to the Sikh *sangat* in 1699: for it involved a dramatic and direct speech to an attentive audience, and in that silence it expected and was utterly dependent upon individual participation, the whole process was full of surprise and drenched with the immediacy and risk of living now one of those days allotted to us all.

Inter-religious dialogue can easily turn into a non-dialogue where we get "authoritative representatives" to speak for their traditions in apologetic fashion having learnt the script of that tradition by heart, turning each opportunity for dialogue into a theatrical performance in which the audience response is only the silence of obedience. There must be the cultivation of the mode of address and dramatic delivery to create the silence of expectation such that we can begin to say that which we have never heard each other say before – and thus begin to speak beyond our identities as 'Muslims' or as 'Hindus' or as 'Christians', etc. and speak as the humble beggars all of us always are.

Carse argues that if we cannot know God then we cannot ever completely prepare ourselves against surprise. Because of the dramatic silence of God there is nothing necessary about our worlds. We cannot therefore know for certain the meaning of our discourse with each other. The primary mode of the unnecessary and open is the poetic song; the key form of the necessary and closed is the manifesto, be it theological, academic or political.

The completeness of God's silence is such that we never encounter that silence within a world, but between worlds of self and the other. It is God's silence that touches us whenever we see our worlds as possible worlds. One may ask how it is possible anymore not to see our tradition as merely one among many in this increasingly networked and globalised local present.

God does not answer within a world, but with a world.
(Carse)

That is to say the world is always a process, not a thing, what is happening is a world-making. God's world is always larger than our life-worlds have ever imagined. Guru Nanak, very early in life – began to see the Hindu world, and the Muslim world as merely possible worlds, not the world in toto and seemed to understand very keenly that revelation never comes to support a previously existing world view, tradition, writing, language or culture – but always initiates a new vision, culture, language and people. Just think about Abraham, the Jews and the Torah, Jesus his New Testament and the arrival of the Christian, Muhammad, the Quran the phenomenal growth and the spread of Islam. That is a provocative definition of revelation: one which never arrives without destroying or going beyond that which was there before, revelation is that speech which does not answer within a world, but with a world not yet imagined. The point is not that one day we will arrive with heaven on earth, but that God's truth is understood as a bottomless mystery which demands a perpetual creativity to make ever-new worlds of praise and petition. The world of the Guru Granth Sahib has not yet been imagined, a world the ego cannot yet see or configure. The truth is always a mystery to come; newness cannot enter our world without altering its poles fundamentally. Are we prepared for that? Sikhi is a spontaneously attuned intervention to the needs of the other in the moment at hand.

Thus all religious dialogue must be inter-religious, as the Guru Granth Sahib demonstrates, because then we gain surprise, we gain a voice beyond the world that the ego surrounds itself within, we gain a perspective unimagined by our own tradition and thus

remember that the silence of God demands a perpetual creativity to voice again and again the praise and prayers that create new life and visions.

Receiving the Guru Granth then cannot be done as receiving an object. It cannot be a passive act. It is always an active transformation of the receiver; it is always the beginning of something we cannot bring to an end. We can never come to the end of the gift of the Guru Granth Sahib, or revelation in general for what is given is a world, a life, not merely words. Thus we can never finish in receiving its gift which continues to give to us... the passing of the Gurus does not end the giving of the Gurus... if anything stops their giving, it is not the silence in their absence but the noise of our lives. One has to forget who one has come to be, to listen.

When did religion's true voice, that cries out for help in intense passion become overshadowed by the grand declarations and theories of the about? In whose interests does this transformation from the raw cry of emotion turn into the stick of law?

The exiled Egyptian Jew, Edmond Jabès gives us a clue about how we should hear God's multiple voices,

"The difference between us is this," he said. "You believe firmly in a recognised truth, whereas the one which fascinates me has never bothered with recognition."

How then to hear God's multiple voices? Well, how to hear each other's voices might be a start. How to hear the calls of despair, injustice and suffering? How to hear the call of the animal kingdom that is being slaughtered by human beings at such a rate that species are fast disappearing? How to hear the call of the earth in all its environments that are also under threat? How to hear these multiple voices as God's? We must begin to recognise the call these multiple voices have upon us and see them as part of one cosmic body of which we are an integral part. We must begin to hear that voice in all beings and events, for the integrity of our own voice and life depends upon it.

Guru Nanak reminds us that love and intimacy follow neither formula nor rule – we should not therefore turn Guru Nanak into a 'nice person' for love is demanding and unpredictable: Guru Nanak pulls no punches and speaks directly to the fool, that means me certainly, and perhaps you also:

(GGS: 19 Rag Sriraag M1)

You fool: chant the Name of Ram, and preserve your virtue.

ਮੂੜੇ ਰਾਮੁ ਜਪਹੁ ਗੁਣ ਸਾਰਿ ॥

Egotism and possessiveness are very enticing; pride has plundered everyone.

ਹਉਮੈ ਮਮਤਾ ਮੋਹਣੀ ਸਭ ਮੁਨੀ ਅਹੰਕਾਰਿ ॥੧॥

Those who have forgotten the Name of the Lord, are attached to affairs of duality.

ਜਿਨੀ ਨਾਮੁ ਵਿਸਾਰਿਆ ਦੂਜੀ ਕਾਰੈ ਲਗਿ ॥

Attached to duality, they putrefy and die; they are filled with the fire of desire within.

ਦੁਬਿਧਾ ਲਾਗੇ ਪਚਿ ਮੁਏ ਅੰਤਰਿ ਤ੍ਰਿਸਨਾ ਅਗਿ ॥

Those who are protected by the Guru are saved; all others are cheated and plundered by deceitful worldly affairs.

ਗੁਰਿ ਰਾਖੇ ਸੇ ਉਬਰੇ ਹੋਰਿ ਮੁਨੀ ਧੰਧੇ ਨਗਿ ॥

GGs p 19 Sri Rag M.1

Scolding can also produce the silence of expectation rather than the more common silence of obedience if it is done with wisdom. There is a huge difference between being 'nice' and being 'wise'. The Gurus weren't interested in being nice and routine, but expected that one and all could manifest a vision beyond the notion of self-centredness via a mode of uncalculated living that nurtured the voice of every other whenever encountered. As such Sikhi is a celebration of difference – just as the GGS itself demonstrates. How to hear God's multiple voices? Listen to the voice of the other everywhere resounding and enter the life of a beggar's humility, and acquire a voice to speak that which you never thought possible in resonance with a wider collective. This lecture has also argued that tied to asking how we can hear God's multiple voices, is also the question of how can we speak God's multiple voices and keep the integrity of life's diversity flourishing.

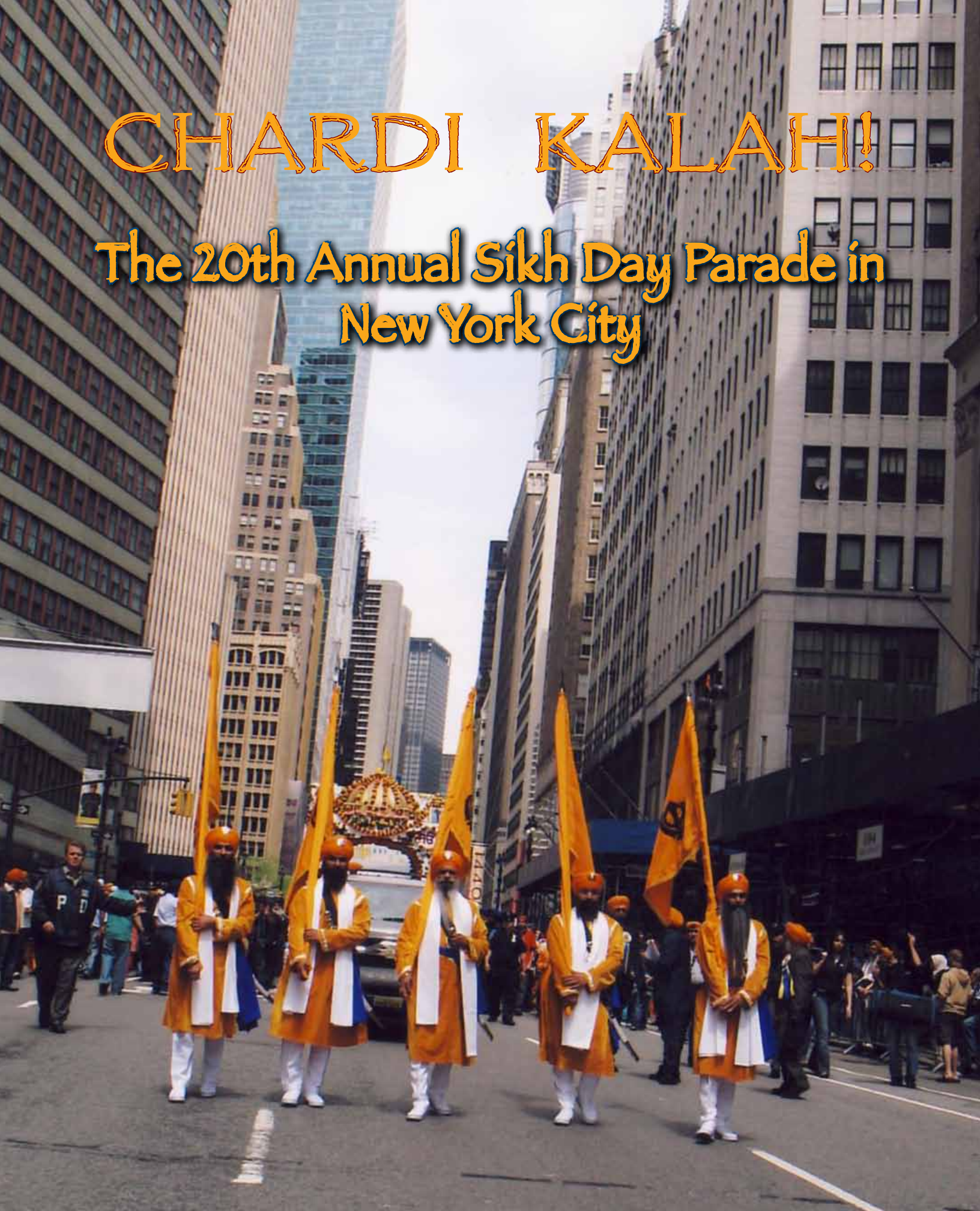
Dr. Balbinder Singh Bhogal

Dr. Balbinder Singh Bhogal, Ph.D., has been appointed the Sardarni Kuljit Kaur Bindra Chair in Sikh Studies at Hofstra University in Long Island, New York.

Dr. Bhogal was most recently an associate professor in South Asian religions and cultures, Division of Humanities, Faculty of Arts at York University in Toronto. He received his Ph.D. from London University, School of Oriental and African Studies, in 2001. Dr. Bhogal's interest include South Asian religions and cultures, specialising in Sikh Studies, particularly the philosophy and exegesis of the Guru Granth Sahib.

CHARDI KALAH!

The 20th Annual Sikh Day Parade in New York City





Held in the heart of Manhattan, the 20th Annual Day Parade took place on Sunday 29 April 2007, when the city of New York witnessed resplendence of the Sikh community, marking the great significance of Vaisakhi. Organised and co-ordinated by the Sikh Cultural Society of Richmond Hill in New York, there were scores of participating Sikh organisations and gurdwaras, including the Sikh Centre of New York in Flushing, the Guru Gobind Study Circle, The Shaheed Baba Deep Singh Sikh Society of New York, while various Sikh Associations, Khalsa Schools

and Sikh Cultural Societies took part, tens of thousands in Kesri turbans and dupattas, the waves of colour proceeding from 42nd Street past some of New York's most famous landmarks to converge at Madison Park for kirtan, langar and some inevitable speeches.

Led by the Panj Pyaras were members of New York's Assembly and US Congress alongside Sikh American leaders, the New York City Police Department band followed by enthusiastic young Sikh drummers from Canada while young American majorettes paraded the Stars and Stripes and Khalsa flags together, several floats beautifully decorated, great reverence being paid to the bir with the Guru Granth Sahib, with Kirtan performed throughout the three hours as over 50,000 Sikh men, women and children marched down the heart of Manhattan.

In his message, Joseph Crowley, Member of Congress of the United States House of Representatives, extended his greetings and warm regards to the Sikh Community on the occasion exclaiming that "The Sikh community's vibrant and culturally rich history is an integral part of New York City and our nation's diverse ethnic heritage. As more and more Sikh immigrants enter the United States, we are privileged with the opportunity to learn from our Sikh neighbours about the tenets of their faith and the accomplishments of their leaders throughout history."

"There have been countless individuals of notable character and distinction originating from the Sikh community, including the former President of India, Giani Zail



Singh, Olympic Gold Medalist, Milkha Singh and foremost scientist and fibre optics pioneer, Dr Narinder Singh Kapany. It should also be noted that the Sikh community contributed greatly to US efforts in both WWI and WWII, with a disproportionate number of Sikh soldiers fighting on behalf of the Allies and earning the highest per capita number of awards for heroism during this time."

Centre of the World

Manhattan is a borough of New York in the USA, coterminous with New York County. With its nearly two million population packed into a land area of 23 square miles, this is the most densely populated county in the United States, with almost 75,000 residents per square miles. Manhattan Island is the largest section of the borough, which also includes several smaller islands and a small section of the mainland adjacent to the Bronx.

Commercial, financial and cultural centre of the world, Manhattan has many famous landmarks, tourist attractions, museums, and universities and is also home to headquarters of the United Nations and seat of the city government.

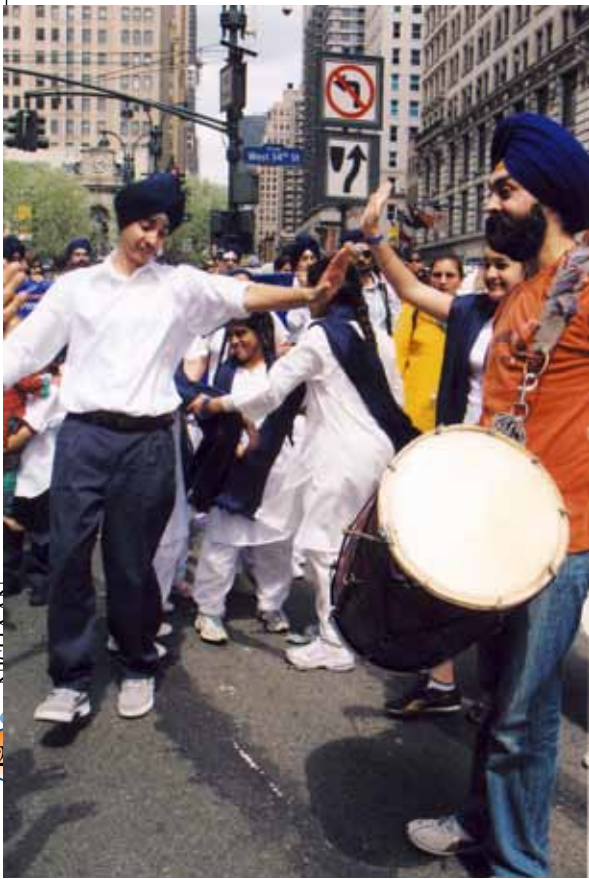
Early in the nineteenth century, landfill was used to expand Lower Manhattan from the natural Hudson river shoreline at Greenwich Street to West Street. When building the World Trade Centre, 1.2 million cubic yards of material were excavated from the site, rather than dumping the spoil at sea or in landfills, the fill material was used to expand the Manhattan shoreline across West Street, creating Battery Park City.

Manhattan is connected by a bridge and tunnels to New Jersey to the west, and to three New York City boroughs, the Bronx to the northeast and Brooklyn and Queens on Long Island to the east and south. Its only direct connection with the fifth New York City borough is the Staten Island Ferry across New York Harbour and one can also travel to Staten Island via Brooklyn, using the Verrazano-Narrows Bridge.

"As the duly elected representative for the 7th Congressional District, I am proud to share in this history and represent the Sikh men and women who reside in my district. It is wonderful to see the Sikh community coming together once again to pay tribute to its cultural and historical roots in a spirit of reflection, unity and celebration. Last year, more than 50,000 individuals from the Sikh community came out to march in this parade and I look forward to an even greater presence this year as this significant two-decade milestone is reached."

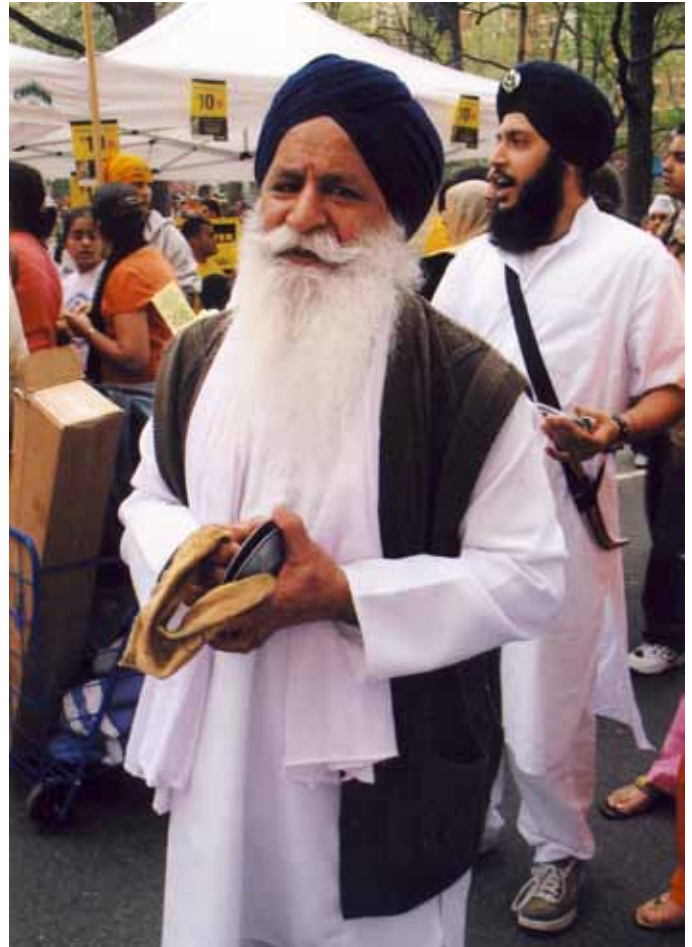
Scenes in Manhattan, Sunday 29 April 2007

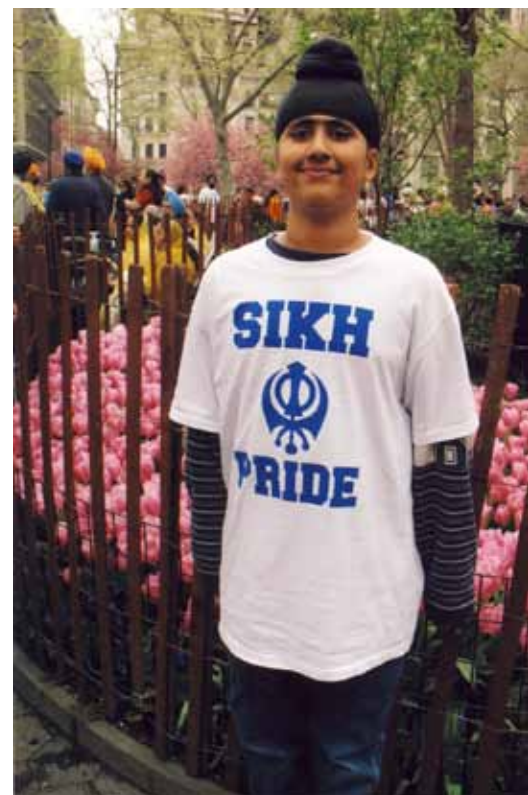














Wahe Guru ji ka Khalsa, Wahe Guru ji ki Fateh!

Flags of our Fathers

Vaisakhi 2007 in Surrey, British Columbia, Canada

Some journeys just do not seem to end. Coming into parenthood is one such journey. One of the biggest challenges with young children at home is keeping schedules and being on time for events and important occasions. So what was planned for the morning was shifted to almost one o'clock in the afternoon, when all of us, my brother, Kabir and his wife Sarvpreet and their two and half year old daughter Aadi and my wife Shriya and our two year old son Anhad managed to dress 'on time', and reached the crossing of 128th Street and 80th Avenue to await the grand and now traditional Vaisakhi parade in the 'warm' suburban city of Surrey in British Columbia, Canada.

Imbibing hot tea and *pakor*as, we were fortunate enough to come across some of those whose names will go down in the history of Sikhs in Canada. A very important person among them is Baltej Singh Dhillon, the first Sikh officer sporting turban and *kesh*, of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. A tall, imposing and compassionate personality, he shared anecdotes of his life as an RCMP officer, which without any doubt is inspirational. His clarity of purpose and steadfast beliefs seems to have encouraged his daughter Onkar, to join the army. She was wearing the uniform of the Royal New Westminster Regiment; as a senior cadet as she is only in grade ten.

The days when there was only one Sikh officer in the RCMP have long gone by. We met many more Sikh officers who were helping manage the crowds. And then, suddenly, a group of Harley Davidsons droved into view. The Parade had finally arrived!



The whole family out in celebration of Vaisakhi.



Author with Singhs and Kaurs of the RCMP (Royal Canadian Mounted Police).



Turbaned Singhs of the Sikh Motorcycle Club.



Arrival of the Gatka Group, getting ready for their demonstration.



Onkar Dhillon (elder daughter of Baltej Dhillon) of the Royal Westminster Regiment, Canada.



Baltej Singh Dhillon with author's family (brother Kabir, an architect from New Delhi and his daughter Aadi Kaur born, in the 400th anniversary year of the installation of 'Adi Granth' at the Harmandir by the Fifth Master).

It was fascinating to see the *nagaara* installed on a big truck, being led by the Simon Fraser University Sikh Students body, followed by *gatka* demonstration by young boys and girls along with an elderly looking *jathedar*. The Khalsa School, which contributes in every sphere of the lower mainland life and which fares among the top schools of the province, demonstrated their students' excellence in the *kirtan* performance on a beautifully decorated float. The five *Nishaan Sahibs*, held by *Panj Piaras*, led the *sowari* of Sri Guru Granth Sahib ji, in a decorated *palki sahib*. The numbers in the congregation that was following the *sowari* had increased manifold as the parade progressed along its route. From where we were witnessing the parade, which was closer to the terminating point of the parade, the Dasmesh Darbar Gurdwara, the sheer numbers of men and women with folded hands, children in prams and the ones being led by their parents, walking quietly listening to the devotional hymns of *gurbani* being sung by *ragi jathas*, was overwhelming.

I stood quietly and recalled that more than a hundred years had passed since the first Sikhs had stepped on Canadian land, while it had only been a couple of months for me. The success of the Sikh community was evident in the parade: big trucks, very expensive motorbikes and cars, extremely well dressed families were to be seen wherever you looked. As a 33-year old Sikh, I felt like congratulating all those of the previous generations, who came as early as 1897 from the warm climes of the Punjab to this virtually the coldest country in the world and made it their home. The generation of men faced discrimination at the hands of the earlier immigrant Canadians. They had to forego their own

professional background and found work suitable for those who controlled Canada's economy, primarily in the saw-mills. What did it mean to have gone through that phase for those men, some of whose great grand-children I just saw participating in the Parade? A very significant part of that struggle did mean losing their professional identities. These men however did not lose the energy that they possessed, a large part of which they derived from *gurbani* and Sikh history. They worked long shifts, in difficult situations, never wavering from their goals and vision, to bring a change in the Canadian way of thinking about them. They then bought the saw-mills and became *employers* from being *employees*. They competed with resilience in every sphere with the Canadians who were opposed to immigration of these "alien people".

I pondered that a century before the Sikhs landed in Canada, that is, in 1797, on Punjab's soil, a different sort of history was in the making. Young Ranjit Singh, who took control of the reigns of his *misl* over a matter of two years, invested the city of Lahore in 1799, an important landmark in Sikh history. What did that mean then to the Sikhs? Surely it meant a great deal for the Sikh community, as from being the *ruled* they became *rulers*. The Sikhs who had come in command and their ancestors, had emerged to power after going through very difficult times which included intolerance and strong hostility from the Mughal authorities. Many Sikh men, women and children had sacrificed their lives defending the ideals of their identity, significant components of which were the turban and *kesh*. So the conquest of Lahore by Ranjit Singh was symbolically the victory of Sikh identity as well.

I wondered when, in a saw mill, in cold inhospitable British Columbia, without a family for comfort, a turbaned Sikh with his resplendent beard, after working for long hours, would have sat down to eat a humble meal and perhaps dream that one day, this kind of Vaisakhi parade would happen and thousands of North Americans from all over would flock to see grandeur of the Sikh community.



Float of the Khalsa School, one of the prestigious institutions in the province of British Columbia.



Khalsa School children performing Shabad Kirtan.

I would like to tell my little niece Aadi and son Anhad to always remember this fact, that our older generation, grandfathers, great-grandfathers faced tough lives but achieved great success in Canada. They should feel that the Canadian lifestyle has space for the Sikh identity and its culture which will flourish even more if they are able to believe in themselves and their heritage, as they grow up in this wonderful country, which is Canada.

Rishi Singh



Sikhs in America's Capital

The National Gurdwara and Sikh Cultural Centre on Massachusetts Avenue, popularly known as 'Embassy Row', in Washington D.C.

“It really began,” recalled Dr Rajwant Singh, Chairman of the Sikh Council of the USA, “after 35 Sikhs met Clinton administration officials and a Bill was passed in the US Congress in 1993, called the Religious Freedom Restoration Act. That’s when President Clinton invited a coalition of different religious groups to meet him and I was in there.”

Rajwant Singh has visited New Delhi thereafter to meet with “people of influence” about Sikh issues in the USA. Though the Sikh Council was formed in 1998 in Washington DC to raise the profile of the community “from sea to shining sea”, it was after 9/11 that the issue became crucial when the average American confused Sikhs with Osama’s ‘baddies’ and attacked anybody in a turban.

But other issues are on the boil too, related to religious freedom. Ronald Reagan apparently imposed a ‘Waspy’ workplace dress code that Sikhs are lobbying against, it for the right to wear the turban,

beard, kirpan and kada. Not surprisingly, they have strong backing from the Democrats.

“Hillary Clinton came home to dinner and promised to take up the issue,” says Rajwant Singh. A bill is pending in the US Congress, called the *Workplace Religious Freedom Act*. Senator John Kerry introduced it and so far, has the support of 25 senators (55 out of 100 are needed to get the Bill passed and the Sikh Council is lobbying hard for it).

In fact, the issue first came up at the US Air Force Academy, where recruits of all faiths were forced to say Christian prayers. A Jewish recruit took the case to court in 2005 and that too, is pending judgment.

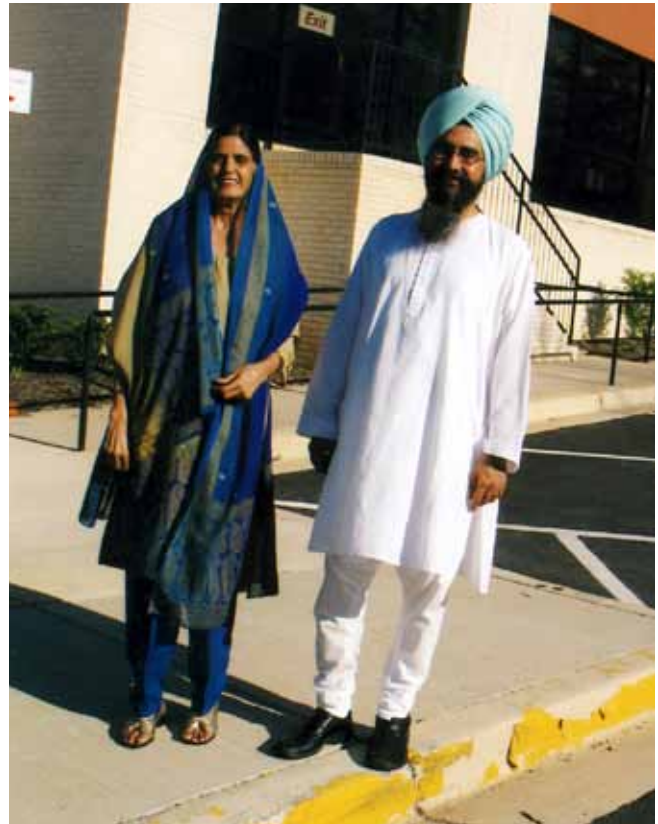
Another move is afoot to include Sikhs in the US Army, co-sponsored by Senator John Cornyn of Texas. There are already about some 100 Sikhs in the US Army and thereby is a poignant tale. The late Dr Bhagat Singh Thind (who died in 1967 short of his 75th birthday) was a highly respected professor of religion

and philosophy in California, where the first Sikhs migrated to Orange County nearly 100 years ago.

Thind fought with the US Army in World War I but later was denied citizenship by a US Supreme Court ruling that allowed citizenship only to Anglo-Saxons. Thind fought the case and the ruling was finally overturned in 1963 with life-changing consequences for all non-Anglo-Saxon immigrants to “the land of the free and brave”.

“Dr Thind remains unsung although he fought for civil rights for all, not just Sikhs. The first gurdwara was built in Stockton, California in 1915 and was totally supportive of India’s Freedom Movement. Sikhs have shared 100 years in the history of this 200-year-old country called the United States of America and we want everyone in America to know it,” says Dr Rajwant Singh.

During Prime Minister Manmohan Singh’s visit to Washington DC, Rajwant Singh and his wife Dr Balvinder Singh, a child psychologist, were invited to the state dinner at the White House. “My wife was seated with Laura Bush and we got a chance to speak with President Bush, Condoleezza Rice and Donald Rumsfeld. It was a great honour and I hope was the start of many good things,” believes Rajwant Singh.



Dr Rajwant Singh with Amrit Kaur of the Guru Gobind Singh Foundation.



The Gurdwara Sahib at Rockville, Maryland.



Children are taught kirtan every Sunday morning at the Rockville Gurdwara Sahib.



Sartaj Singh with Bhai Gurdarshan Singh at Rockville.



Nishaan Sahib at the Guru Nanak Foundation Gurdwara, Maryland.



Volunteers at the Langar kitchen in Rockville.



Dr. Rajwant Singh with the Sangat at Gurdwara Sahib, Rockville.



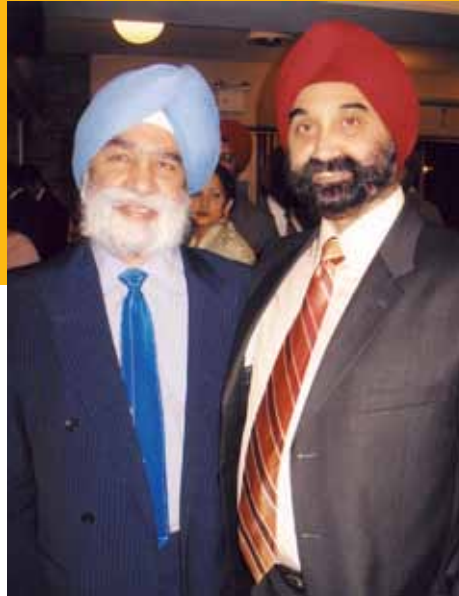
Bhai Surinder Singh, 'Head Priest' at the National Gurdwara on Massachusetts Avenue, Washington DC.



Inspiration for Sikh basketball players at Maryland.



Sat Jagat Singh Khalsa and Kuldip Singh Khalsa of NYC.



T. Sher Singh and Tejinder Singh Bindra.



Siri Vishnu Singh Khalsa with Sat Kirn Kaur Khalsa (mother of Gurumustuk Singh).

Tejinder Singh Bindra, Senior Vice President of Jeetish Group of Companies and a member of the Hofstra Board of Trustees, welcomed everyone to the event and asked for a moment of silence to remember the victims of the recent Virginia Tech shootings and the passing of Dr Gurcharan Singh, a great scholar. He also thanked and acknowledged various Hofstra officials, and particularly Comptroller DiNapoli and Consul General Deo.



Colour and music as young ladies do the Gidda.

Hofstra University is a dynamic private institution located 25 miles east of New York City where students find their edge to succeed in more than 140 undergraduate and 155 graduate programmes in liberal arts and sciences, business, communication, education and allied human services, honours studies, and a School of Law. With a student-faculty ratio of 14-to-1, professors teach small classes averaging 23 students that emphasise interaction, critical thinking and analysis. Hofstra offers a faculty whose highest priority is teaching excellence, cutting edge technology, extensive library resources, internships and special educational programmes that appeal to their interests and abilities. The Hofstra community is driven, dynamic and energetic, helping students find and focus their strengths to prepare them for a successful future.

T. Sher Singh acknowledged and thanked those who spoke before him and other distinguished guests, including the Rev. Dr Calvin Butts, President of SUNY at Old Westbury; Mrs Ellen Israelson, Executive Director of the American Jewish Committee; Ms Lisa Schubert, of the Rubin Museum; Dean Firestone from Hofstra University and Mrs Inni Kaur Dhingra, an advisory member of the Sikh studies programme at Hofstra (and Nishaan's editorial representative in New York).

Which War of Independence?

The Government of India decided to celebrate the anniversary of 1857 as the First War of Independence. A debate has been raging for some time now about the 1857 uprising. One eminent group would like to remember this as a momentous event, almost unprecedented in its sweep, which gave a great fillip to our fight against the British. For another equally eminent group, it was merely a Sepoy Mutiny, involving rebellious kings and potentates, and not necessarily a progressive event.

The debate is not over yet, despite the government's decision. I therefore want to warn our present-day rulers against reinventing history in their own partisan manner. It's a mistake all successful rulers have made since they became aware of the role of history in the march of time. For who would not like to see his or her name emblazoned in the roll-call of history?

To me, the entire renewed effort to call the cataclysmic events of 1857 as the first war of India's Independence is to trivialise the importance of history. And as a mature nation, a nation with a mind we should desist from doing so.

After all, what do we mean by the term 'First War of Independence'? If we think that this battle against the British should be called thus, then what should we call the wars of Mysore that Tipu fought? Or, what were the wars that the Marathas fought with the Mughals? Or, if it is a war against all foreign invaders, where should we place the heroics of Maharana Pratap or Chhatrapati Shivaji?

Should we not remember the first Anglo-Sikh War in 1846, when the British Governor-General himself was in danger of being captured by the Sikhs? If the Sikhs had then been able to reach Delhi, who knows, the British might have had to leave India altogether!

We should be very clear about the enemy against whom the war is being waged. For example, the Sikh *Misls* specialised in waging guerrilla warfare against scourges from the West like Nadir Shah or Abdali, who would invade India and take away Indian women in the thousands to be sold in the streets of Basra. Sikh guerrillas would harass them right up to the Attock (Indus) to recover as many Indian women as they could and then try to restore those unfortunate women to their families. Now, what war were they waging? Evidently, a war of independence! For, it was the Sikhs under Hari Singh Nalwa who re-established the geographical borders of India across the Khyber.

And what about the time when Zaman Shah invaded India to re-establish the Afghan empire here? Ranjit Singh,



Guns of the Sikh Army, captured at Chillianwala in January 1849, on display at Chelsea, London.

or more correctly the Sikhs again, met him in open battle, destroying the pride of Central Asia. Twenty thousand Afghan soldiers lay dead as against 15,000 Sikhs of the *Misl* levies before Zaman Shah retired from the battlefield.

The point I am trying to make here is that love for the motherland has been deeply ingrained in the hearts of men since the dawn of history. It is Lord Rama, after all, who said "*Janani janmabhumiścha swargadapi geeyasi* (Mother and the motherland are even greater than heaven)". Hence, fighting for the honour and defence of the motherland has always been a sacred cause.

Even so, it is a common human weakness to create benchmarks of man's achievements, by saying this or that happened for the first time ever. So let me talk of a benchmark of this kind. There was Banda Singh Bahadur, the first ever Jathedar of the Khalsa Panth, nominated by Guru Gobind Singh himself. And for a time in 1709, he destroyed all the vestiges of Mughal tyranny in Punjab, as a hurricane removes all the dead leaves from a tree. He became the first ruler of the Punjab and he issued coins in the name of Guru Nanak and Guru Gobind Singh, as a symbol of Sikh sovereignty. It was perhaps for the first time that such a thing had happened in India, after the fall of Anangpal, as the second millennium began. Now, can we not call his achievement the first battle of independence that was won? No. It is the march of evolutionary history that counts its benchmarks in firsts and seconds. But our time is cyclical, because the Indian cosmic order was evolved as Time itself took birth. It has no beginning and no end.

I take great pride in what happened in 1857. And I salute its heroes and martyrs. This was certainly an event that shook the British to their very foundations. Still, I shudder to call this the first battle of our independence. To me, it appears that by doing so we are trivialising history and compromising its sacredness for very small ends.

Tarlochan Singh, MP

The 1857 Double-Speak



There was no all-India canvas

Accepting that Mangal Pandey's attempts at inciting his colleagues in his Infantry battalion, and a little later the skirmishes in the 3rd Light Cavalry were mere triggers to later events in Lucknow, Kanpur and Delhi, the question that begs an answer is whether the "First War for Independence" in 1857, if it was one, was actually pre-planned to ignite in this manner and at this moment of time by those who had masterminded the uprising.

Pandey was arrested and hanged without further ado and most of the companies of his unit were disbanded. Was there anyone amongst the Indians one could identify as the central controlling force that

was nominated or elected to take the war to its logical conclusion, and if not, then was this event really launched on an all-India scale, with clear objectives and a time frame for execution?

As it is, the scene of action in 1857 centered around the Gangetic Plain, with the whole of southern India keeping out of the picture and rulers and princes only too anxious to safeguard their kingdoms sitting on the proverbial fence. Yes, there was fighting in Awadh (Oudh), because that state was well endowed with weapons and war material and because the British presence there was perceived to be minimal and ineffective.

Another aspect that must not be glossed over is that it were mostly the units of the Bengal Army of the East India Company that took up arms, and that the Madras and Bombay Presidency Armies remained dormant or off the scene altogether. So those who had raised the flag of revolt against the British ended up fighting with the Gurkhas, Sikhs, Punjabi Musalmans (PMs as they were called then) and others from the North-West Frontier who continued to soldier on with the British.

Was a war on a national scale even possible in those days when the state of road communications was so meagre and when military messages were sent through the helio lamp and horse riders, many of the latter never even reaching their destination?

Even otherwise as history has it, the first mutiny or war for our freedom had occurred much earlier, in 1806 at Vellore, but this attempt did not succeed because of Col. Rollo Gillespie's counter-action. The racial, religious, caste and ethnic divisions that existed at the time were, in my humble opinion, not very conducive to a nationwide, planned out upsurge that could have in itself dethroned the Company and its armies which were commanded by foreigners all the way, with the Indians only reaching the Jamedar and Subedar rank.

There are others who have even called the period between 1857 and 1947 as one long freedom struggle, oblivious of the fact that Indians of many a race shed their blood in the First and Second World Wars under the British. And in between, we also have a school of nationalists who have often downplayed the sacrifices of the Indian National Army and the spark generated by the Bombay Naval Mutiny during this era, all suggesting that history keeps on being rewritten from time to time depending on the writer and the power and reach of the rulers.

So, readers must objectively judge for themselves how they would wish to identify the events of 1857, and not be too influenced by movies and other populist vehicles of the commercial kind where virtually, single handed, some have gone about ushering in freedom all by themselves!

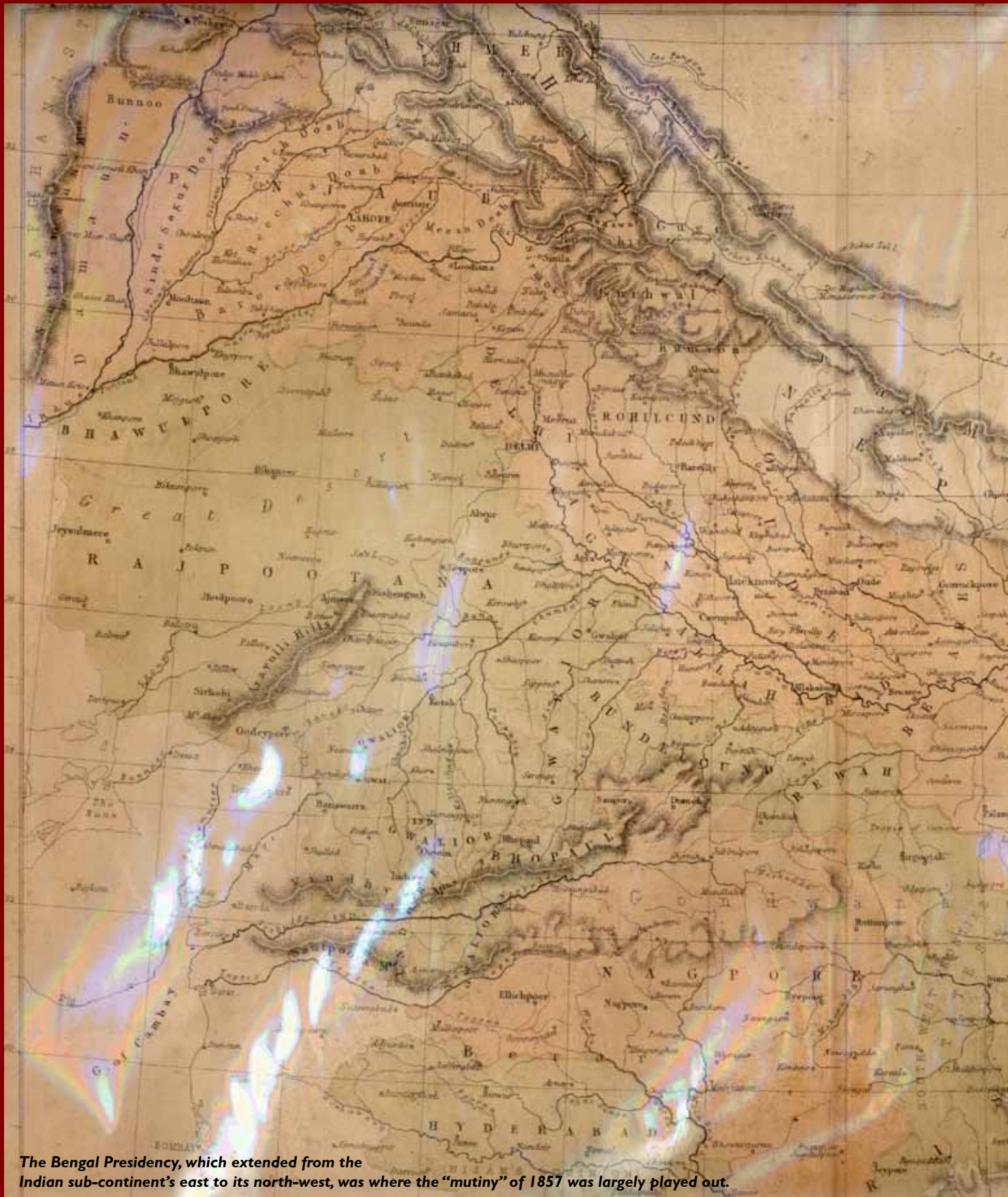
Nevertheless, whatever be the reasons for the uprising or mutiny, few can deny that within months the British were back in power in Delhi, having exiled the aged and ineffective Moghul Emperor and more importantly affecting a power switchover from the Company Bahadur to the Crown. This was

a turning point in the ways of the Raj, wherein from that period onwards the British only grew stronger and I daresay, harsher in their treatment of their subjects.

The British component of the armies was strengthened, the Muslims were subtly cut to size in judicial and other *sarkari* appointments, and the recruitment from the northern regions of the country was stepped up. 1857 actually resulted in the British settling down in India to govern with their brand of social reform and raising an infrastructure of roads, communications, railways, postal services et al. It is only about 90 years later that they departed essentially when their post-World War II economy could no longer sustain a far-flung empire, and when the rumblings of the necessity of a democratic order worldwide had started to stir the imagination of many a nation. It is within this template that the gains of the events of 1857 as a possible catalytic agent leading to better governance (earlier, we were just fiefdoms and kingdoms at war with each other), needs to be looked into. Extrapolating regional events and happenings that certainly were not on any all-India canvas during and after 1857, and the wont of some historians only too eager to prove that 1857 was a masterly, pre-arranged and well-planned freedom movement on our part, should possibly be avoided.

Though the British colonised and ruled over us initially for economic gain, there is ample evidence that many of the Governor Generals who followed, had the genuine interest of India's betterment and progress in mind. Sadly Indians, not exactly known for writing records, accounts, gazettes and diaries tabulating day-to-day events of an era which becomes the truthful history of the time, should write more frequently and record for posterity history as we then saw it. This possibly is another meaningful gain (if only we realise it), of 1857.

Bahadur Shah wrote good poetry but had lost touch with his subjects and some of the icons of the 1857 era who need not be named here, have been credited by historians as being in and out of the struggle, as suited their own gain and personal interest. The anniversary is most welcome provided we have drawn the right lessons out of this event, and promise to ourselves that we will work towards a United India, which unfortunately was not the case in 1857. But today we also need to ask



The Bengal Presidency, which extended from the Indian sub-continent's east to its north-west, was where the "mutiny" of 1857 was largely played out.



ourselves whether the democracy we practice has not degenerated into a mobocracy, and whether the soldiers who died fighting for the Crown or the Emperor did so in vain, as our clutch of politicians and their henchmen go about furthering their interests at cost of the nation.

And, as we go keep talking and writting on a war which certainly was not the first for our freedom, should we not in all fairness also remember the supreme sacrifices of the Punjabis (mostly Sikhs) who filled the Cellular Jail in the Andamans or those intrepid pioneers who sailed on the *Komagata Maru* to shores alien and fought it out against all odds? Or the soldiers of the INA who died in the paddy fields of Malaya, the jawans who died defending Kashmir, and those who die defending the land in Siachen and the North-East on a daily basis. These are the heroes that the country should be celebrating as we mark the anniversary of 1857!

And did the mutiny really come to define our identity as some feel, or resulted in a bigger social divide than that existed before? If the British were foreigners, then how would we like to define the Moghuls? Or would it not be better to rank them for the good that both did for a divided land and so educate our youth who seem to be blissfully unaware of much of Indian history beyond Aamir Khan and his characterisation of Mangal Pandey?

Let 1857 remind us to bridge the communal divide that still separates many, and let some who call themselves historians start reading faithfully and honestly a turbulent past of 150 years back and thus record it for posterity.

Maj Gen Himmat Singh Gill (Retd)

The 1857 Mutiny and the Sikhs*

The mutiny at Meerut on 10 May 1857, which later assumed large proportions and developed into a revolt in some parts of UP and neighbouring territories, has been called by some writers as the Indian War of Independence. This view is not however, accepted and supported by recent researches of respected Indian historians. The full-throated praises showered by some of our modern political leaders on the sepoy mutineers and their so called leaders have all been undeserved. And equally, if not more, undeserved have been the censure and the charges of betrayal and treachery leveled against those who happened not to espouse their cause or were opposed to their activities. The worst sufferers in the latter case have been the people of the Punjab, particularly the Sikhs, owing to the intensive propaganda carried on by some of the politicians who happened to be immune from historical truths.

I have been asked to rebut, if I can, the charge that "Indian struggle for freedom (1857) failed as Sikhs betrayed and sided with the British." The charge of betrayal against the Sikhs could be justified only if they had given up or had been disloyal to or had violated allegiance to a cause, person or trust which they had at any time befriended or owned. As history has it, the Sikhs had never at any time been privy to, or taken up the cause of, the mutiny of 1857. They had never been taken into confidence. They had neither been consulted nor invited. The Poorbia sepoys, as the soldiers of the Bengal army were then, and are still called in the Punjab, had not the moral courage to approach the Sikhs for cooperation and assistance against the British as they had themselves helped them destroy the independent kingdom of the Punjab in 1845-46 and reduce it to British subjection in 1848-49. As such, there was not much love lost between the Poorbia sepoys and people of the Punjab. The offensive airs of the Poorbia garrisons in the Punjab had been particularly galling to the martial Sikhs. Their behaviour towards the civil population during their first march in 1846 from the theatre of war to the capital of Lahore, and during the British occupation of the country before and

after the annexation, had caused such deep wounds in the hearts of the people as could not be healed in so short a time. The Sikhs could not volunteer to help these erstwhile enemies of the Punjab, nor could they, for evident reasons, espouse the cause of the Mughal Emperor, Bahadur Shah II, whom the mutineers had raised to the throne. For two centuries the Sikhs had fought against Mughal tyranny and they could not now be persuaded to support an alliance which might have resulted in its re-establishment. Moreover, as the mutiny later turned out to be, there appeared to be nothing national or patriotic in it to appeal to the noble sentiments of the Sikhs to attract them to the side of the mutineers. The wrath of the mutineers was mostly directed against Christians who had interfered with their religion. A large number of unsuspecting

Englishmen and their women and children were indiscriminately murdered at Meerut, Delhi and other places. The first man to be killed in Delhi was an Indian Christian, Dr Chamanlal, who was standing in front of his dispensary. Their next victims were Baniyas and Mahajans whose shops they plundered, and account books and debt-bonds they burnt or destroyed. Beyond this, there was no planned or organised scheme or effort on their part either to subvert

the rule of the East India Company or to weaken the administrative hold of the British over the country. Moreover, the mutiny was exclusively confined to the Poorbia sepoys of the Bengal army. Territorially too, it was limited to UP and its neighbourhood, while the remaining 80 per cent of India was practically unaffected by it. Even in UP there were a number of pockets which remained undisturbed. The reason for this lack of interest in, and sympathy with and, in many cases, active opposition to, the continuance and progress of the sepoy mutiny was the absence of any common cause, any planned scheme, any unity of interests. The early activities of the sepoys in Delhi and its neighbourhood were repugnant not only to the civil population of the country but also to the non-Poorbia soldiers: the Rajputs, the Marathas, the Madrasis, the Garhwalis, the Gorkhas, the Dogras, the Punjabi Musalmans, the Sikhs and the Pathans.

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Revolt against Callousness

The mutiny at best was a religious riot of the Hindus and Muslim soldiers of the Bengal Army against the indiscreet but, perhaps, unintentioned callousness of some British military officers, who happened to be careless about the religious sentiments of Hindus and Muslims offended by greased cartridges. With passions inflamed and a number of murders committed at Meerut and Delhi, the sepoys could not retrace their steps. They were then joined by a large number of bad characters, set free from jails, and of professional dacoits and plunderers from the criminal tribes of the neighbouring areas. It is true that the Mughal Emperor Bahadur Shah had been proclaimed King, in whose name they professed to have risen in defence of Hinduism and Islam. But in practice, this was nothing more than a mere pretence to seek a cover for their crimes and misdeeds. His authority, they openly flouted and his orders, they publicly disobeyed. They insulted him in his very face and treated him insolently in his own palace. Such behaviour was certainly not becoming of the faithful and devoted soldiers towards a king whom they had themselves raised to the throne. But, in truth, they had done so only to use him as a handy tool. If he were not to be useful to them, they had no hesitation in renouncing him. "The sepoys at Delhi refused to fight unless they were paid their salaries, and that on an adequate scale a demand which is hardly in consonance with the spirit which should guide a fighter in a war of independence".

The King himself was only a victim of circumstance. He had no hand either in organising or encouraging the mutiny. He might have been glad within his heart to see the English humbled, but he was too old to plan or lead an insurrection. In fact, he had no knowledge of the rising of the sepoys till they had actually arrived at the palace gates and called upon him to assume command. He cited infirmity and poverty, but the sepoys would hear nothing of the sort. He was in a dilemma. He sent a fast camel rider to Agra to inform the Lieutenant-Governor of the mutiny at Meerut and of the arrival of mutineers at Delhi. Finding himself helpless before the increasing violence of the armed sepoys, violating the sanctity of the palace itself, the old King quailed

before them. In fear, he issued the proclamations desired by the sepoys and outwardly espoused their cause. Within a week the indisciplined sepoys disregarded the King's authority and refused to be commanded by his nominee, Bakht Khan, and transferred their allegiance to Prince Abu Bakr whom, on 17 May, they elected as their King in place of the old Emperor. The King's confidant Ahasanullah then represented that "the mutineers were a treacherous, blood-thirsty class on whom no dependence could be placed".

No Faith in Mutineers

The King himself had no faith in the sepoys nor in the success of the mutiny. He, therefore, entered into secret negotiations with the British and offered to have gates of the fort and city of Delhi opened to them if they guaranteed his life, pension and privileges. These negotiations came to nothing, it is true, but they "show Bahadur Shah in his true colour so far as his attitude to the mutiny or the War of Independence is concerned".

The principal Queen, Zinat Mahal, on her own part, offered to assist the British if her son, Jawan Bakht, was recognised as successor to the old Emperor to the exclusion of other princes. The Mughal princes, too, were not sincere and faithful to the mutineers. They offered their services to the British in the occupation of Delhi on condition of favour being shown to them. "During the brief term of their authority," the princes occupied themselves in feathering their nests with the loot of the city, and then their only anxiety was to save their skin as best as they could. All this leaves no doubt that Bahadur Shah and his family betrayed the cause not only of the mutineers, of whom he was the nominal head, but also of the whole country.

Raja Nahar Singh of Ballabgarh, Nawab Abdur Rahman Khan of Jhajjar and Rao Tula Ram of Rewari, who were supposed to have identified themselves with the king and mutineers, were playing a double game and negotiating with the British for a settlement. Their double dealings, however, did not succeed with the British who treated them as other mutineers and hanged them.

Personal Motives

About the other big leaders of the sepoys, less said the better. In the words of Maulana Abul

Kalam Azad, supported by the evidence adduced in recent researches in mutiny records, "With a few honourable exceptions of whom the most distinguished were Ahmadullah and Tatya Tope, most of the leaders who took part in the struggle did so for personal reasons. They did not rise against the British till their personal interests had been damaged. Even after the revolt had begun, Nana Sahib declared that if Dalhousie's decisions were reversed and his own demands met, he would be willing to come to terms. The Rani of Jhansi had her own grievances". There is nothing on record to say that she had any hand in planning, instigating or organising the mutiny of sepoys at Jhansi. In fact, she informed the British that she had been ill treated by the mutineers and forced to pay money, and she asked for their help to maintain order. Believing in her innocence, the Commissioner of Saugor division nominated her to rule in Jhansi till the British could re-establish their administration. When the British changed their attitude and suspected her of complicity in the mutiny, she sent pathetic appeals to the authorities pleading her innocence and professing loyalty to the British. If she had succeeded in dispelling the suspicions of the British, she would have gone to their side. But when at last she found that the British held her responsible for the mutiny and massacre at Jhansi, she preferred to fight. And it may be said to her credit and glory that she died a hero's death in the battlefield.

Tatya Tope was neither an organiser nor a leader of the mutineers, but only a follower of Nana Sahib, to whom he was devotedly attached. But luck did not favour him. He was driven from place to place and could not find even a single Maratha village across the Narmada to give him shelter. He had, therefore, to flee to the forests where he was betrayed to the British by a professed rebel friend, Raja Man Singh of Narwar, a feudatory of Sindia.

No Understanding

The mutiny having broken out all of a sudden, and none having an idea of the turn it would take, there was no understanding between the Hindus and Muslims. While, in the chaos and confusion that followed the arrival of the Meerut sepoys at Delhi, a number of Muhamedans were oppressed and plundered, a regular *jehad* was proclaimed against the Hindus by Muslims in a number of places. Some clever

adventurers found in the mutiny an opportunity for the revival of an Islamic kingdom and used the cover of religion for their anti-Hindus activities. The green flag of holy war was often displayed in Delhi. It was hoisted in Bareilly, Bijnor, Moradabad, and many other places where the Hindus were plundered and massacred. This estranged the feelings between the Hindus and Muslims. As fellow-sufferers, the Hindus in many places took the side of the English, protected their lives and property and prayed for their victory. "It was generally held", says Dr Sen, "that the Hindus were as a community well-disposed towards the British and the Muslims as a community were hostile, the Hindus should be exempted from any penalty. Some Hindus of the trading classes were allowed to return (to the city of Delhi)." It was ultimately realised that disaffection towards the British Government was not the monopoly of any particular community, and there were exceptions in both. It was, therefore, decided that every citizen who desired to return should pay a fine, but there should be a discrimination in the rate on a communal basis. While the Muslims had to pay a fine equivalent to 25 per cent of the value of his real property, the Hindus were required to pay 15 per cent less.

A close and critical study of the mutiny records reveals a very sad story of everyone for himself and no one for the country. The Mughal Emperor, the proclaimed head of the mutiny, the Queen and the princes, and other leaders of the revolt all pulled in their own directions and played a double game to secure their ends and interests. The sepoys of Oudh fought for the restoration of their own King. Nana Sahib and the Rani of Jhansi pressed their own claims. A number of smaller adventurers, not inspired by any patriotic impulse, sprang up to exploit the opportunity, offered by the mutiny, to their personal advantages. Khan Bahadur Khan, a grandson of Hafiz Rahmat Khan, set himself as Viceroy of Naib Nazim of Rohilkhand. The Banjaras of Sahranpur set up a king of their own. The Gujjars had different *rajas* in different areas, Fatua being proclaimed as the king of the Gujjars. One Devi Singh proclaimed himself king of fourteen villages in Mathura district. Similarly one Mahima ji Wadi, a dacoit, and Belsare, a Maratha Brahman, were attracted to the rebel camp to improve their fortunes.

The idea of Indian nationalism and of fighting for the independence of India was a thing unknown both to the so-called leaders of the mutiny and to the Poorbia sepoys who had been instrumental during the past hundred years in the loss of independence of the various Indian kingdoms. The Marathas, the Mysorians, the Malabarais, the Rajputs, the Gorkhas, the Pathans, the Sikhs and the Assamese had all been reduced with their help and never had the Poorbias raised their little finger in protest much less in their defence. This was not a very creditable record to have attracted the non-Poorbias to their side.

The people of the Punjab were the worst and most recent sufferers at their hands. In addition to the Poorbia sepoys who had fought against them under the British in 1845-46 and 1848-49, it was the Poorbia soldiers of fortune, Tej Singh and Lal Singh – the Commander-in-Chief and Prime Minister of the Punjab respectively – who had entered into secret agreements with the British and betrayed the Sikhs in the first Anglo-Sikh War. Again, it was mostly with the help of the Poorbia regiments and Poorbia civilian subordinate officials that the Punjab was being held under British subjection in 1857 when the mutiny took place. As such, the people of the Punjab, particularly the Sikhs, could not have looked upon them as worthy of their support in a cause which threatened them with the re-establishment of Mughal tyranny of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

The Punjabis were not alone in not joining the revolt. They could not have joined it for reasons which have been stated at some length. The Bengalis, the Marathas, the Madrasis and the Malabarais, whose love for the independence of India has been in no way less than that of anyone else in the country, took no part in it. The Rajputs, the Jats, the Dogras and the Garhwalis kept studiously aloof. The educated communities of Bengal and Madras openly condemned the rising and denounced the mutiny and mutineers.

The cooperation of the Sikhs with the mutineers could not have made much difference, nor could it have contributed much to their success. There were the Punjabi Musalmans, the Bahawalpuri Daudpotras, the Baluchis and the Frontier Pathans who were deadly opposed to the mutineers. The strength of East India Company's rule in India

depended mostly on the naval power of England. The rising in the Punjab could not have placed any obstacles in the way of their reinforcements from the West. A few more murders of Englishmen in the Punjab or even a military defeat of the British in that province could not have ended the rule of the Company in India and freed her from British yoke.

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"The sepoy mutiny was not a fight for freedom", says Sir Jadunath Sarkar. "It was not a rising of the people for political self-determination, but a conspiracy of mercenary soldiers to prevent the cunning destruction of their religion by defiling their bodies with pig's lard and cow's fat which were used in lubricating paper parcels for cartridges"

"A number of dispossessed dynasts, both Hindu and Muslim, exploited the well-founded caste-suspensions of the

sepoys and made these simple folk their cat's paw in a gamble for recovering their thrones. The last scions of the Delhi Mughals or the Oudh Nawabs and the Peshwa, can by no ingenuity be called fighters for Indian freedom".

Why The Mutiny Failed

The mutiny of 1857 failed not because the Sikhs, or the people of the Punjab, or of any other state or province, did not join it but because it had no noble sentiment behind it, no plan to guide it, and no sincere leader to see it through. "The failure of the outbreak, according to Dr Majumdar, "may also be attributed to the fact that neither the leaders, nor the sepoys and masses were inspired by any high ideal. The lofty sentiments of patriotism and nationalism, with which they are credited, do not appear to have any basis in fact. As a matter of fact, such ideas were not yet familiar to Indian minds. In the light of the available evidence, we are forced to the conclusion," says Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, "that the uprising of 1857 was not the result of careful planning nor were there any master-minds behind it." "As I read about the events of 1857, I am forced to the conclusion", he continues, "that Indian national character had sunk very low. The leaders of the revolt could never agree. They were mutually jealous and continually intrigued against one another. In fact these personal jealousies and intrigues were largely responsible for the Indian defeat".

Controversial Points Cleared

My article on the “Indian Mutiny of 1857 and the Sikhs” published in the special number of *The Tribune* of 15 August 1957, has raised a good deal of discussion. Seventeen letters and two articles have since appeared on the subject. I feel a stage has now come when a reply from me is due to my critics.

Most of the contributors of the discussion have not been able to keep in view the exact thesis of my article. I had clearly stated in the beginning of its third paragraph that I was writing in response to the invitation of the Secretary to the Indian Freedom Struggle Centenary (1857-1957) Souvenir Committee, New Delhi, to rebut the charge that Indian struggle for freedom (1857) failed as the Sikh betrayed and sided with the British. In spite of it, some of writers have laboured under the impression that I was writing on the part played by the Sikhs during the Mutiny. That is in itself a subject for discussion, with detailed narration of events, district by district, in the British Punjab and in the Indian states.

I propose to confine my reply to an academic discussion of the points raised by critics. I shall not, therefore, mention any names. This will eliminate the possibility of reducing the discussion to a personal controversy.

The approach of the gentleman with whose letter, the controversy started, was purely sentimental. To him, and to others with a similar approach, I have only to say that history takes no cognisance of the sentiments of people coming a century after the event, twisting and moulding it, mixing politics with history, to give the colour and appearance which never belonged to it.

For his information, I may be permitted to say that my conclusions (which he says “no sensible man would accept”) are not only mine. They are also conclusions of the greatest living authorities on the history of India, Dr Sir Jadunath Sarkar, Dr Romesh C. Mazumdar and Dr Surendranath Sen. They are scholars of international fame and are acknowledged as the leading educationists of India. They have been Vice-Chancellors of Universities of Calcutta, Dacca and Delhi. Their conclusions have not only been accepted but also supported by Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, Education Minister of the Government of India, and other men of sound learning and judgement.

Poorbias

One of the critics thinks that I have derisively referred to the soldiers of the Bengal Army as Poorbias. Not at all. If he were to refer to contemporary records of the central and provincial governments and to the Regimental histories of the then Bengal Army, he would find the words Poorbia and Hindoostanee then commonly used for men from beyond the Yamuna. (See MacMuns, *The Armies of India*, *The Punjab Mutiny Reports*, *Regimental History of the 54th Sikhs etc.*) And in the Punjab, the word ‘Poorbia’ was more commonly used than ‘Hindoostanee’, as it continues to the present day, and there is no derision attached to it.

I wish the name of Karl Marx had not been brought into controversy. Marx does not appear to have any first hand knowledge of then Punjab and of the Sikh regiments stationed in the Punjab cantonments. The ‘conspiracy to murder British officers and to rise against the British’ discovered among ‘several’ Sikh regiments at Dera Ismail Khan referred to by Marx does not stand the test of historical scrutiny.

According to regimental records, there was only one Sikh Regiment at Dera Ismail Khan when the mutiny broke out at Meerut on 10 May 1857, and that was the 3rd Sikh Infantry. Although it carried a Sikh name, it was not completely Sikh in its composition. Like the other three Sikh regiments, it had 50 per cent Punjabi Musalmans from Jhelum and Rawalpindi, Pathans from across the Indus, Dogras from the Shivalaks and Hindoostanis (Poorbias) from the other side of the Jamuna. It was among the last named Hindoostanee sepoys of the 3rd Sikh Infantry (and not among the Sikhs, the Punjabi Musalmans or the Dogras) that plot to murder British officers was discovered. To quote from the regimental history:

“In July it came to the notice of the Commanding Officer that some of the Hindoostanees had been talking in a very mutinous and insubordinate manner, regarding the disturbances in Hindoostan, and all efforts failing to discover the ringleaders, he determined to disarm the whole, which was accordingly done. They consisted of 4 native officers, 12 havildars, 26 naiks, 60 privates.

Another conspiracy reported at Dera Ismail Khan was amongst the 39th Native Infantry composed exclusively of the Poorbia sepoys who had quietly surrendered their arms.

The argument that 'the democratic press of the various European countries hailed the 1857 uprising as a national revolt of the Indian people' carries no weight with a man of history. It was nothing more than political propaganda of the jealous anti-British European countries against England, and was as meaningless as the present day propaganda of several European and American countries against Russia and China.

It is true that Punjabis were not devoid of patriotic fervour, but what they could not believe was that Poorbia soldiers, who had been the most devoted henchmen of the British for a hundred years, who had helped the British subjugate the Marathas, the Rajputs, the Jats, the Gurkhas, the Pathans and the Sikhs and were garrisoning the Punjab for the British even during the Mutiny, could have turned patriots overnight. Such a movement for which the various martial fraternities of Indian people had not been consulted and taken into confidence, and which was openly denounced by the people of Bengal and Madras and was not joined by the people of Maharashtra, Bombay, Gujarat, Sindh and Rajasthan, could not, according to Punjabis, be a national movement. Poorbias alone did not constitute the Indian nation, nor was nationalism the name of whatever they did, whether it was the indiscriminate murder of innocent women and children, the plunder and spoliation of their own countrymen or secret negotiations with the British to further their personal interests.

Hindu-Muslim Relations

There is no denying the fact there was no understanding between the Hindus and Muslims. It is true that majority of the Poorbia soldiers were high caste Hindoos but they sought shelter under the banner of the Mughal Emperor who was raised to the throne. The emperor was practically a helpless puppet in the hands of his sons and Muslim lieutenants who had all the power and authority centred in them. The efforts at Hindu-Muslim unity were mostly one way traffic. Having broken with the Government and not supported by either Hindu Rajput, Maratha, Dogra and Gurkha princes of people, the Hindu sepoys were left with no alternative other than following Muslim rule in the country. Emperor Bahadur Shah favoured them with the prohibition of cow slaughter in Delhi on the occasion of Id, and Khan Bahadur Khan Bahadur

Khan of Bareilly also offered to prohibit cow-killing, not for Hindu-Muslim unity or for respect for Hindu sentiments but only as a bargain for killing Englishmen. "If the Hindus will come forward to slay the English", said he, "the Mohamedans will from that very day, put a stop to the slaughter of cows." This needs no comment.

The unfurling of the green flag of *jehad*, and the plunder and massacre of Hindus at Delhi, Bareilly, Bijnore, Moradabad and other places were certainly not the symbols of Hindu-Muslim unity. Nor was the Muslim attempt to hoist the green flag on the Hindu temple of Bisheshwar at Benaras the result of "friendly regard" for the Hindus.

"The communal hatred", says Dr Majumdar, "led to ugly communal riots in many parts of U.P. The Green flag was hoisted and bloody wars were fought between Hindus and Muslims in Bareilly, Bijnor, Moradabad and other places where the Muslims shouted for revival of the Muslim kingdom."

On authority of the *Bidrohe Bangali* of Durgadas Bandyapadhyaya, an eye-witness, Dr Majumdar tells us: "the demon of communalism also raised its head. The Muslims spat over the Hindus and openly defiled their houses by sprinkling them with cow's blood and placing cow's bones within the compounds. Concrete instances are given where Hindu sepoys came into clash with Muslim hooligans and a complete riot ensued. The Hindus, oppressed by the Muslims, were depressed at the success of the Mutiny, and daily offered prayers to God for the return of the English."

This was the foretaste of the feared revival of Muslim rule. One shudders to think of what would have actually followed it.

In spite of this all, if some people wish to live in a state of hallucination and believe there was complete friendly understanding and great communal harmony between Muslims and Hindus at all stages in the Mutiny, they are most welcome to do so, but they should not expect a student of history to be one with them. Past history has to be recorded as it was and not wish it to be re-invented a century afterwards. It cannot be written to order or moulded and remoulded according to changing times.

Bhai Maharaj Singh, referred to by the author of the article, was not a product of the Sepoy Mutiny. He

was as much against the Poorbia soldiers as against the British. His zeal against them was some ten years old and had come from the days of the Anglo-Sikh wars of 1845-46 and 1848-49. He had then escaped being caught and hanged or exiled by them.

The author of the second article has accepted almost all the main points of my article. It appears that he had not studied Dr RC Mazumdar's *Sepoy Mutiny & Revolt of 1857. The Trial of Bahadur Shah* (published by the Government of Punjab, 1932) and *Selections from Public Correspondence*, Vol IV, N.1, Punjab Mutiny Report published at Lahore in 1859), otherwise he would have agreed to the other minor points as well.

Excess

That the mutineers behaved worse than bands of plunderers and dacoits is proved by a large number of petitions submitted to Emperor Bahadur Shah and his instructions and orders issued thereon to Prince Mirza Mughal and to the military and police authorities. According to the evidence on record, the mutineers took the law into their own hands and helped themselves to whatever they wished to take away. The bad examples set by the Mughal Princes and rebel leaders encouraged the soldiers to enter any house within and outside the city of Delhi, billet themselves on whomsoever they wished and carry away whatever they liked. There is nothing on record to support the argument advanced to defend or to explain away the conduct of the mutineers as "the rebels harmed only those (Indians) who either refused to give supplies to them or were suspected of being in league with the British."

The Emperor forwarded the petitions of helpless sufferers to Prince Mirza Mughal for affording protection. But finding that his orders were not obeyed, the Emperor wrote to his son, Mirza Mughal, on 18 June, "It is surprising that, upto the present time, no arrangements should have been made. It is the business of the Army to protect, and not to desolate and plunder." On the 19th June, the residents of Jaisinghpura and Paharganj complained that "the troops of the State were oppressing the shopkeepers, forcibly take away their wares, without the payment of prices, and also, entering the dwelling houses forcibly carry away all such articles that they can lay hands on, and wound with fire-arms and swords those who may supplicate their forbearance. In his order dated 27 June,

the Emperor wrote to Princes Mughal and Khair Sultan, "Not a day has elapsed since the arrival of the army, and its taking up quarters in the city, that petitions from the people have not been submitted, representing the excesses committed by numerous Infantry Sepoys. You, our sons, are directed to take all proper steps to prevent the men of the Army from plundering and desolating the city." Syad Abdullah, priest of the shrine of Hazrat Sheikh Muhammad Chisti petitioned on the 29th of June that "the whole of the autumnal crop of sugarcane, churree, etc., has been totally devastated, and more than this, the very implements of agriculture, such as ploughs, wood work on wells, have all be carried away, in plunder by soldiers. Similarly petitions from all types of people, rich and poor, Hindus and Muslims, came in from all quarters of the capital and from towns and rural areas, complaining against the depredations of the mutineers. In his orders to Prince Mughal, the Emperor tells horses in front of the shops and have taken possession of a number of them and that the rebel Gujjars of Aliganj, Mallanji, Hasangarh and Alpur "are now engaged in highway robbery and in plundering the country."

King's Threat

But who cared for the wishes and orders of poor Bahadur Shah, helpless puppet in the hands of the mutineers! They only meant to use his name to have their own way. And, when they found that his wishes clashed with their own, they just ignored him. Openly disobeyed and insulted by the mutineers, Emperor Bahadur Shah, in disgust, threatened to abdicate and leave the capital and commit suicide, as is evident from his memorandum of the 9 August, 1857, addressed the officers of the army at Delhi. He says:

"If you are not disposed to comply with these requests, let me be conveyed, in safety, to the Khwaja Sahib. I shall there sit and employ myself in the occupation of a Mujawir (sweeper) and go away. Let those who think they can detain me, attempt to do so. Not having been killed by the hands of English, I shall be killed by yours. Further, the oppression that is at present inflicted on the people, it is inflicted on me. It is incumbent on you all to take measures to prevent it. Or let me have my answer, and I shall swallow a diamond and kill myself".

Even this had no effect, and there was no improvement in the attitude and conduct of the mutineers. Emperor Bahadur Shah, therefore, resolved to discard the world, to adopt the garb of a Faqir and to go to the shrine of Khwaja Kutub-ud-Din and thence proceed to the holy city of Mecca. One can hardly imagine the agony and mental torture to which the helpless Emperor was subjected by the misbehaviour of the mutineers and their leaders. The following extracts from the order of Bahadru Shah addressed to his son Mirza Mughal speak volumes for themselves and leave no ground for any further comments on the point:

“Repeated injunctions have been issued prohibiting plunder and aggression in the city, but all to no purpose; for although ten days have now elapsed, the same evils are prevailing to the present time. (Regiments of Infantry) have thoroughly desolated several of the bazaars. Moreover, without reference to night or day, they enter and plunder the house of inhabitants on false pleas. They force locks on shop-doors, and they forcibly loose the horses of cavalry and take them off. A notification, under special seal, was issued publicly, proclaiming that courts of justice had been established in the city, and prohibiting acts of violence on the part of soldiery. Even this had no effect, they now clamorously demand allowances daily, and above all, daily take allowances for more men than are present. Under these circumstances, how is it to be believed that these people can have the welfare of the state of the heart, or that they cherish and desire to yield subjection and obedience to the royal authority? Wearied and helpless, we have now resolved on making a vow to pass the remainder of our days in service acceptable to God, assuming the garb of a religious mendicant, to proceed first and stay at the shrine of saint Khwaja Sahib, and, after making necessary arrangements for the journey, to go eventually to Mecca.

Men such as these who would observe no discipline, recognise no authority and obey no orders, even of the supreme head of the state, and who would indulge in cold-blooded murder of women and children, despoil their own countrymen, and rob their own exchequer by fraud and dishonesty, are a disgrace to any movement, and cannot, in truth, be hailed as champions of a national cause.”

It is being said that “there is ample evidence to prove that the atrocities committed by the Britishers exceeded those committed by the rebels in all respects.” Admitted. Nobody would justify and acclaim the British atrocities, “not even the Britishers. They deserve our strongest condemnation. They were the result of revengeful madness. But the atrocities committed by the Britishers, later, in retaliation do not justify those committed by the rebels who began the mutiny with cold-blood butchery at Meerut and Delhi. And to acclaim and celebrate activities which had no moral or religious justification is not becoming of a nation with a rich heritage as India has. It would have been in the larger interests of the country to have allowed these painful memories to be quietly forgotten. Who does not know that in violent movements and bloody revolutions the national character of people not un often sinks very low? That is why Mahatma Gandhi studiously avoided the introduction of violence in his movements. And if he were alive, I am sure he would not have permitted any celebration of the centenary of the Mutiny. I have nothing but pity for those who can, even after a century, extol the blood-thirsty murderers of innocent women and children. For, if murder is the worst of crimes for the purpose of history, “those who promote or defend it, before or after, share in proportion the guilt of the crime.” May Lord, in His boundless mercy, give light and guidance to His erring people.

To another friend who has written more than a column to disagree with me in that “the co-operation of the Sikhs with the mutineers could not have made much difference,” I have only to say that I had deliberately used the word ‘much’. He would certainly have been right if I had used the word ‘any’ instead. I agree that it would have made some difference, though not much.

I am very much surprised at the ignorance of a lecturer in history. He says, “And even then not the whole of the Punjab kept itself aloof. What about the people of Ajnala to whom the Chief Minister of our state paid a tribute the other day? What about Raja Nahar Singh and Rao Tula Ram of Rewari in whose memory a glorious memorial is being raised?” The answer to my learned friend’s first question is that not a single resident of Ajnala either rebelled or joined the mutineers. The soldiers who came to be entrapped at Ajnala and executed by Frederick Cooper, Deputy Commissioner of Amritsar, were all Poorbias belonging to the disarmed 26th Native Infantry who had, on 30 July, 1857, bolted

from their camp at Mian Mir. Their arrival at Doodian was reported by Chaukidar Sultan Khan to Diwan Prem Nath Tehsildar who, with a number of Sawars, policemen and villagers, attacked, shot, dispersed and drove them into the river. At the same time he sent information to the Deputy Commissioner of Amritsar, Mr Fred Cooper, who later on destroyed them in detail.

About Raja Nahar Singh and Rao Tula Ram, the less said the better. They were both playing a double game to secure their personal interests. "These Chiefs," says Dr. Surendranath Sen, "were supposed to have closely identified themselves with the king's cause, but they were secretly negotiating for a settlement with the English, even before the British had succeeded in achieving any notable success against the sepoys."

As regards the memorials, they are being raised by politicians and not by historians.

The same gentleman who has asked me the above questions about the people of Ajnala and about Raja Nahar Singh and Rao Tula Ram, is, however, happy at the failure of the mutiny. "To the good luck of India," he says, "the rising of 1857 did not succeed, otherwise there would have been a huge civil war, a great catastrophe, to use the words of Data Bhai Naoroji."

"To the good luck of India, the rising of 1857 did not succeed, otherwise there would have been a huge civil war, a great catastrophe, to use the words of Data Bhai Naoroji."

Another writer calls the failure of the mutiny 'a blessing in disguise.' "If unfortunately, the great rising of 1857 had succeeded (in favour of India), we might not have seen the era of democratic freedom dawning upon us so soon," says he.

The Sikhs, according to one calculation, were then hardly 10 per cent in the Punjab, and the remaining 90 per cent of Punjabis were Hindus and Muslims. If the Sikhs had, for some reasons, kept themselves aloof from the mutineers, why did not the Hindus and Muslims of the Punjab join them? One may ask. The 90 percent majority could have easily ignored the 10 percent or brushed them aside. In the all-India calculation, the Sikhs would hardly be 1 per cent, and they could not have successfully opposed the 99 per cent majority of the Hindus and Muslims, if they were all united and there was complete harmony amongst them, as claimed by a writer.

The truth is that not only the people of the Punjab (the Hindus, the Muslims and the Sikhs) kept themselves aloof from the mutineers, but the people

of Bengal, Madras, Maharashtra, Gujarat, Sindh, Rajasthan, Jammu and Kashmir and the north-western frontier also did not join them. Some of them actually opposed them. Not only this, of the three Presidency armies, Bengal, Madras and Bombay, it was only a part of the Bengal army that had mutinied. The other part fought on the side of the Government to suppress it. The Madras and Bombay armies remained quiet and loyal: Evidently the Poorbia soldiers had failed to win the sympathies of their own class of people in the south and south-west as in the west and north-west.

Surely there was, then something fundamentally wrong with the Mutiny and its leaders that kept the majority of the Indian people and army away from them. In the first place, the movement had nothing national or patriotic about it. The idea of India being one nation had yet to grow in the country. The cry of *Deen* and *Dharma*, raised by the mutineers and Emperor Bahadur Shah, carried no weight with the people at large. Beyond this, there was no common popular aim to appeal to and attract the people. The past record of the Poorbia soldiers was not creditable enough to win the confidence of the non-Poorbias.

Then, there was no plan for the mutiny on all-India basis. The non-Poorbia had not been consulted, nor invited. And, lastly, the mutineers failed to produce from among themselves, or win over from amongst the people, sincere and selfless leaders who could command respect and obedience. There was no mutual understanding between the Hindus and Muslims, and between the various social, economic and geographic fraternities of the country for a joint effort against the British. The conduct of the mutineers and their leaders at Delhi, Meerut and other places was not such as to convey to others the impression of the mutiny being anything like national or of common interest and benefit. The exhibition of blood-thirstiness in the murder of women and children sent throughout the country a thrill of horror and hatred against the mutinous sepoys and alienated the sympathies of their probable friends.

Dr Ganda Singh

* Written on Centenary of the Mutiny, in 1957, with quotes from Surendranath Sen and RC Majumdar.

The Fate of India



The Gurdwara Sahib at Mudki, where akhand path is continously recited in memory of the Shaheeds of 1845.

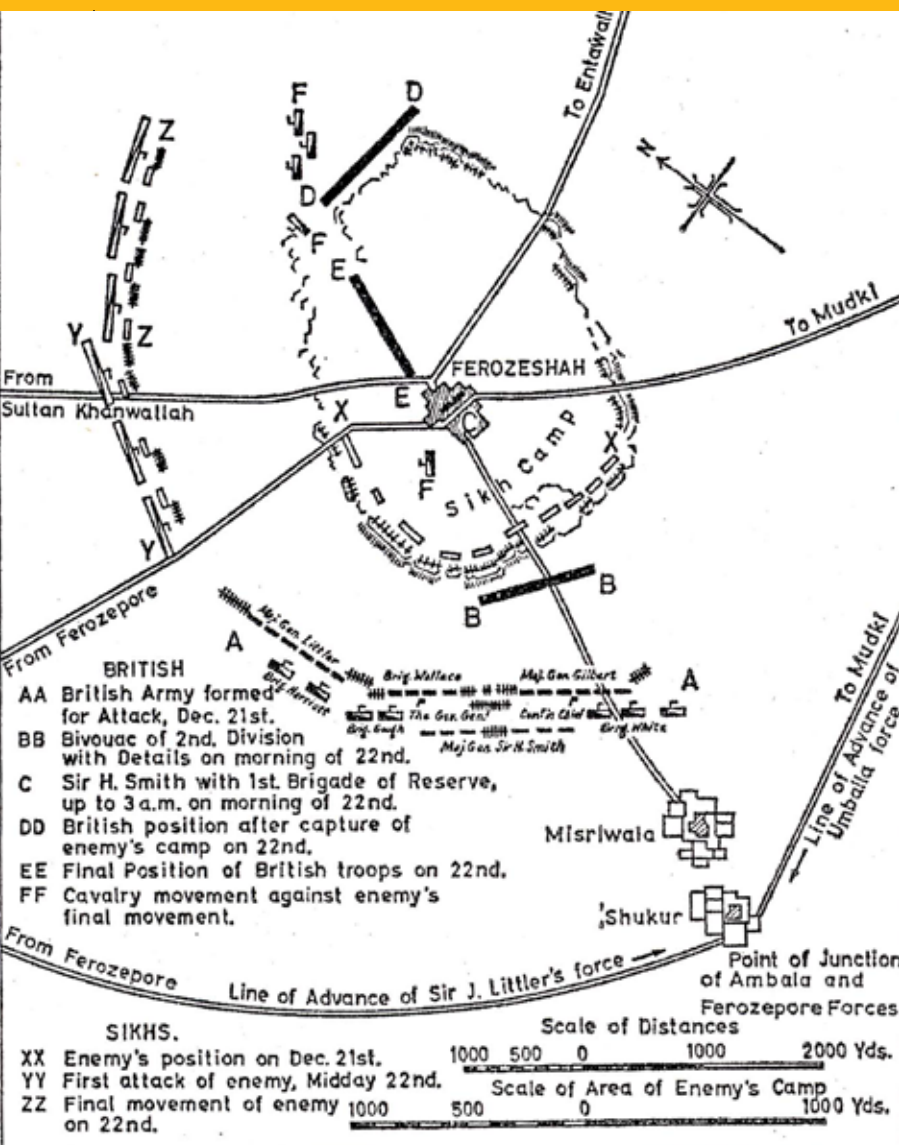
Fate of the Indian sub-continent under the English expansionists was sealed during the middle of December 1845 when the Sikh armies fought them on the battlefields of Mudki and then Ferozeshah on the eastern side of the Sutlej river, southeast of Ferozepore. The English had been continuously interfering in the affairs of the last independent kingdom of India as they endeavoured to expand their empire



The battlefield of Mudki, 18 December 1845.

north-westwards towards Afghanistan. Sir Henry Hardinge as Governor General had blatantly provoked rulers of the Punjab by moving his armies towards the Sutlej with scores of assault boats and pontoon trains being brought up the Indus from Sind.

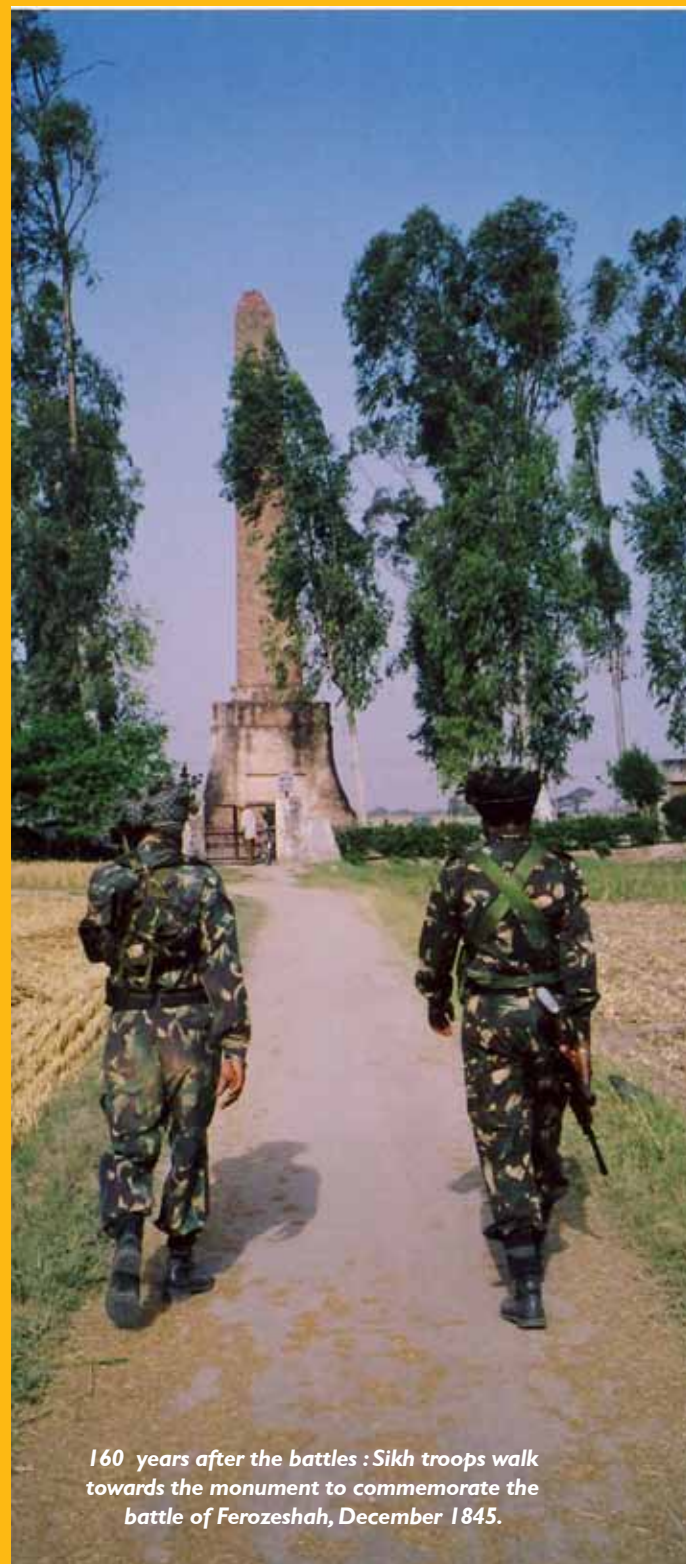
Perturbed by this massing of forces, which included large numbers of the Bengal Presidency Army, the Sikh Army crossed the Sutlej on 11 December 1845, but only to occupy their own enclaves despite which the Governor General immediately put out a proclamation of war and declared the cis-Sutlej States as 'annexed'. Details of the fierce battles of



The battle of Ferozeshah, 21-22 December 1845

Mudki and Ferozeshah have been recorded in detail elsewhere but two aspects need to 'be highlighted: firstly bulk of the native infantry engaged (the 16th, 24th, 26th, 27th, 41st, 42nd, 45th, 47th and 73rd Regiments) were soundly beaten and English regiments had to actually protect them from annihilation and secondly, after the battle, the Poorbias went on a looting rampage and had to be controlled by the English officers by force. Forerunner to 1857?

Fate of the English in India would have been sealed on the night of 21-22 December 1845, Ferozeshah being described as 'the most terrible battle of British Indian history'. Despite the traitorous Poorbias Lal Singh and Tej Singh, the Sikh Army so decimated their opponents that had an advance being made by the fresh Sikh



forces held back in reserve, the road to Delhi was open and the defeated English would arguably have had to leave the sub-continent 100 years before they actually did in August 1947.

Bangla Sahib

*After many years
I find myself
On the grounds of Bangla Sahib
Taking in the scene.*

*My mind drifts
My eyes glaze
My heart gets heavy
I can hardly breathe.*

*I want to run
But my feet don't move
I'm caught in time
There is nothing I can do.*

*I hear my Biji's voice
Filled with a longing
"Just take me once, my child
To Bangla Sahib, please."*

*The steps are steep
The marble is wet
There is no way
I can take her there.*

*Days go by
She gets weaker
Yet her desire to visit Bangla Sahib
Remains strong.*

*Biji leaves
I'm ridden with guilt.
I blame myself
For not fulfilling her dying wish.*

*I wrap up my emotions
File them in a corner
Proceed to live my life
Without dealing with the guilt.*

*Yet today, I find myself
In front of the sarovar
Sobbing like a baby
Desperate for a healing touch.*

*My tears mingle
With the sarovar waters.
I beg for forgiveness
From my Biji.*

*I feel a strange pull
Towards the stairs
I enter the Darbar Hall
Not knowing what to expect.*

*I sit in a corner
With a heavy heart
With eyes that are drenched
And a soul in pain.*

*The Shabad embraces me
My soul responds
To the Divine Melody
That fills the air.*

*Hours pass
There is no desire to leave
There is no other place
I'd rather be.*

*I feel my Biji's presence
I know I'm forgiven
The healing powers of
Bangla Sahib
Have filled my heart with love.*

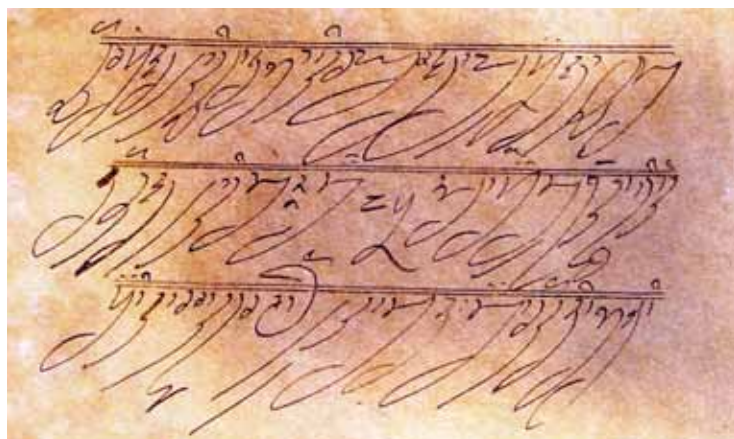
*In the lap of Bangla Sahib
Surrounded by love
I rest my head
On its loving floors.*

*Thoughts come and go
As I reflect
All I can say, is
Shukar - I am here.*

*Inni Kaur
Biji - my naniji*

Nanakshahi: Vision of a (On-line) Digital Sikh Reference Library

"The struggle of man against power is the struggle of memory against forgetting," writes Milan Kundera in *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*. Prophetic as these thoughts are, they remind us that people who sustain and invigorate their memory, live to lead and be remembered. The quest for survival, as well as the active participation in the world arena, has taken the Sikh community through many highs



Guru Gobind Singh ji's writing: the document is with the descendants of Suraj Mal at Anandpur Sahib.

and lows. Unfortunately, through continued strife on the way, the community has lost rare and vital markers of its heritage and roots. It is especially distressing since the community is relatively well placed and lives in less turbulent times.

In light of such a situation, it is thrilling to introduce a brilliant effort initiated by a handful of young Sikh professionals working for community service programmes with a no-profit agenda. A site quite rare and unique in its capacity, the SAS Nagar-based NGO, *The Nanakshahi Trust* is dedicated to the preservation of history and heritage of the Sikhs and the Punjab. A research and action-oriented organisation, *Nanakshahi* is creating awareness of Sikh culture by creating audio-visual aids, publishing books and other textual material, and also offering expertise towards archiving manuscripts and periodicals.

Maintaining and archiving records of the past is a major concern and requirement in preserving history. In a scenario with limited time and scarce resources, the battle between time and technology is decided by a single crucial factor – human initiative. The pages of many old and rare documents are ageing quickly and daily. The sources must be preserved in their original colours, texture, along with the text and graphics.

The Sikh Reference Library, Amritsar is a good case study in such endeavours. Established in 1929, with a huge collection of rare Sikh artifacts and archives, it contained 383 volumes that covered 980 different topics, several *hukamnamas*, a 2500 hand-written Guru Granth Sahib, and other valuable material. On 7 June 1984, the Sikh people saw this rich treasure house of memory and history being stolen and torched. At that time microfilming technology was readily available, but unfortunately the custodians of this archive had lacked the foresight to do the same.

Tracing the history of most manuscripts in the Punjab region is a story in human indifference towards their upkeep and preservation. Today access to numerous old and rare historical documents is difficult because of their widespread distribution throughout the region. Many such manuscripts and objects are still not catalogued and simply remain untraced. This is primarily owed to lack of interest, knowledge and means. Further, handling of originals establishes risk of permanent loss, as no duplicates exist. This is where digital technology comes to our succour.

Institutions around the world are moving ahead with projects to digitise books and manuscripts. Lately, a team of IBM technicians assisted the Vatican digitise its resource library. Hewlett-Packard has worked with the Vatican to provide public online access to the Apostolic Library founded by Pope Nicholas V. In contrast, it is greatly distressing to see that numerous educational and religious institutions in the Punjab in possession of valuable and ancient manuscripts are neither properly preserving them nor getting them digitised.

Digitisation is synonymous to digital image capturing through scanning and photography, which transforms data, information, knowledge or physical objects into digital files (computer format). In this process, the original is represented as a picture that can be displayed on a computer screen. A precursor to a variety of applications, digitisation

specifically increases ease and efficiency of document transmission in multiple ways. Images can be displayed on a computer screen; distributed to multiple destinations via e-mail; printed onto any paper-based format, etc. Through proper storage, digitised data has an unlimited lifespan. Many historical documents are so fragile that the slightest human contact can cause damage. Digitisation has the potential to change the way scholars utilise historical documents. Once a document has been digitised, originals can be preserved longer through reduced handling; provide wide and easy reach to the public through digital libraries and online access; aid in research, education, awareness programs and saving of precious hours of search by research scholars through the click of a mouse.

Nanakshahi introduced the project 'Punjab Virsa Digitisation Initiative' taking a leaf out of the Vatican project. The project aims to digitise manuscripts and other archives maintained by major institutions like the SGPC, GNDU, Khalsa College, Punjabi University, and Patiala Archives. Private collections are also being sought. Convincing the custodians of these documents however remains a difficult proposition.

Progressive on its mission, these youngsters have digitised many old manuscripts and documents, numbering over a million folios, besides converting over a hundred thousand pages from different important books and newspapers to searchable PDF format. All this digitization has been carried out on the manuscripts of private collections only, barring a few institutions. It is strange irony that in a fast growing network of higher education in this country, institutions are not willing to allow digital preservation and access of their collections.

The team wishes to further expand the project to create an *Online Digital Library* of the entire digitised collection, which will be readily available to the public. Since these originals are rare and fragile, they cannot be borrowed through an interlibrary loan system. A Digital Library will allow scholars to study rare manuscripts via the Internet.

Nanakshahi provides digitisation facilities to individuals free of cost. Of the million folios digitised so far, the prime clientele include the Sodhi family of Anandpur Sahib; Dera Mahant Mastan Singh, Dharamkot; Dr Man Singh Nirankari, Chandigarh; Professor Pritam

Singh, Patiala; Professor Madanjit Kaur (GNDU); S. Gurtej Singh, Chandigarh; Institute of Sikh Studies; Government Museum, Chandigarh; Kurukshetra University; Panjab Language Department, Patiala; Chief Khalsa Divan, Amritsar. Kurukshetra University officially requested the Trust to digitise their collection of 7000 manuscripts and over 1000 rare books. Remarks of the University Dean Dr G Khurana, before eminent personalities on the Manuscripts Day function last year are worth mentioning; he said "...hamari university ke upar (Guru) Nanak sahai ho gae hain". It is perturbing to see institutions from the Punjab refusing to entertain, when others from far off regions are approaching them to avail the service.



Illuminated page from SGGS manuscript.

Meanwhile, some of the works digitised to date include a Granth bearing the mark of Guru Tegh Bahadur Sahib, Gian Ratnavli by Bhai Mani Singh, Paire Mokhe Vali Janamsakhi with seventy eight illustrations, Safri Bir of Bhai Daya Singh, Siyar-Ui-Mutakhrin, most of the issues of *The Spokesman Weekly* (1979-1993), *Khalsa Akhbar* (1893-1903); over twenty books by Giani Dit Singh; Sant Sipahi (Periodical), *The Sikh Review*, Kolkata, a few hundred other rare books, few copies of Guru Granth Sahib dating back to as early as 1653 and a *hukamnama* by Guru Gobind Singh Sahib.

Their future projects includes collections of Dr Trilochan Singh, Ludhiana and Punjab Archives Department. Also, the organisation has informed of its plan to launch Punjab Virsa Online Catalogue (PVOC), containing bibliographic records of books, manuscripts, magazines, newspapers, maps, photographs, and other significant cultural material relevant to the Punjab. They hope to make one lakh bibliographic records online this year. Metadata of over 30,000 books in Gurmukhi script has already been created. Besides, they have developed



Illuminated page from Janamsakhi manuscript.



Khalsa Akhbar Lahore first page, first issue dated 1st May 1893.



Writing of Guru Gobind Singh ji.



Illuminated first page of the handwritten SGGS manuscript.



Sikh Reference Library at Darbar Sahib Amritsar damaged and destroyed in 1984.



A damaged manuscript, writing of Guru Gobind Singh Ji.



Hukamnama of Guru Gobind Singh Ji, denouncing the Masand system.

a host of software meant for support and automation of digitisation processes.

They acquired a vast amount of critical heritage in the past couple of years. This includes *The Indian Express*, *Tribune*, *Akali Patrika*, *Ajit*, *Hind Samachar*, *Jag Bani* from 1961 to 2006. Also, as mentioned earlier, they have also acquired *Sant Sipahi*, and *The Sikh Review* since 1960. SGPC resolutions since 1932 also add to it. There is a support library with a good collection of about 3500 books housed in it as well.

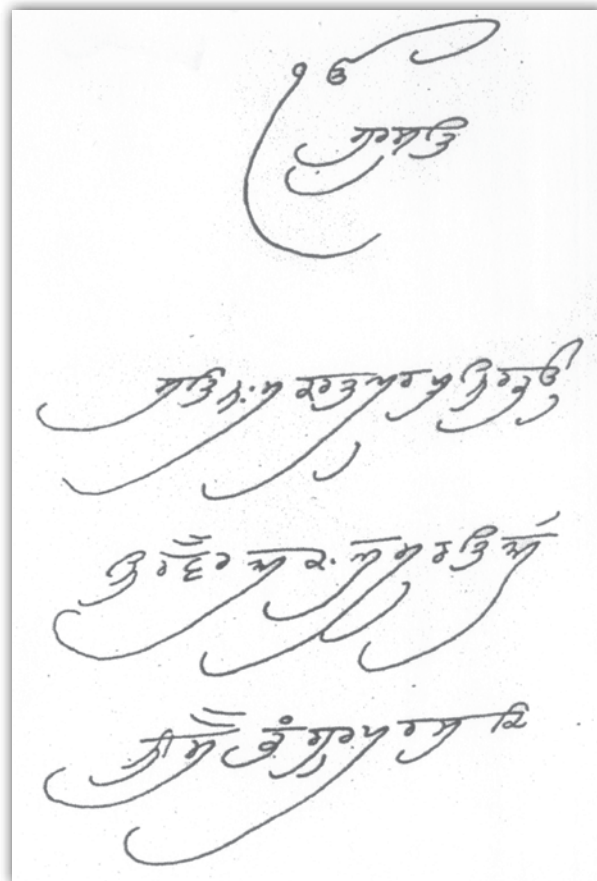
In front of my eyes, starting from a single workstation and one employee, they have grown to a well trained staff of ten employees, supported by equally well advanced equipment acquired over the years.



Illuminated page (gold print) from SGGS manuscript.



In the process of digitising manuscripts.



By the holy hand of Guru Gobind Singh ji.

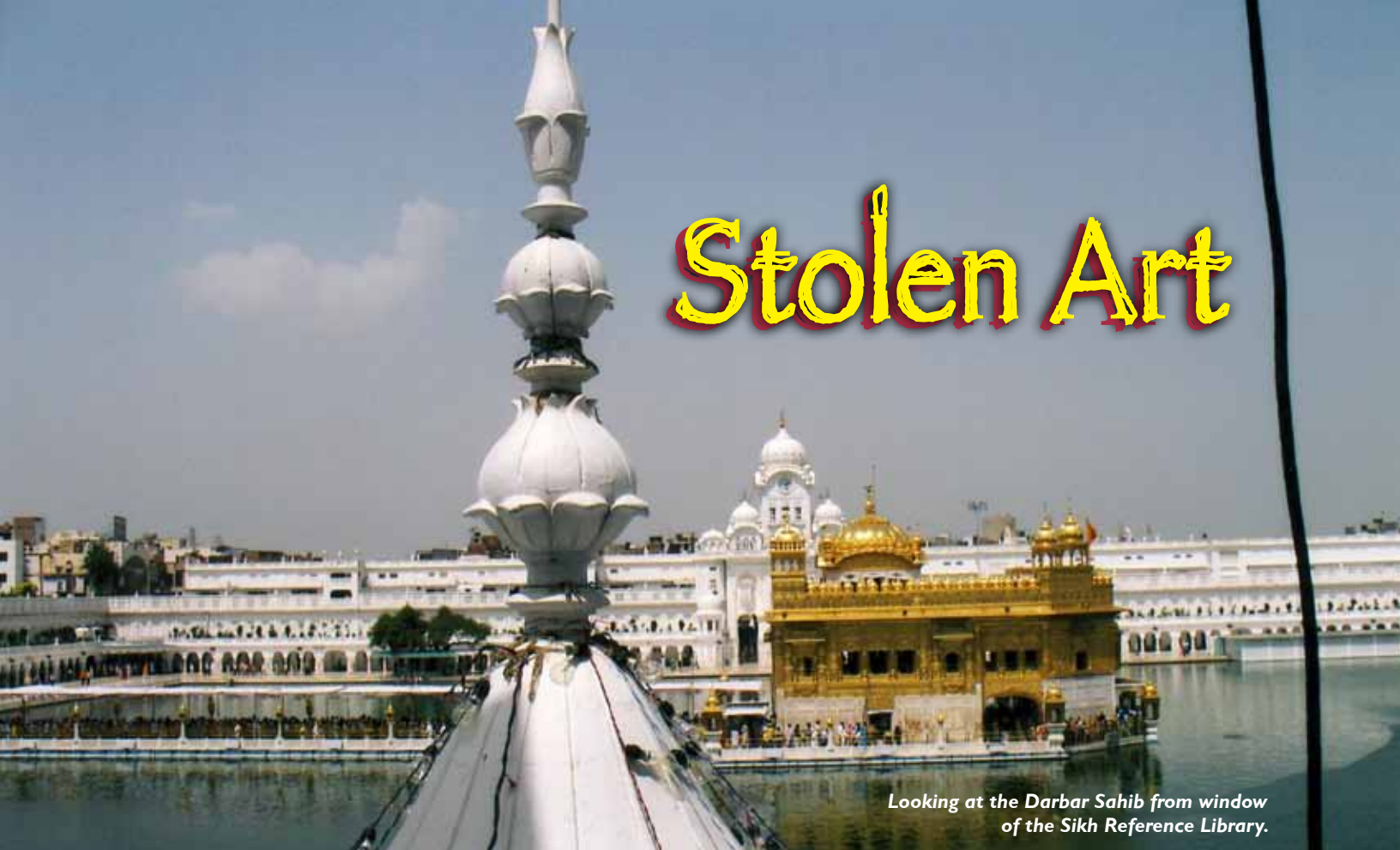
Taking a leap into the new era of digital technology, the organisation seeks to promote a whole new culture of awareness, where the masses contribute in safeguarding of old texts. Nanakshahi needs support in this huge task that certainly cannot be accomplished without public participation. The Trust can be aided by providing access to valuable collection lying with individuals, and by providing information regarding such collections. The community needs to take collective responsibility and encourage and take the archiving process forward.

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Stolen Art



Looking at the Darbar Sahib from window of the Sikh Reference Library.

There is absolutely no doubt that in the Indian Army attack on the Golden Temple in June 1984, much priceless art and artefacts were destroyed. There is also incontrovertible evidence that truckloads of rare manuscripts and relics were carted away by the army.

Now over 20 years later, there have been sporadic demands by Sikhs that those relics be returned: these demands remain entirely unfulfilled so far. This unresolved matter prompted me to cast a wider look at the art world – how art is acquired, how it ends up where it does.

Perhaps the most outstanding claim remains the fate of the Elgin Marbles. In the war of victory against the Persians, Athens was destroyed. Pericles led the campaign to rebuild it. Parthenon was built between 447 and 432 BC, and dedicated to the Greek goddess Athena; hence the name Parthenon marbles. In 450 AD Parthenon was made into a church; a thousand years later in 1458 AD, the Turks converted it into a mosque.

Lord Elgin was the British ambassador to the Ottoman Empire in 1801 and an inveterate art collector. The potentates of Constantinople were happy to sell him the art work of the Parthenon. Lord Elgin dismantled about 274 feet of the original 524 feet and carted away about 120 tons of it. Now known as the Elgin Marbles, the art has a home in Britain, and has been restored – some say ineptly.

Now 200 years later, the Greeks want it back. The art, they say, belongs to the people of Greece; it was looted by the Turks and illegally sold to Lord Elgin.



Librarian at the Sikh Reference Library, Darbar Sahib Complex.

This is hardly the only story of stolen art, even if it is the most dramatic.

During the Second World War, Germany plundered 427 specimens of rare art from Soviet museums and

collections. In the aftermath of the war, the National Gallery of Art in Washington, DC, acquired 202 of those pieces. Frances Taylor, then the director of the Metropolitan Museum, claimed that “in this war the American people have earned the right to such compensation as they choose to take it.” Luckily, other officials demurred and called such appropriation “morally untenable.” President Truman agreed, and the material was subsequently returned.

But few cases end so simply or happily.

Peru wants the relics from the 500-year-old Inca city Machu Picchu returned from Yale University which now houses them. There is no question that they are well protected and preserved at Yale, and that it was an American, Hiram Bingham III, who made the hidden city known to the outside world. The case for return rests on the claim that the rightful owners of the relics are the Peruvians. They dispute that these artefacts are best preserved and studied at Yale, away from the culture of their origin.



Signboard on the outer wall.

Private collectors specially, and even museums, have often behaved as robber-barons in their quest of relics from across the world. But it is now a politically correct world, and one counter argument clearly says that if you didn't pay for what you took, then you stole it.



Outer face of the building housing the Sikh Reference Library.

Readers could not have missed the ongoing attempts to locate and return art that was stolen from the Jews during the Second World War. Recovery and return are not easy matters, and the process remains unfinished.

Western powers have used a variety of sophistry to justify their plundering of vulnerable civilisations. One only needs to look at the great Western museums and the endless collections of private art connoisseurs to realise the extent of their power in their heyday, and how ruthlessly they used it.

Similar arguments prevail in the case of lost and stolen Sikh art. The Indian government removed plenty in 1984 from the collection at the Golden Temple, and returned none of it. The irony is that none of the art has so far surfaced in any national gallery, academic or private collection. So wherever it is now stored, it serves no purpose. Could it be that some of it has entered private collections of the political honchos or the generals of the day? The pity is that there is no accounting of it. True to the lackadaisical *modus operandi* in Indian culture, no exhaustive listing of the missing artefacts

exists; perhaps none was completed either by the custodians of the art when they had their opportunity, or by the army who took it.

Like most empires of the day, the British Empire, too, was notably rapacious. The very impressive collections of Indian art in British holdings do not surprise us. We remember collectors of Sikh art like Lockland Kipling and Lord Dalhousie. When the British annexed Punjab, they did what they have done in much of the world that they ruled; they carted away art, relics, and many of the finer things of life. Consequently, British Museums have been benefited by



A new beginning: bound publications, 20 years after 1984.

Punjabi and Sikh art. Countless hand-made phulkaris, paintings and examples of folk-art enrich British castles. The aigrette (*kalgi*) that reputedly adorned Guru Gobind Singh's turban is now housed in the British Museum, along with many of his personal weapons. Also found there is what may be the handwritten version of the *Damdami Bir* – the definitive rescension of the Guru Granth. A painting of Guru Tegh Bahadur, said to be made during his lifetime was, for many years, in a museum in Bangladesh.

Now, many Sikhs worldwide are clamouring to have these returned to Punjab. Is it best that art remain close to or embedded in the culture of its origin? Not that I have any answers, but I do want to open that topic for exploration.

With the past past decade, I have heard that rare manuscripts of early Sikh period have been lost or misplaced from academic libraries in India. I also know that many historical documents like the “Kartarpur” rescension of the Adi Granth, the precursor of the Guru Granth, are the personal properties of certain families. That makes them not so easily available to scholars. This also means that are not so well preserved.

And don't forget the treasures that the Indian government and its army confiscated and misappropriated in 1984. How well preserved, protected, protected or available are they now?

Some credible observers of the Indian scene indicate that of the stolen artefacts have indeed surfaced in the marketplace and that some illustrated manuscripts, e.g. *pothis* and *janamsakhis* are being sold surreptitiously, page by page, at horrendous prices. I am not surprised if some of that lode is on the market, albeit under the table; some might even get spirited out of the country.

I understand full well that Sikh relics belong to the Sikh people, and not to any government or political institution. The Sikhs now have an international presence; their religion and its artefacts speak of universal values in ways that have eternal meaning.

Better yet, these markets of Sikhs religion, culture and history are treasures of mankind. Art and artefacts best serve their purpose when they are freely available to people worldwide, to Sikhs and non-Sikhs alike, and where governments and foundations protect and preserve them for posterity.



View of the Sikh Reference Library as in 2007.

Even beyond the constraints and consideration of preservation and safe-guarding, wouldn't a small Sikh museum, perhaps in the Punjab, only limit and imprison them to a cultural/geographical enclave, when they really need and deserve the free marketplace of people from around the globe?

Could it be that trying to limit them into our tight little fist would only diminish us into a small toad with a constricting presence in a well of our own making?

Dr. I.J.Singh

EXTREME PREJUDICE?

The following extract is from the chapter 'Fatal Miscalculation' in S. Khushwant Singh's book "Illustrated History of the Sikhs" released in 2006.

The government spokesmen had often mentioned the 'foreign hand' (clearly meaning Pakistan or the United States – or both) in the supply of arms and training facilities to terrorists, as well as camps set up by them in Jammu and Kashmir. The White Paper, too, stated that 'the government has reasons to believe that the terrorists were receiving different kinds of active support from certain foreign sources'. The most glaring inaccuracy was the White Paper's estimate of human casualties and the damage to sacred property. According to it, the 'civilian-terrorists' killed numbered 554 and 121 injured. Army casualties were put down as 92 killed (including 4 officers and 4 JCOs) and 287 injured. Most eyewitness accounts put the number of 'civilian-terrorist' casualties at between 1500 and 5000, mostly innocent pilgrims, including women and children.

The government maintained that no damage was done to the Harimandir. Journalists who were allowed to visit the Temple a few days after 'Operation Blue Star' counted hundreds of fresh bullet marks in the gold-leaf and marble. The government maintained that the Temple archives (including the Sikh Reference Library) which housed hundreds of rare handwritten copies of the Granth and hukumnamahs bearing the signatures of the gurus, had caught fire during the fighting. D.S. Duggal, keeper of the archives, was categorical that it was after the fighting had stopped that troops set fire to the archives under the impression that the manuscripts were probably account books of the Temple. By then they had broken open the offices of the SGPC, the Akali Dal, and the Istri Akali and taken whatever valuables they could find and set the rest on fire. There are over a dozen shrines in the complex, each with its golak (metal pitcher for putting in coins and currency notes). Not one was found after the army action. The Temple kitchen which catered to thousands of pilgrims every day was robbed of every utensil. Amongst the invaluable, irreplaceable treasures lost was a gem-studded canopy sent by the Nizam of Hyderabad to Maharajah Ranjit Singh and presented by the Maharajah to the Golden Temple. The White Paper was roundly criticised by all opposition parties. Atal Behari Vajpayee, President of the BJP, who had earlier lauded the army action, observed that 'it evaded more issues than it tackled'. 'India Today' referred to it as 'Operation White-Wash'.

Nearly two decades after that infamy of June 1984, the government in power, with Vajpayee as Prime Minister, admitted that "sackfuls" of books, artefacts and other material sacked from the Sikh Reference Library had been traced to Meerut, HQ of the 9th Infantry Division, which formation had carried out the attack on the Darbar Sahib in 'Operation Blue Star'. But thereafter, stony silence to all requests that this priceless treasure of the Sikhs be returned to the resurrected library at Amritsar.