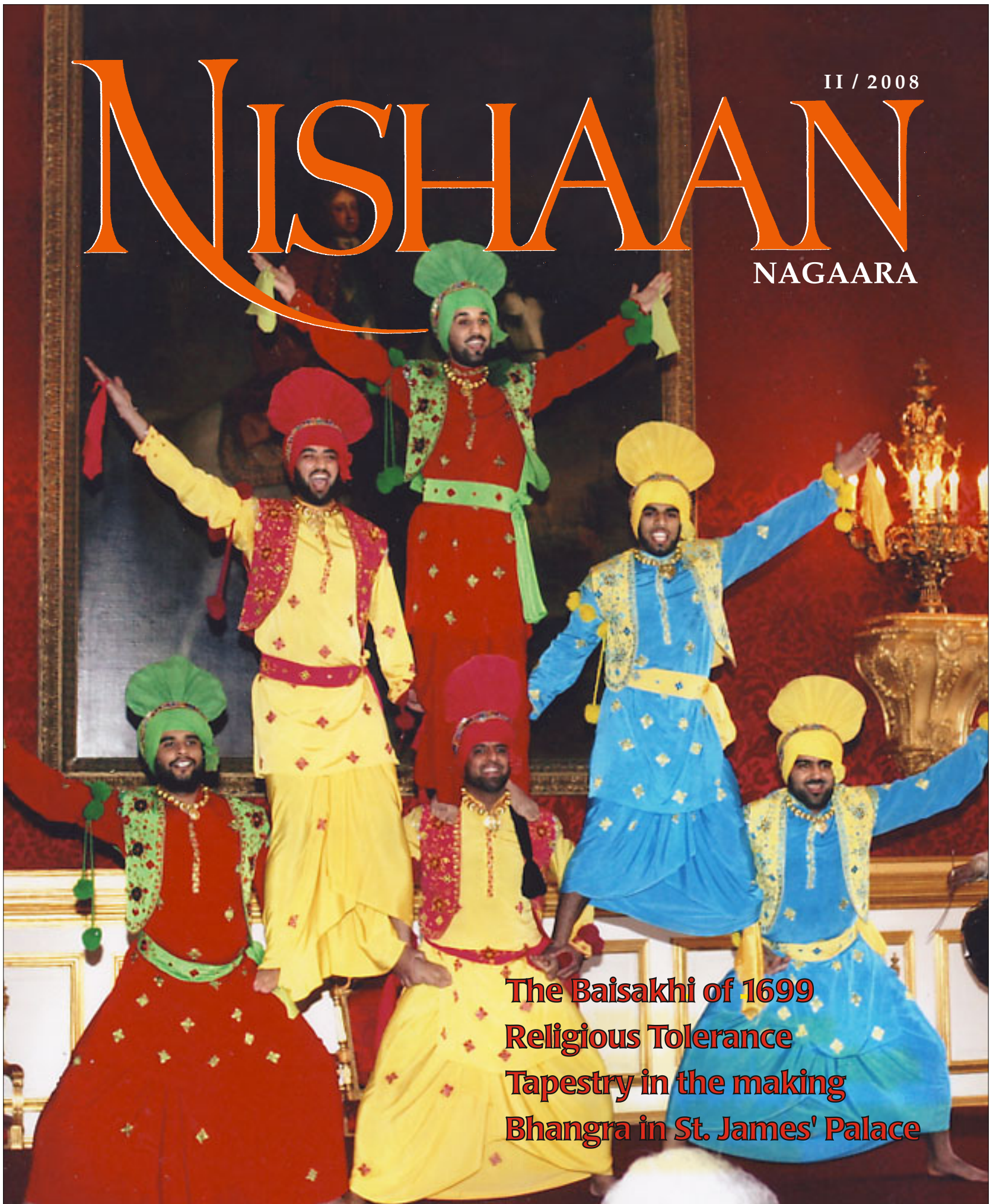


II / 2008

# NISHAAN

NAGAARA



**The Baisakhi of 1699  
Religious Tolerance  
Tapestry in the making  
Bhangra in St. James' Palace**

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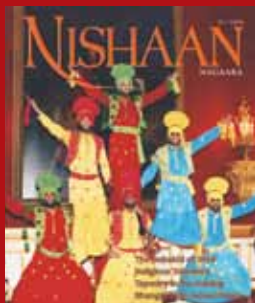
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# Editorial

**S**ikhi has its unique and independent ethos which needs no reiteration. Often questions are raised about its core religious anthologies. Questions about the authorship of Granth of the 10th Master, originally called Dasam Patshah Da Granth are raised Sikh's themselves.

Sikhs have every right to evaluate whether some elements of their religio-literary heritage stands in way of, contradicts or diminishes the fact that Divinity i.e. Guruship was enshrined as 'Shabad Guru' in the Adi Granth and later affirmed in Sri Guru Granth Sahib, and not in the Dasam Granth as we call Dasam Patshah Da Granth today. Only certain parts of the later Granth that have been given the status of 'Bani' by having been weaved into the Sikh ethos by usage.

That the Sikhs have a right to review their own scriptures is a complement to the divinity and the sovereignty enshrined by the Guru in the *Khalsa Panth*. It is for the Sikh scholars theologians and the Panth to work it out keeping in view the Panthic traditions.

Sikhism, if allowed to grow on its own ethos and fundamentals is the most pragmatic secular and socially relevant religion. It accepts co-existence with other faiths. In his writings Guru Gobind Singh is very clear about to commonality of purpose of people of different religious pursuits:

*"Bengalis of Bengal, English of England, Delhities of Delhi also function as per Thy Will, Ruhelas of Ruhelkhand, Brave Mughals of Magadh, Bundelas of Bundelkhand wash off their sins (by remembering Thee). He who has remembered Thee gets full honour, his place is filled with material and other affluence". (Akal Ustat 255)*

Sikhism accepts that every religion has its own approach to the 'Infinite' Divinity, and its own concept thereof. However when practices are corrupted, the purpose is lost. In this process the 'ego' (Haumnai) of the emissaries of Divinity (the Avtaars) makes them failures. In Bachittar Natak; the truth Moster reiterates:

*"Whosoever great people were created by the Lord, they all started their own cults all got recited their own name and did not impress upon anybody to mediate on the True Name". (26) (27)*

Demons of mythology were thus created to challenge and destroy 'ego' of the gods: for gods were playing God. However the Sikh precept is that everyone worships the Ultimate, Akal, the Ekonkar in his own way. But Guru Nanak/Guru Gobind Singh's path directs us to the crux, i.e. 'Naam Japo' (remember God), 'Kirat Karo' (do honest labour-be a productive human) and 'Wand Chhakhho' (share the bounties of Lord thus obtained with your fellow beings), Divinity is thus to be realized in the social context. These are Sikh fundamentals and Sikhs who are good at it are fundamentalists.

Based on the above approach the Sikh identity becomes unique. The Khalsa observes the dictate of the Tenth Master that to see your Guru the Sikh has the "Deedar of the Khalsa" (the

collective vision of good practicing Sikhs); for direction he seeks 'Parcha Shabad Da' i.e. (instruction of Gur Shabad as in the Sri Guru Granth Sahib), and "Pooja Akal Di", (worship none but the one, Akalpurkh, the Timeless all powerful.

Let it be clear that is the Khalsa whose form was created by the first nine Gurus and then codified and constitutionalized by the tenths Guru, which is accepted (acceptable physical form) for the "Deedar" is this 'Sabat Soorat, Dastaar sira, as described by the 5th Guru (of undiminished visage turban on his head) in whom the Guru can be visualized, the Guru Khalsa and None Else, and it is this Khalsa whose glories have been sung in "Khalsa Dee Mahima" and are well known, and Khalsa in this form declared as one with the Guru:

The leadership of panth is reposed in this Khalsa. One can define a Sikh in narrow or wide terms but the corporate management of the Panth can only be reposed in Khalsa of the above concept.

In his Epistle of Victory – Zafar Naama Guru Gobind Singh Sahib makes it very clear that his conflict with Mughal rulers which was instigated and precipitated by the hill Rajas, and as consequent where of the Guru had to abandon Anandpur, was a product of a conflict of fundamentals with the hill Rajas:

*"They are idol worshippers, and I am an ideal breaker".*

The earlier Gurus too had preached against idolatory in uncompromising terms. Guru Gobind Singh only reaffirmed it.

Guru Gobind Singh's declaration at the end of 'Ram Avtar' leaves no doubt about his theology and views on gods of scriptures of Indian mythology:

ਪਾਹਿ ਗਰੇ ਜਬ ਤੇ ਤੁਮਰੇ, ਤਬ ਤੇ ਕੋਊ ਆਖ ਤਰੇ ਨਹੀਂ ਆਨਿਓ

Sikhi is a way of life evolved by the ten Gurus over a period of 200 years. It is a continuous and composite whole which found its completion in the form of the Khalsa Panth on 1699 Baisakhi day. It has to be accepted as a whole and without its unique identity and physical form, its beliefs and its heritage, it becomes severally compromised and corrupted and thus, it fails its purpose, the mission of the Gurus.

The traits of the personality of Guru Gobind Singh, as revealed in his autobiography, distinguish him from his predecessors. His personality, though in agreement with other Gurus in the essentials of Sikhism, struck a new note. He had, no doubt, all the saintly qualities of his predecessors, the Gurus, but that was only one side of his personality. He was a saint for the good but for the wicked he was a soldier determined to finish them and extirpate the evil from the universe. Like his predecessors, he had no false vanity. He was full of humility but humble he would be only to those who knew the value of humility. To others he was a fierce opponent. Like other Gurus, he entertained no fear of any mortal and he could sacrifice anything and everything for his principles, but he would not leave things to take their own shape. He would, on the other hand, spare no pains or consider no sacrifice too great to see the evil punished and the good rewarded.

He had a complete reliance on God, he called Akalpurakh, like his predecessors. He considered himself Akalpurakh's chosen instrument for spreading the faith, saving the saints and extirpating all tyrants. In regard to the extirpation of tyrants, Dr. Indubhushan

Banerjee has beautifully brought out the Guru's conception of the role of sword in the following words:

"But for these purposes particularly the second one the old weapons of service, humility and prayer were wholly out of place and in the very opening verses of the Bachitra Natak the Guru makes his position clear. His reliance was on God and the Holy Sword. The past that he had inherited and the circumstances in which he was placed naturally led him to think of God as the punisher of the wicked, and as the Sword is a great weapon for that purpose, in the Guru's mind the two become identical. God subdues enemies so does the Sword; therefore the Sword is God and God is the Sword".

Often it is alleged that the invocation to the 'Sword' (BgOql) which precedes every Sikh prayer is in fact a prayer to the Devi Bhagwati. Nothing can be farther from the truth. In "Chandi Dee Vaar" it states:

*"Durga struck Raja Sumbh with Bhagauti on his head which tasted his blood"*

Surely it was not the Devi Bhagwati, but Durga's sword which tasted Raja Sumbh's blood.

Bhai Gurdas in his Vaar 25 says:

ਨਾਉ ਭਗੌੜੀ ਲੋਹੁ ਘੜਾਯਾ

Surely it does not imply that the Devi is sharpened on a grinding wheel.

If the Chaubis Avtaar or the Pakhian Charitar sections of the Dasam Granth appear attractive and of interest to some sects or sangats, they are free to enjoy it. These writing are not even peripheral to the Sikh ethos; but have a social relevance and one cannot pick and choose. For anyone to claim to follow Sikh thought and Sikh way of life he or she must accept its fundamentals i.e. a Sikh does not believe in anyone except one Akalpurakh, he does not follow any tenets other than those of the Ten Gurus and those enshrined in Sri Guru Granth Sahib, he does not believe in incarnations (Avtaars), does not worship idols and denounces caste system.

The above fundamentals are enshrined in Sri Guru Granth Sahib and reiterated in the Dasam Granth with unequivocal clarity. Without going into the question of authorship of certain sections of this revered anthology one has to contend with the Sikh scriptures as a whole. The stories of the Chaubis Avtaar, mythological heroes are retold by Guru Gobind Singh in the Dasam Granth as the valor and the heroics of the protagonists impressed him and he used them to reawaken the spirit of the nation: He certainly is very categorical about not accepting their principles or their divinity:

*"The so called twenty four incarnations, O Lord, could not attain even an iota of You. Becoming worldly kings they got deluded in worldly affairs known by many names:" (7) (Chaubis Avtaar – Chaupai Patshahi) (For Guru Gobind Singh)*

*"There are myriad Vishnus and Maheshs in the body of the Akalpurakh" and*

*"I shall not invoke Ganesh first of all I shall not contemplate on Krishan or Vishnu. I have heard about them but I recognize them Not, my devotion is concentrated on the feet of the Lord" Krishan Avtar (434)*

The Guru Calarifies

I describe the deeds of the Krishan as I can (Krishan Avtar 440)

For he is only telling the story of Krishna and no more. Similarly, the great Guru is very clear about his approach to the story of Ram Avtar, and he reiterates:

*"Merits and demerits of the story I have not taken up:*

*Nor have I involved myself in any controversy*

*Discussion or polemics on any such point Ram Avtar (862)*

And the end of the Ram Avtar, the Guru philosophy is crystal clear:

*"Ever since I have united myself to Thy feet (O God), none else than (Thee) ever pleases me.*

*The Purans and Quran call Thee Ram and Rahim, and such numerous names.*

*But I woe allegiance to neither of them.*

*The Simiritis, Sastras and Vedas talk of different characteristics*

*But I accept none of these.*

*O sword-wielding Lord ! It is through Thy grace that write all this*  
Ram Avtar (863)

All these characters of Indian historical religions past are merely heroes of mythology for the Guru. For him the Lord has created and destroyed many such heroes. The practices of the exploitative priesthood and the caste system are emphatically discarded and the Sikh are warned:

*"If they (Sikhs) indulge in Brahmanical practices, they will lose my blessings/care*

(Khalsa di Mahima)

In fact the gist of the thought content of Dasam Granth is "against the belief in gods and goddesses as they are subject to death are therefore imperfect" says Darsrath Astha in Poetry of Guru Gobind Singh, page 208.

In Sri Mukh Vak Swayai of the Dasam Granth, the postulates are unambiguous:

*Ye say that god is unconceived and how could he have been born from the womb of Kaushalaya.*

*Why should god whom we describe as holy and without amity have driven Arjun's chariot?*

*Worship as God Him, whose secret none hath known or shall know*

*Say if Krishan were the Ocean of mercy (Kripanidh) why should the hunters arrow have struck him?*

*If he can save others families (Kul) why did he destroy his own?*

*Say, why did he, who called himself the eternal and the unconceived, enter into the womb of Devaki?*


*Why did he, who had no father or mother, call Vasudev his father?*

*(Swayai Sri Mukh Vak Patsahi 10 (Translation by Dasrath Ashta Poetry of Guru Gobind Singh page 209)*

Sikhism is a religion of total commitment. Its Guru is the Shabad (Word). Its scriptures and spiritual heritage is sacrosanct. The Dasam Granth is a part of the Sikh ethos and rightly deserves a significant place in it.

# The Baisakhi of 1699

## When the movement reached the Apex



**B**aisakhi for us Sikhs is an auspicious day. It is our great day. It was the day of culmination and perfection. After two hundred years of calculated, persistent and planned efforts, sacrifices and hard work, the Satguru's mission came to be fulfilled and the ideals set by the Satguru reached perfection on this day. It is the Birthday of the Khalsa. No definite and pin-pointed information regarding the creation of any other nation or its achieving exalted status, is known the world over. None could be determined for any of them. It is a special honour of the Khalsa that not only its birthday but even the period of its creation can be pin-pointed. On this day, the Guruship was passed on and entrusted to the Khalsa under the supreme instructions and guidance of the Gurbani.

The Khalsa was not created out of vengeance or with a view to take revenge. It was not created impulsively, in a hurry, nor was it created as a 'time-server', a strategic step, or as a reaction to any barbarous event such as the martyrdom of the ninth Nanak, Guru Tegh Bahadur. The martyrdoms of the fifth Nanak Guru Arjan Dev, and that of the ninth Satguru, were significant and important stages in the process of its development. They were like missiles fired to clear and straighten the course, to propel and shoot the movement vigorously towards the goal, like a bullet. The Khalsa was created at the pleasure of Akalpurkh and as ordained by Him.

Thus was the Khalsa created spontaneously, after full thought, thorough deliberation, and meticulous planning in the perfect, whole, and masculine image. It was created by the Satguru (as Lepel Griffin has said,) like Jupiter taking out Minerva from his thighs. It was like goddess Durga producing Chandi from her forehead.

Two hundred years earlier, Sri Guru Nanak Dev had made the call and set the ideals. The ideals were set in the first *Shalok* of Guru Nanak's *Asa-di-Var*.

*I am a sacrifice to my Guru a myriad times a day,  
Who turned men into gods and without delay.*

The ideal was to turn men into gods. It was to create a nation of God-conscious men out to do service to humanity and be ever ready to offer sacrifice for a just and righteous cause, to uphold godly virtues and exact justice where it was denied. In the words of the tenth Nanak, Guru Gobind Singh, it was:

*To uphold and advance righteousness, and to emancipate  
the good, the saint within us.  
To extirpate evil and evil doers, root and branch.*

During the span of a human life, those of us who have earned the blessings of the Satguru and chosen to tread the way of life he has chalked out for his Sikhs, are duty bound to keep these ideals always in view and strive to achieve them.

The movement was calculatively and meticulously worked, progressed and developed towards this goal. We find that during time of the fourth Nanak, Guru Ram Das, the Sikhs had reached a stage and the movement touched the point when the Satguru wished for and said:

*O God, grant the dust of feet of Sikhs of the Guru,  
So that we sinners may also be saved*

Like emeralds set with pearls, the fourth Satguru had depicted the daily life and time table of a Sikh of the Guru in *Raag Gaurhi* which defines a Sikh as follows:

*He who is called a Sikh of the Satguru,  
Should rise early and meditate on the Lord's name.  
He should take bath and have a dip in the pool of nectar.  
Through the Guru's teachings he should dwell upon the  
Lord's name,  
So that all his sins are washed off.*

*And when the sun rises, let him sing the Guru's word,  
And reflect on God's Name; whether sitting or standing.*

*He who remembers my God with every breath and  
morsel that he eats,*

*To whom my Lord becomes kind,*

*The Guru imparts his instructions to that Sikh.*

*Nanak craves for the dust of that Sikh of the Guru*

*Who always remembers the Lord and helps others  
remember Him.*

(Guru Granth Sahib, p. 305-306)

During the fifth Guru Arjan Dev's period, when the spiritual reawakening and regeneration of 'Man' and resurrection of human values, restoration of consciousness of the self, mental, moral and social uplift was complete, the virtues of self-help, self respect and self confidence had been reborn and surrender-cum-submission had been swept out, the Satguru announced:

*I have built the abode of truth and righteousness,*

*And gathered the Guru's Sikhs after great search.*

*The merciful Lord hath now given the command,*

*That no one will henceforth domineer over and give pain  
to another.*

*And, all will abide in peace; such being the rule of the  
merciful Lord.*

.....

*I am the combatant with the God's own legion,  
(Akalpurkh's Fauj)*

*On meeting the Guru, the plume of my sarband flutters  
high,*

*The spectators hath assembled in the arena to witness  
my deeds of valour;*

*The Creator Himself witnesseth [the struggle].*

The pinnacle of glory was reached on the burning Jeth Shudi fourth (30 May 1606) when at Lahore the fifth Satguru offered *Shabadat* (martyrdom, death by *Yasa*).

But if surrendering life as *Abuti* was not successful, it was not to mean the surrender of values and principles helplessly. So long as there is life, effort and struggle must continue. When other means have failed, it is ethically and morally justified and even incumbent on a Sikh to resort to the use of arms.

After martyrdom of his father, the sixth Nanak, Guru Hargobind, at the time of his accession, asked for the sword. Not one, he wore two swords. One representing spirituality (*Piri*) and the other worldly duties to resist aggression, tyranny and injustice (*Miri*). It was (and is) meant to sweep aside obstacles that obstruct the performance and progress of one's duties (*Dharma*). It is meant to uphold good and punish the bad, who are a bane to human society. Like the surgeon's knife, it is meant to remove infected parts and amputate any gangrened organs of society. It is the symbol of will and power and determination of a Sikh to live a Sikh's life. These two swords of '*Miri*' and '*Piri*', in their sophisticated form, merged into one double-edged sword called *Khanda*, in the hands of the tenth Satguru. This *Khanda* became the creator of the new liberated order, the Khalsa and the destroyer of the evil and wrong.

The movement reached its apex in 1699 A.D. when the tenth Nanak, Guru Gobind Singh, brought Guru Nanak's mission to completion and evolved gods in the form of the Khalsa.

The first Satguru had made the call:

*If thou art zealous of playing the game of love,  
Then enter my lane with thy head on thy palm  
And, once thou settest thy foot on this Path.  
Then find not a way of escape but lay down thy head.*

- Guru Granth Sahib, p1412

Before enrolling a Sikh in God's own legion, the Master demanded his head, which his followers so spiritedly offered.

On this day, five 'beloved ones' (Pyaras) who literally came with their heads on the palms of their hands, to submit before the sharpened sword of the Master, were administered *Amrit of Khanda* by the Guru then the Guru himself received Amrit from these five 'beloved ones'. Thus the Guru became the Sikh and the Sikh the Guru.

*Praise be to (Guru) Gobind Singh, who himself is the  
Guru and the disciple. (Bhai Gurdas)*

Such an evolution of man was unparalleled in history. Leaders previously had functioned virtually as shepherds tending their disciples just as sheep and cows. There was thus no place for any personality cult amongst Sikhs after the Satguru.

Foundation of the system of joint leadership and joint responsibility in democratic set up had been laid. When we get inclined towards authoritarian dictatorship, we get off track, head towards a downfall and then collapse.

The head of a Sikh, having been offered and accepted by the Guru in effect became that of the Guru. It is in trust with him. It is therefore, incumbent upon a Sikh to carry his head high and not to bow it before a mortal or anyone who would first take birth and then die. He shall only bow, and supplicate before God.

The Sikh way of salutation also changed after this evolution. Previously when a Sikh saw a Sikh, they would touch each other's feet.

*Whenever a Sikh of the Guru is seen, repair to his feet in all humility.*

Guru Granth Sahib, p763

After being entrusted with the Guruship and his enrolment in the Akalpurkh's Fauj, his status soared sky high and a Sikh began to greet a Sikh exclaiming:

*The Khalsa is of God-Guru, so is too the victory of God-Guru.*

History had it that these 'gods' created by the Satguru were not like those mythical gods who could not withstand the onslaught of demons and protect themselves, but fled crying and bewailing to goddess Durga to seek her refuge. The gods created in the shape of the Khalsa, were not only able to defend their hearths, homes and families, kith and kin, but also came to the help of the helpless millions who were groaning in helplessness under the iron heels of tyrannous and barbarous foreign invaders. They rescued over 25 thousand Hindu women and girls who were being carried as 'war booty' to Afghanistan by Ahmad Shah Abdali and then escorted them safely back to their respective homes. These gods were eventually to ride triumphantly into Delhi in 1790.

Seeing these developments, Kesho, the Brahmin priest, noticed that offerings, gifts, and all the money that the priests extorted or received, were being stopped by the Sikhs and the Guru Darbar and diverted towards the needs and causes of their own and those of the Panth. He flared up, and filled with rage, went to the Satguru and spoke out his mind disrespectfully about the whole matter and the Sikhs as coming from 'low castes' etc. Satguru, in his usual sweetness replied

in the following four historic Chhands:

*Whatever God had written in thy destiny thou hast received; O Brahmin,*

*Banish thy regrets.*

*It is not my fault. It escaped my memory altogether. Do not be angry.*

*I shall send good clothes and bedding today. Be absolutely assured by this.*

*All Khattris are created by the Brahmins.*

*But for my Sikhs you better have kindness and leave them alone.*

The Sikhs, the Khalsa, are lauded in the next two Chhands.

*My victories in battle have been through their favour, Through their favour I make gifts.*

*By their favour, all my troubles have been removed, their kindness has destroyed all my enemies.*

*By their kindness, I am exalted; otherwise there are millions poor like me.*

*Serving them pleaseth me; service of any other is not dear to me.*

*Bestowing gifts on them alone is proper; to others is not profitable.*

*Bestowing gifts on them alone bears fruit and praise,*

*Here and fruitful hereafter; to bestow on others is altogether useless.*

*All the wealth in my house my soul and body is for them.*

Hearing all this, the Missar (Brahmin)

*With agony and anger in his heart, the Missar ignited like dry grass.*

*Realising the loss of his income and in anxiety for his future provision, the Missar began to weep.*

In the second line of the above Chhands, the words 'it escaped my memory altogether,' are very significant. They depict that the Brahmin priest was not at all in any picture or consideration at the Guru's court and would have no place amongst the Sikhs. Kesho Gopal (Kesho – uncut long hair, Gopal – sustainer of the universe) had taken the place of Kesho Pandit.

## The universal being

All the four Varns are merged into one individual Sikh. When he reads the holy scriptures, recites Gurbani, leads in prayers, delivers a sermon, preaches in Sangat, performs religious rites and social ceremonies, the Sikh is a Brahmin. When the Sikh wields the sword, fight battles, jumps to the help of the helpless and defends his family and country, he is a Kashtrya. When the Sikh tills the land and does a craftsman's job, he is a Vaish. And when the Sikh cleanses the dirty utensils of the langar, dusts the shoes of the Sangat, sweeps the house and the Gurdwara compound, takes the farm-yard manure on his head to the field and does other service wherever needed, that very Sikh is a Shudra too.

*All the four castes were merged into a single caste.*

But unfortunately we are again dividing ourselves and setting up a Sikh against a Sikh which we cannot afford. We have to live a useful life, active life, a purposeful and fruitful life.

The world has made wonderful progress and admirable achievements in science and technology. We have even landed on the Moon. But inspite of all this, the world today lacks stability and tranquillity of mind. If the world needs anything at this time, it is the teachings and message of the Satguru. If we can spread the Guru's word, far and wide and into every nook and corner of the world, we would have done some service.

When the Satguru entrusted Guruship to the Khalsa, he also granted the image and identity and entrusted the banner to be kept aloft. It is our *Dharma* (Duty) to protect and preserve these even with our lives. The directives of the Guru are clear:

*So long the Khalsa retains a distinct identity, I will bestow full glory on them,*

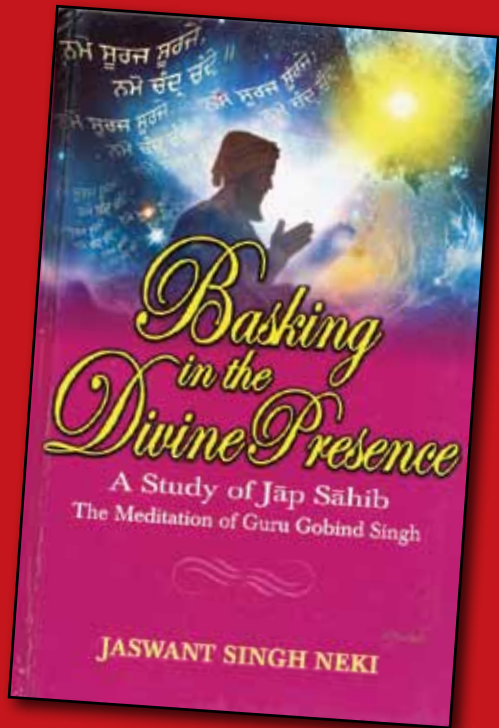
*But the moment they adopt Brahmanical ways, I will not trust them.*

It is painful that some of our younger brothers and even sisters are out with blades and scissors in their hands to tarnish and disfigure their own image in defiance of the above directions. The future of the Panth rests with our younger generation. Sooner than later they will be called upon to shoulder the responsibility. They should rise higher and prepare themselves in time for this purpose and earn the Satguru's pleasure and blessings. Beware, for let us not miss our destiny.

*Bhayee Ardaman Singh of Bagrian*



In deep reverence, we continue to reproduce the transliteration by Dr. Jaswant Singh Neki's



# A Study of Jāp Sāhib

## The Meditation of Guru Gobind Singh

ਭੁਜੰਗ ਪ੍ਰਯਾਤ ਛੰਦ ॥

ਅਗਾਧੇ ਅਬਾਧੇ ॥ ਅਨੰਦੀ ਸਰੂਪੇ ॥  
ਨਮੋ ਸਰਬ ਮਾਨੇ ॥ ਸਮਸਤੀ ਨਿਧਾਨੇ ॥੬੪॥  
ਨਮਸਤੁੰ ਨਿਨਾਥੇ ॥ ਨਮਸਤੁੰ ਪ੍ਰਮਾਥੇ ॥  
ਨਮਸਤੁੰ ਅਗੰਜੇ ॥ ਨਮਸਤੁੰ ਅਭੰਜੇ ॥੬੫॥

*Bhujāᅅg Prayāt Chhāᅅd.*

*Agādhe abādhe. Anāᅅdī sarūpe.  
Namo sarb māᅅne. Samastī nidhāᅅne.(64)  
Namastwaᅅn nriᅅnāthe. Namastwaᅅn pramāthe.  
Namastwaᅅn agāᅅnje. Namastwaᅅn abhāᅅnje.(65)*

**Bhujāᅅg Prayāt Chhāᅅd**

Hail ! the unfathomable,  
Hail ! the ever unhindered,  
Hail ! the Bliss-incarnate,  
Hail ! the ever-venerated,  
Hail ! the Treasure veritable.64.  
Hail ! the One sans a master,  
Hail ! the Grand Destroyer,  
Hail ! the ever Un-conquered,  
Hail ! the never destroyed.65

ਨਮਸਤੁੰ ਅਕਾਲੇ ॥ ਨਮਸਤੁੰ ਅਪਾਲੇ ॥  
ਨਮੋ ਸਰਬ ਦੇਸੇ ॥ ਨਮੋ ਸਰਬ ਭੇਸੇ ॥੬੬॥  
ਨਮੋ ਰਾਜ ਰਾਜੇ ॥ ਨਮੋ ਸਾਜ ਸਾਜੇ ॥  
ਨਮੋ ਸ਼ਾਹ ਸ਼ਾਹੇ ॥ ਨਮੋ ਮਾਹ ਮਾਹੇ ॥੬੭॥  
ਨਮੋ ਗੀਤ ਗੀਤੇ ॥ ਨਮੋ ਪ੍ਰੀਤ ਪ੍ਰੀਤੇ ॥  
ਨਮੋ ਰੋਖ ਰੋਖੇ ॥ ਨਮੋ ਸੋਖ ਸੋਖੇ ॥੬੮॥

*Namastwaᅅn akāle. Namastwaᅅn apāle.  
Namo sarb dese. Namo sarb bhese.(66)  
Namo rāj rāje. Namo sāj sāje.  
Namo shāh shāhe. Namo māh māhe.(67)  
Namo gīt gīte. Namo prīt prīte.  
Namo rokh rokhe. Namo sokh sokhe.(68)*

Hail ! the Lord immortal,  
The Self-supporting Master,  
Abiding every land,  
Inhabiting every garb.66.  
Hail ! the King of kings,  
Designer of all designs,  
Hail ! the Ruler of rulers,  
Hail ! the Light of moons.67.  
Hail ! the Song of songs,  
Hail ! the Love of loves,  
Hail ! the Fury o' furies,  
Hail ! the Drought of droughts.68.

ਨਮੋ ਸਰਬ ਰੋਗੇ ॥ ਨਮੋ ਸਰਬ ਭੋਗੇ ॥  
 ਨਮੋ ਸਰਬ ਜੀਤੰ ॥ ਨਮੋ ਸਰਬ ਭੀਤੰ ॥੬੯॥  
 ਨਮੋ ਸਰਬ ਗਿਆਨੰ ॥ ਨਮੋ ਪਰਮ ਤਾਨੰ ॥  
 ਨਮੋ ਸਰਬ ਮੰਤ੍ਰੰ ॥ ਨਮੋ ਸਰਬ ਜੰਤ੍ਰੰ ॥੭੦॥  
 ਨਮੋ ਸਰਬ ਦ੍ਰਿਸ਼ੰ ॥ ਨਮੋ ਸਰਬ ਕ੍ਰਿਸ਼ੰ ॥  
 ਨਮੋ ਸਰਬ ਰੋਗੇ ॥ ਤ੍ਰਿਭੰਗੀ ਅਨੰਗੇ ॥੭੧॥

*Namo sarb roge. Namo sarb bhoge.*  
*Namo sarb jītaṅ. Namo sarb bhītaṅ.(69)*  
*Namo sarb giānaṅ. Namo parm tānaṅ.*  
*Namo sarb maṅtraṅ. Namo sarb jaṅtraṅ.(70)*  
*Namo sarb drissaṅ. Namo sarb krissaṅ.*  
*Namo sarb raṅge. Tribhaṅgī anaṅge.(71)*

Hail! the source of ailments,  
 Hail! Enjoyer of relishes,  
 Hail! the utmost Conqueror,  
 Hail! Generates who Awe.69.  
 Hail! the ultimate Wisdom,  
 Hail! the All-attracting,  
 Hail! the Lord of the Word,  
 Hail! the Master of spells.70.  
 Hail! the all-observing,  
 Hail! the Power Supreme,  
 Hail! the all-enjoying,  
 Hail! the all-destroying.71.

ਨਮੋ ਜੀਵ ਜੀਵੰ ॥ ਨਮੋ ਬੀਜ ਬੀਜੰ ॥  
 ਅਖਿੱਜੇ ਅਭਿੱਜੇ ॥ ਸਮਸਤੰ ਪ੍ਰਸਿੱਜੇ ॥੭੨॥  
 ਕ੍ਰਿਪਾਲੰ ਸਰੂਪੇ ਕੁਕਰਮੰ ਪ੍ਰਣਾਸੀ ॥  
 ਸਦਾ ਸਰਬਦਾ ਰਿਪਿ ਸਿਪੰ ਨਿਵਾਸੀ ॥੭੩॥

*Namo jīv jīvaṅ. Namo bij bije.*  
*Akhijje abhijje. Samastaṅ prasijje.(72)*  
*Kripālaṅ sarūpe, kukarmaṅ praṅāsī.*  
*Sadā sarb-dā ridh(i) sidhaṅ nivāsi.(73)*

Hail! the Life of Beings,  
 Hail! the kernel of seeds,  
 Unvexed and unattached,  
 Hail! the never embarrassed,  
 Hail! the ever Compassionate.72.  
 Hail! Kindness incarnate,  
 Hail! Destroyer of sin,  
 Hail! the fount of miracles,  
 Hail! the Power occult.73.

ਚਰਪਟ ਛੰਦ ॥ ਤੂ ਪ੍ਰਸਾਦਿ ॥  
 ਅੰਮ੍ਰਿਤ ਕਰਮੇ ॥ ਅੰਬਿਤ ਧਰਮੇ ॥  
 ਅਖੱਲ ਜੋਗੇ ॥ ਅਚੱਲ ਭੋਗੇ ॥੭੪॥  
 ਅਚੱਲ ਰਾਜੇ ॥ ਅਟੱਲ ਸਾਜੇ ॥  
 ਅਖੱਲ ਧਰਮੰ ॥ ਅਲੱਖ ਕਰਮੰ ॥੭੫॥  
 ਸਰਬੰ ਦਾਤਾ ॥ ਸਰਬੰ ਗਿਆਤਾ ॥  
 ਸਰਬੰ ਭਾਨੇ ॥ ਸਰਬੰ ਮਾਨੇ ॥੭੬॥

*Charpaṭ Chhaṅd. Tva Prasād(i).*  
*Anmrit karme. Anbrit dharme.*  
*Akhal joge. Achall bhoge.(74)*  
*Achall rāje. Atall sāje.*  
*Akhal dharmaṅ. Alakh karmaṅ.(75)*  
*Sarbaṅ dātā. Sarbaṅ giātā.*  
*Sarbaṅ bhāne. Sarbaṅ māne.(76)*

**Charpaṭ Chhaṅd. By Your Grace.**

Nectar-like Your deeds,  
 Immutable Your Laws,  
 Blissful is Your Yoga,  
 Perennial Your Rule.74.  
 Perpetual Your kingdom,  
 Perennial Your Works,  
 Unhindered Your Laws,  
 Unknowable Your deeds.75.  
 The One Bestower to all,  
 The One Cognizer of all,  
 The Solar Lord Eternal,  
 The Pride of one and all.76.

ਸਰਬੰ ਪ੍ਰਾਣੰ ॥ ਸਰਬੰ ਤ੍ਰਾਣੰ ॥  
 ਸਰਬੰ ਭੁਗਤਾ ॥ ਸਰਬੰ ਜੁਗਤਾ ॥੭੭॥  
 ਸਰਬੰ ਦੇਵੰ ॥ ਸਰਬੰ ਭੇਵੰ ॥  
 ਸਰਬੰ ਕਾਲੇ ॥ ਸਰਬੰ ਪਾਲੇ ॥੭੮॥

*Sarbaṅ prāṅaṅ. Sarbaṅ trāṅaṅ.*  
*Sarbaṅ bhugtā. Sarbaṅ juktā.(77)*  
*Sarbaṅ devaṅ. Sarbaṅ bhevaṅ.*  
*Sarbaṅ kāle. Sarbaṅ pāle.(78)*

The Source of all the Life,  
 The strength of every Power,  
 The Reveller ultimate,  
 And Ever united with all.77.  
 The God of all the gods,  
 The Mystery Great eternal,  
 Destroyer of every form,  
 Sustainer of one and all.78.

ਰੂਆਲ ਛੰਦ ॥ ਤੁ ਪ੍ਰਸਾਦਿ ॥

ਆਦਿ ਰੂਪ ਅਨਾਦਿ ਮੂਰਤਿ, ਅਜੋਨਿ ਪੁਰਖ ਅਪਾਰ ॥  
ਸਰਬ ਮਾਨ ਤ੍ਰਿਮਾਨ ਦੇਵ, ਅਭੇਵ ਆਦਿ ਉਦਾਰ ॥  
ਸਰਬ ਪਾਲਕ ਸਰਬ ਘਾਲਕ, ਸਰਬ ਕੋ ਪੁਨਿ ਕਾਲ ॥  
ਜੱਤੁ ਤੱਤੁ ਬਿਰਾਜਹੀ, ਅਵਧੂਤ ਰੂਪ ਰਸਾਲ ॥੭੯॥

*Rūāl Chhāṅd. Tva Prasād(i).*

*Ād(i) rūp anād(i) mūrāt(i), ajon(i) purakh apār.  
Sarv mān trimān dev, abhev ād(i) udār.  
Sarv pālak sarv ghālak, sarv ko pun(i) kāl.  
Jattra tattra birāj-hī, avdhūt rūp rasāl.(79)*

Rūāl Chhāṅd. By Your Grace.

Primal Being, Form Transcendent.

Never cast into a womb,

In all Three worlds adored by all.

Mystery Divine, Primal Compassion,

Protector of all,

Destroyer of all,

Ultimate cause of the Dooms-day call,

Present everywhere,

And free of care,

Beauty exquisite that ever enthral.79.

ਨਾਮ ਠਾਮ ਨ ਜਾਤਿ ਜਾਕਰ, ਰੂਪ ਰੰਗ ਨ ਰੇਖ ॥  
ਆਦਿ ਪੁਰਖ ਉਦਾਰ ਮੂਰਤਿ, ਅਜੋਨਿ ਆਦਿ ਅਸੇਖ ॥  
ਦੇਸ ਔਰ ਨ ਭੇਸ ਜਾਕਰ, ਰੂਪ ਰੇਖ ਨ ਰਾਗ ॥  
ਜੱਤੁ ਤੱਤੁ ਦਿਸਾ ਵਿਸਾ, ਹੁਇ ਫੈਲਿਓ ਅਨੁਰਾਗ ॥੮੦॥

*Nām thām na jāt(i) jākar, rūp raṅg na rekh.  
Ād(i) purakh udār mūrāt(i), ajon(i) ād(i) asekh.  
Des aur na bhes jākar, rūp rekh na rāg.  
Jattra tattra dishā vishā, hue phailio anurāg.(80)*

Nameless, placeless, sans a caste,

Sans a colour, contour and mark,

Primal, Bountiful, un-begotten,

Ever transcendent, immaculate,

Unconfined to land or garb,

Sans a shape, a feature or form,

Here and there and everywhere,

He Pervades as Essence of Love.80.

ਨਾਮ ਕਾਮ ਬਿਹੀਨ ਪੇਖਤ, ਧਾਮ ਹੂੰ ਨਹਿ ਜਾਹਿ ॥  
ਸਰਬ ਮਾਨ ਸਰਬੱਤੁ ਮਾਨ, ਸਦੈਵ ਮਾਨਤ ਤਾਹਿ ॥  
ਏਕ ਮੂਰਤਿ ਅਨੇਕ ਦਰਸਨ, ਕੀਨ ਰੂਪ ਅਨੇਕ ॥  
ਖੇਲ ਖੇਲ ਅਖੇਲ ਖੇਲਨ, ਅੰਤ ਕੋ ਫਿਰਿ ਏਕ ॥੮੧॥

*Nām kām bihīn pekhat, dhām hūn nahī jāhe.  
Sarv mān sarbattra mān, sadaiv mānat tāhe.  
Ek mūrāt(i) anek darshan, kīn rūp anek.  
Khel khel akhel khelan, ant ko phir(i) ek.(81)*

Nameless, want-less, sans abode,  
Everywhere, Everyone whom adores,  
Singular, yet, with myriad forms  
Creation, ever His lively sport,  
Spreads His Play,  
Then Folds up the Game,  
And becomes the 'One' again.81.

ਦੇਵ ਭੇਵ ਨ ਜਾਨਹੀ, ਜਿਹ ਬੇਦ ਅਉਰ ਕਤੇਬ ॥  
ਰੂਪ ਰੰਗ ਨ ਜਾਤਿ ਪਾਤਿ, ਸੁ ਜਾਨਈ ਕਿਹ ਜੇਬ ॥  
ਤਾਤ ਮਾਤ ਨ ਜਾਤ ਜਾਕਰ, ਜਨਮ ਮਰਨ ਬਿਹੀਨ ॥  
ਚੱਕੁ ਬੱਕੁ ਫਿਰੈ ਚਤੁਰ ਚੱਕ, ਮਾਨਹੀ ਪੁਰ ਤੀਨ ॥੮੨॥

*Dev bhev na jān-hī, jih bed aur kateb.  
Rūp raṅg na jāt(i) pāt(i), su jānāī kih jeb.  
Tāt māt na jāt jākar, janam maran bihīn.  
Chakkra bakkra phirai chatur chakk, mān-hī pur tīn.(82)*

All the Vedas and Semitic texts,  
His Mystery can't discern.  
He has no colour nor caste nor clan,  
So how can He be known ?  
Sans lineage, sans birth, sans death,  
The Hallowed Disc of His Power whirls,  
In the four corners and triune worlds.82.

ਲੋਕ ਚਉਦਹ ਕੇ ਬਿਖੈ, ਜਗ ਜਾਪਹੀ ਜਿਹ ਜਾਪ॥  
ਆਦਿ ਦੇਵ ਅਨਾਦਿ ਮੂਰਤਿ, ਥਾਪਿਓ ਸਬੈ ਜਿਹ ਥਾਪਿ॥  
ਪਰਮ ਰੂਪ ਪੁਨੀਤ ਮੂਰਤਿ, ਪੂਰਨ ਪੁਰਖ ਅਪਾਰ॥  
ਸਰਬ ਬਿਸ੍ਵ ਰਚਿਓ ਸੁਯੰਭਵ, ਗੜਨ ਭੰਜਨਹਾਰ॥੮੩॥

*Lok chaudah ke bikhai, jag jāp-hī jinh jāp.  
Ād(i) dev anād(i) mūrat(i), thāpio sabai jinh thāp(i).  
Param rūp punīt mūrat(i), pūran purakh apār.  
Sarv bisva rachio suyambhav, garan bhañjanhār.(83)*

Ever invoked in spheres Fourteen,  
Is His Presence Benign.  
Primal Being and Lord eternal,  
Fashioned who Great Design,  
Ever Transcendent, sacred Visage,  
Fathomless, faultless, flawless ever,  
Self-resplendent, Cause of the universe,  
What he makes, unmakes as well.83.

ਕਾਲ ਹੀਨ ਕਲਾ ਸੰਜੁਗਤਿ, ਅਕਾਲ ਪੁਰਖ ਅਦੇਸ॥  
ਧਰਮ ਧਾਮ ਸੁ ਭਰਮ ਰਹਿਤ, ਅਭੂਤ ਅਲਖ ਅਭੇਸ॥  
ਅੰਗ ਰਾਗ ਨ ਰੰਗ ਜਾਕਹਿ, ਜਾਤਿ ਪਾਤਿ ਨ ਨਾਮ॥  
ਗਰਬ ਗੰਜਨ ਦੁਸਤ ਭੰਜਨ, ਮੁਕਤਿ ਦਾਇਕ ਕਾਮ॥੮੪॥

*Kāl hīn kalā sañjugat(i), akāl purakh ades.  
Dharam dhām su bharam rahit, abhūt alakh abhes.  
Aṅg rāg na raṅg jākaih, jāt(i) pāt(i) na nām.  
Garab gañjan dushṭ bhañjan, mukat(i) dāik kām.(84)*

Deathless Being, adroit and skilled,  
Who's beyond both Time and Space,  
Seat of Faith, devoid of doubt,  
Ever invisible, sans a garb,  
Has no limb or sport or game,  
Has no caste or clan or name,  
Tears He pride,  
Subverts He bane.  
Grants Liberation, fulfils Aim.84.

ਆਪ ਰੂਪ ਅਮੀਕ ਅਨ ਉਸਤਤਿ, ਏਕ ਪੁਰਖ ਅਵਧੂਤ॥  
ਗਰਬ ਗੰਜਨ ਸਰਬ ਭੰਜਨ, ਆਦਿ ਰੂਪ ਅਸੂਤ॥  
ਅੰਗ ਹੀਨ ਅਭੰਗ ਅਨਾਤਮ, ਏਕ ਪੁਰਖ ਅਪਾਰ॥  
ਸਰਬ ਲਾਇਕ ਸਰਬ ਘਾਇਕ, ਸਰਬ ਕੋ ਪ੍ਰਤਿਪਾਰ॥੮੫॥

*Āp rūp amīk an ustāt(i), ek purakh avdhūt.  
Garab ganjan sarab bhañjan, ād(i) rūp asūt.  
Aṅg hīn abhaṅg anātam, ek purakh apār.  
Sarv lāik sarb ghāik, sarb ko pratipār.(85)*

Self-existent, deep, mysterious,  
Care-free, brooks no peer nor praise,  
Life He shatters, pride He smashes,  
Primal Being,  
un-begotten,  
Sans a body,  
sans a soul,  
Primal Person, ever Infinite,  
All-accomplishing, all-abolishing,  
He preserves His Creatures all.85.

ਸਰਬ ਗੰਤਾ ਸਰਬ ਹੰਤਾ, ਸਰਬ ਤੇ ਅਨਭੇਖ॥  
ਸਰਬ ਸਾਸਤ੍ਰ ਨ ਜਾਨਹੀ, ਜਿਹ ਰੂਪ ਰੰਗੁ ਅਰੁ ਰੇਖ॥  
ਪਰਮ ਬੇਦ ਪੁਰਾਣ ਜਾਕਹਿ, ਨੇਤ ਭਾਖਤ ਨਿੱਤ॥  
ਕੋਟਿ ਸਿੰਮ੍ਰਿਤ ਪੁਰਾਣ ਸਾਸਤ੍ਰ, ਨ ਆਵਈ ਵਹੁ ਚਿੱਤ॥੮੬॥

*Sarv gañtā sarb hañtā, sarb te anbhekh.  
Sarv shāstra na jān-hī, jinh rūp raṅg(u) ar(u) rekh.  
Param bed purāṅ jākaih, net bhākhat nitt.  
Koṭ(i) simmrit purān shāstra, na āvai voh chitt.(86)*

Reaching here, destroying there,  
And distinct from one and all.  
None of the *shastras* are cognizant  
With His feature, colour or form.  
Utter the *Vedas* and the *shastras*,  
“He is neither *this* nor *that*!”  
*Simritis*, *shastras* and *Puranas*.  
They all can imagine Him not.86.

[To continue.....]

# Spiritualism in Sikhism

The nucleus of Sikh philosophy is *Naam Japna* (Repetition of God's Name). This philosophy can bring religions together on a common platform. Guru Arjan Dev simply and clearly stated this in Sukhmani Sahib (Psalm of Peace) (SGGS: P.266).

*"The purest and highest dharma (religion) is meditation on the Divine Name and the performance of righteous and unselfish action in our daily lives."*

Guru Nanak says,  
*"If I utter Naam, I live; if I forget Naam I die".*

Life without *Naam* is meaningless because all other noble qualities emanate from it. *Naam* is the path to self-realisation.

In the words of Dr S Radhakrishnan, the highly respected President of India, "All barriers of seas and mountains will give way before the call of eternal truth, which is set forth with freshness of feeling and fervour of feeling in the Adi Granth."

To meditate on *Naam* is to realise the presence of God by seeing Him in mind, as also by singing his praises or dwelling on his Excellences. Doing so, gives a feeling of wonder and eternal bliss.

## Integration of Spiritual Life and Empirical Life

Guru Nanak broke the dichotomy between the spiritual and the empirical lives of humans. According to

Dr Muhammad Iqbal, "Guru Nanak is the only man of God in India who, like Prophet Mohammed, combined the spiritual life and the empirical life of a man and started a religion of the deed, proclaiming and preaching the oneness of God and the brotherhood of man".

Monasticism, asceticism and celibacy had become essential symbols of an ascetic life. Guru Nanak was questioned by ascetics as how it was possible to follow the religious path, while living the life of a house-holder. Sant Ramdas of Maharashtra expressed a similar doubt when he saw the sixth Sikh Guru riding on a horse like a warrior. The Guru replied that while Guru Nanak had given up the materialist way of life, but he had not withdrawn from the world. His own sword was for the defence of the weak and destruction of the tyrant. This integration of spiritual and empirical life led to the doctrine of *miri* and *piri*.

The Sikh principles of *miri* and *piri* creates a social order free of oppression, dominance, exploitation and hierarchy. Alleviation of poverty and achievement of earthly success by just means becomes a cardinal value of Sikhism. Thus, Sikhism provides the model of a classless social order, which clearly meets the needs of the modern age.

## Path of Harmony

Guru Granth Sahib is a common heritage for the entire humankind, as its teachings underline the essential unity of people universally.

Guru Arjan Dev suggests the solution of various problems by saying that in case of a dispute between conflicting parties, they should sit together and settle their differences amicably but seeking Divine guidance.

*Hoi ikatar milo mere bhai duvida dur karo liv laye'*

'Join and meet together, my brethren dispel duality and imbibe love for God.' (SGGS: P.1185).

By following this principle, goodwill can be fostered, making this world safer for humanity.

### **Society free from Superstition and Idol Worship**

There is no place for superstition, dogma, ritual and miracles in Sikhism. Sikh Gurus started a campaign against superstition as articulated in the 'Asa Di Vaar' by Guru Nanak.

*'Good and Bad omens are inventions of the ignorant mind'*. Sikh maryada does not endorse pilgrimages or rituals like taking a bath in a 'sacred river' for cleansing the soul. *'Repeating the Name of the God cleanses the soul, thereby achieving the purity of mind'* (SGGS: 1329).

Guru Nanak says "No pilgrimage place is equal to the Guru. The Guru is the river in whose water (*naam*) the filth of sin and evil thoughts are washed off'.

Fasting is good for health but has no religious merit. God has given us the human body, the temple of the soul, which has to be nourished and cared for.

Guru Nanak says, "Penance, fasting, austerity and giving alms are fine, but 'Truth' or righteous action is best of all".

Sikhism accepts the possibility of supernatural powers, but like any other worldly possessions it should not be used for selfish ends. A Sikh should not seek supernatural powers: the greatest gift of God is *Naam*.

Guru Ram Das says, "*The desire to perform miracles is an obstacle in the way of 'the Name' residing in our heart*". When Guru Nanak was asked about the miracles, he answered, *'I can do nothing against the law of God, its only He who can perform miracles. The 'true name' is the miracle of the miracles, I know of no other miracles.*

### **The need of Guru for Spiritual Evolution**

A lamp can be lit from another lamp already aflame. Eternal bliss and liberation cannot be obtained without spiritual light. The Guru is vital

link for spiritual light, the vital link through whom God instructs creatures. The Guru has been variously called 'ladder', the 'raft', and the 'row boat' that helps man reach God. He is the revealer of God's word through the *Shabad*. Guru is the voice of God and His Divine self-expression. He brings the grace of God, which conquers *Hauma* (ego). Guru gives instructions through the Mantras, invoking union with God. *Waheguru* is the Mantra for the Sikhs. The true Guru reveals the divinity and the way to cross the ocean of life, reaching the kingdom of bliss. Guru Granth Sahib is the living Guru for the Sikhs, embodying spiritual thought of Guru Nanak and succeeding nine Gurus. This revealed Gurbani in the form of *Shabad* is the eternal Guru of the Sikhs. He who attentively reads, sings and listens to the hymns in Guru Granth Sahib is brought into direct contact with God.

### **Divine mission of life**

The main purpose of life is to realise God, which is a privilege bestowed only on human beings. From here on we can either descend to lower species or be uplifted to God and so escape the cycle of birth and death. We should be mindful of our destination and follow the spiritual path.

As Guru Arjan Dev says

*Bhai prapat manukh dehurya,  
Gobind milan kee eh teri bariya*

'Man has the gift of human life,  
This is his opportunity to meet God.'

(SGGS: page 378)

Sikhism believes that human life is a vehicle for spiritual attainment and the goal is to unite with the Supreme. An individual has to develop all the three aspects: body, mind and soul. For bodily development, he must earn a livelihood by honest means and take care of his health.

For the development of the mind, he must study and educate himself, cultivate the intellect for interpreting the mysteries of life and nature.

For development of the soul, he has to break the barrier of ego and attachment to material things. *Maya*. The transmigration of soul, the endless cycle of birth, death and re-birth can be ended by the acceptance of God's will, Hukam, remembrance of his Name and acquisition of Divine Grace. Man has to fight a twin battle. The battle within oneself is fought against the five evils of lust, anger, greed,

attachment and pride. The battle without is against evil forces in the world. Victory is possible, when man makes a conscious effort to follow the spiritual path as ordained by the Guru.

### Requisite of Rulers

Scientific mastery of natural forces has made today's world more chaotic than ever. Two thirds of humanity goes to bed hungry while developed countries are spending billions of dollars on wars and armament even when peace and friendly relationship between nations should be the objective.

Guru Nanak specifies the qualities of a good rulers:

*Takht Raja so bahe je takhat laiq hoi  
Jinni saach Pachhaniya saach raje soi*

'Let the ruler alone sit on throne who is worthy of it.

They who realise the True Lord are the true kings.' (SGGS: page 1088).

Such rulers should be just, endeavour to solve existing social, economic and political problems and definitely strive to make the world a better place.

### Universal Message

Spiritualism and Religion go together, the aim being to make the outward and inward man as one. Spiritualism results in acquisition of virtues and the object of religion is to join the soul to the Creator. A growth in spiritual life is a positive force, which gives us the capacity to love others. A strong belief in universal spiritual values enhances peace and understanding in society.

All religions have similar basic values, suggesting that there ought to be harmony among them. Unfortunately, the attitude of most religions towards one another remains one of unmitigated hostility. If religions have not succeeded in building bridges or saving society from crime and other atrocities, it is because the followers have stopped at mere observance of religious rites and rituals. If we overcome our egos and try to understand and follow the basic essence of any religion, our nature will become a channel of divine energy. Our conflicts will be resolved and we will realise that we belong to one humanity. Love for humanity would lead to love for diversity, as we dwell deeper into ourselves to connect with our fellow human beings.

There are formidable challenges for the very survival of humanity, considering the number of maladies and increasing desire for worldly pleasures,

thereby spiritualism and religion is need of the hour. Guru Granth Sahib provides the manner for solving these problems and for creation of a global society free of fear, caste, creed and colour. As Dr S Radhakrishnan said, "A remarkable feature of Adi Granth is that it contains the writings of the religious leaders of Hinduism, Islam, and others: this is in consistency with the spirit of India, which respects all religions and believes in freedom of the human spirit".

We must honour other faiths, recognise that they offer rich spiritual experiences and encourage sacrificial living and inspire their followers to a noble way of life. The Sikh Guru who compiled the Adi Granth kept this noble quality of appreciation of whatever was valuable in other religious traditions. The saints belong to the whole world. They are universal men who free our minds from bigotry and superstition, dogma and ritualism and emphasise the central simplicities of religion.

The great seers of the world are guardians of the inner values, who correct the fanaticism of their superstitious followers. The model for such a society has been enshrined in the words of Bhagat Ravidas

*"I have reached that region of spiritual life which is free from all anxiety. There is a place called city of no-sorrows. There is no grieving and no man suffers there. There is no attachment and no taxes to pay. There is no fear of committing any sin and there is no coming down from this stage. There we find the true home and eternal bliss. There, all are equals; no one is second or third. It is a popular city; the citizens are wealthy and move freely.* (SGGS: page 345).

Thus, spiritualism and religion would help in creating a moral society based on spiritual knowledge and ethics. Again in the words of Dr. Radhakrishnan, 'when the incarnation of God is realised, not only in a few individuals, but in the whole humanity, we will have a new creation, a new race of men and women, mankind transformed, redeemed and reborn, and a world created anew. This is the destiny of the world, the supreme ideal. It alone can rouse our deepest creative energies, rescue us from cold reason, inspire us with constructive passion and unite us mentally, morally and spiritually in world fellowship'.

The universal message as enshrined in Sri Guru Granth Sahib is the key to creating such an environment and a spiritual world society.

Sohan Singh

# Rejection of Deities in Sikhism: Guru Gobind Singh and Chandī Devi Bhagavati

*An Essay Exploding the Myth*



*Ten Sikh Gurus, painted on the petals of a lotus (A folio of Guru Granth Sahib).*

For an orthodox Hindu, an idol is not at all a lifeless representation. He considers it as very presence of the deity. He joins his mind with devotion to a symbol of God, which he takes

to be God. He accepts the doctrine of God's incarnation. Several gods and goddesses in the Hindu religion, like Vishnu, Shiva and Durga and incarnations like Rama and Krishna, represent for him the ultimate Reality.



The main purpose in image-worship is to spiritualise the image through sincere love for the Lord-God. But there are many people, who without understanding such a high ideal, worship the image as God itself, with some selfish motive. Such a worship is unbecoming, because it brings down God to level of a worldly object. While the latter may be called an idolater, the former who worship God, through constant love for the Lord, ultimately attain salvation.

Since all such gods and goddesses are under the impact of *maya* and its three modes, Sikhism has rejected them. It worships the one and only transcendental Brahman (*Nirguna Brahman*). Guru Nanak Devji says: "All the gods and goddesses have fallen to the fascination of *maya*, and death does not spare any one without the service of the Guru."

(Gauri M.1, P227).

According to Guru Arjan Dev: "Millions of goddesses and Lakshmi serve the Lord in many ways."

(Aasa M.5, P456)

"The blind and ignorant egocentrics, leave their Lord and worship His maid-servant."

(Bhairo M.5, P1138)

Bhagat Kabir says: "Millions of Durgas (goddesses) wash His feet..... I only beg for the Lord and have nothing to do with any other God."

(Bhairo Kabir, P1162)

Thus, very clearly

\* Sikh Scriptures reject all such gods and goddesses.

\* These deities are under the impact of *maya* and its modes, therefore unable to know the secrets of the Lord.

\* They cannot help their devotees in the attainment of emancipation.

\* They are prone to death, like other beings.

Naturally, the point then arises as to why one should worship these deities? Thus, the Sikh devotee worships the One and only One Transcendent Lord and does not adore any of these gods and goddesses.

However some do ask whether Guru Gobind Singh did worship Bhagvati/Durga/Chandi? Guru Gobind Singh is said to have composed two *Chandi Charitas* and *Chandi di Vaar* (also called *Vaar Bhagauti Kiand* and *Vaar Durga Ki*). It is clear that these

compositions along with several others in the Dasam Granth were merely his poetic exercises.

Guru Gobind Singhji had no faith in the Puranic tales and has emphatically written that all such gods ultimately pass away, therefore he worshipped only the Immortal Lord.

*In the beginning I adore the Creator of the Whole world, whose symbol in the double-edged sword.*

*He created Brahma, Vishnu, Shiva and the play of Nature,*

*He created the fourteen regions and exhibited the sport of nature,*

*He created the oceans, mountains and earth and established the heavens without columns,*

*He created the gods and demons and initiated the sense of strife among them,*

*He created the Durga and through her destroyed the demons,*

*He gave strength to Rama who killed Ravana with his arrows,*

*He gave strength to Krishna, who catching Kansa by this hair, hurled him down,*

*All the great hermits and gods, practiced austerities for several ages, But none of them could know His limits."*  
(*Chandi di Var, Stanza 2*)

Very clearly thus it can be conclusively inferred that the Guru worshipped only the One Creator-Lord and none of these gods, goddesses and incarnations, who are all 'created beings'.

Who then is responsible for such canard of Devi-worship? In the first place, usage of the word 'Bhagavati' which is a name of the goddesses Durga has confused mortals. The word has, undoubtedly been used, Bhagavati, which according to Sanskrit lexicon, is a name of Durga, but in Sikh literature, this word in its corrupted form 'Bhagauti', has been used for the sword.

The very first stanza of *Chandi di Vaar*, which is often included by the Sikhs in their daily prayer, runs thus: *Pratham Bhagawati Simar ke Guru Nanak Lain Dhiae: 'While composing this poem, I remember Bhagauti at the very outset, on whom Guru Nanak Dev mediated'.*

If Bhagauti was Durga, to whom did the Sikh Gurus, including Guru Nanak Dev, the founder of Sikhism, offer their prayers?

As we have noted earlier Durga was only created by the Lord God to destroy demons. Kabir has clearly stated that there are a million Durgas 'who wash the feet of the Creator'.

We must find out the exact connotation of the word Bhagauti, as used in Sikh literature. This word is used in Sikh Scripture itself by Guru Amar Das as well as Guru Arjan Dev, where it means the devotee of Bhagwant (Lord-God), and not the Lord Himself. This term was prevalent in times of the Gurus in another sense too. In the sixth stanza of the twenty-fifth Var of Bhai Gurdas, it has been clearly written:

*Nau Bhagawti Loh gharaya i.e. its name is 'Bhagauti' (the sword) and has been fashioned out of steel.*

The above reference leaves one in no doubt about the meaning of Bhagauti. In *Chandi di Vaar* or *Vaar Bhagauti Ki* itself, his word has been used directly in context of the sword.

*Lei Bhagawti Durg Shah Varagan Bhari  
Lai Raje Sumbh nu rat piye piari*

'Durga took out Bhagauti (the sword) flashing greatly like fire; it was struck on Sumbh, the King of Demons and, being thirsty, drank his blood.'

Thus, Bhagauti is the sword, considered by the Guru as the symbol of Primal Power. On the one hand it has been used as an epithet of Lord-God and on the other it has been used for the sword itself.

In the beginning of *Bachittar Natak*, referring to the sword, Guru Gobind Singh writes: "Hail, hail, the cause of the creation of the world, the liberator of the world, my Protector, hail, hail, O Sword" (second stanza, *Bachittar Natak*)

There was an episode behind this dispute. A Brahmin, Pandit Kalidas by name, once told Guru Gobind Singh: "The goddess Bhagawti is all powerful. He who worships Bhagawti, is blessed with her powers and can destroy all demonic forces".

Fifty other Brahmin pandits were invited through Kalidas, and two lakhs of Rupees were spent for a *havan* to invoke appearance of the Devi Bhagauti. All such material was taken to Naina Devi temple, about seven kos (20 km) from Anandpur, where the great *havan* was to be performed for forty days. The ceremony for invoking the goddess began on the first of Chaitra, Samvat 1754. On the fortieth day, the leading pandit, Keshar Das proclaimed:

"If a great man offers himself for sacrifice, then the goddess can manifest." The Guru drew his sword from the scabbard and, with fire in his eyes, said, "Who can be a better person than yourself for sacrifice, O Pandit".

The pandit then ran away for his life and could not be traced. The Guru caused all the remaining materials to be thrown in the *havanakund* at the same time. There was a great fire, with high flames, which could be seen from several kos in the plains. All the people of the area thought that the goddess had manifested. The Guru returned to Anandpur with his sword still drawn. To everyone who enquired about the appearance of the goddess, the Guru replied, "Yes. This goddess Bhagauti (i.e. the sword) has manifested itself". Such is the real story about manifestation of that goddess.

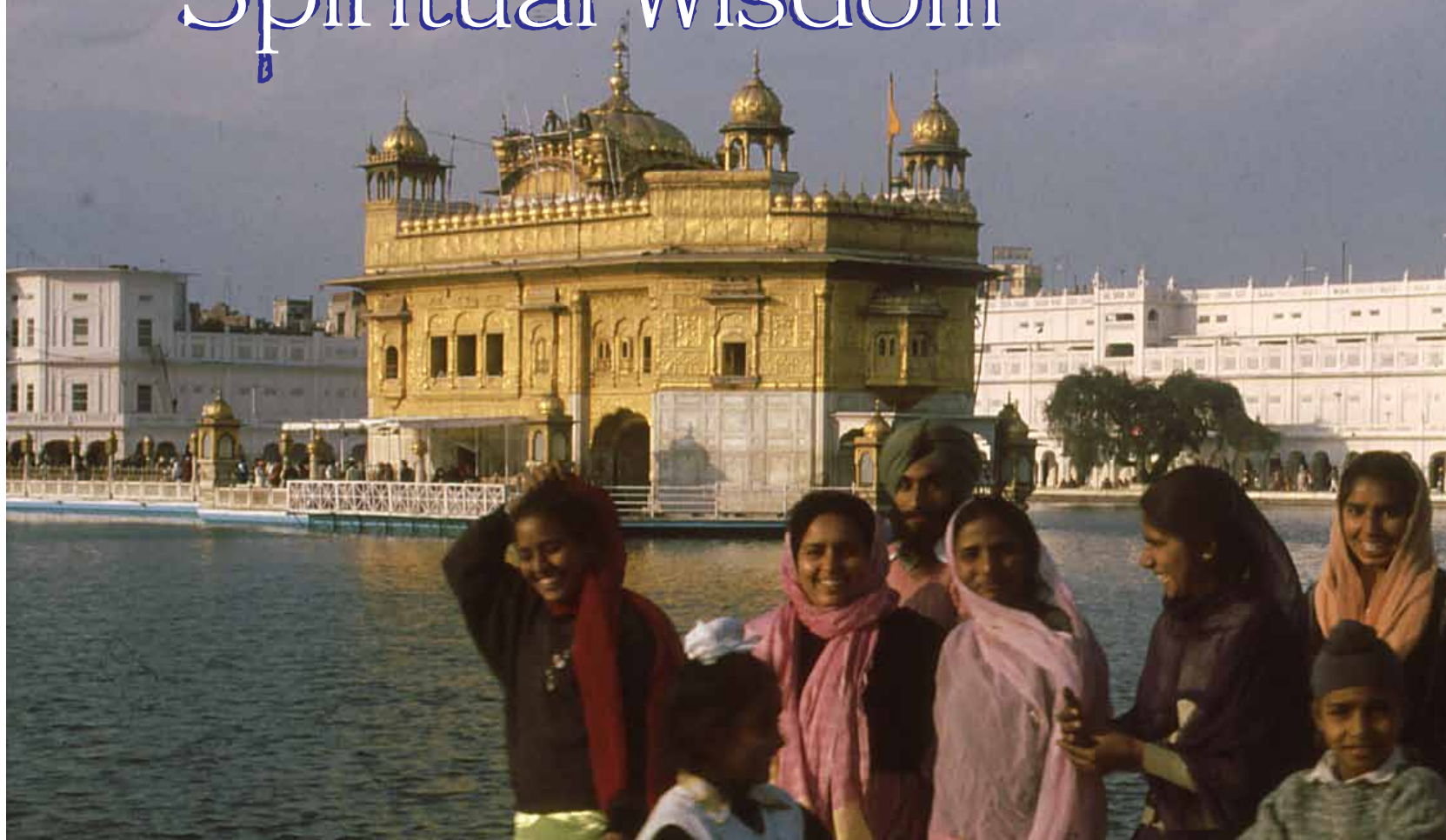
The question then arises as to why the episode of Devi-worship has been included in various pseudo-historical Sikh poetic compositions and even prose works which present a rendering of these poetic works? The answer is that Sikh philosophy, religion, history literature should be written and reinterpreted in its own moral mould.

What occurs to us in this connection is that incomplete knowledge of Sikh doctrines as grasped by the early Sikh hagiographers and recorders of injunctions is the reason why they faltered at many places. Moreover, myths and phony philosophies, not in consonance with Sikh philosophy, also crept into the Sikh religious thought. There have always been efforts at interpolations by some crafty Brahmins in order to pollute the heritage of the Pure Religion, i.e. Nirma Panth, created by Guru Nanak Dev Ji.

Several examples of such interpolations have been found by the reformist Sikh savants. Meenas, Hindalis, and others also joined in this exercise. The erratic thoughts expressed in the earlier works emboldened the antagonistic forces in their onslaught against Sikhism in the modern period. As Prof. Surinder Singh Kohli rightly puts it: "Several earlier works of Sikh philosophy, religion, history, etc. need thorough checking. They should be re-written, dropping all the erratic and spurious material, which does not fit in with the thought-content of the Sikh Scriptures."

Dr. Debabrata Das

# Spiritual Wisdom



We are all spiritual beings, children of One Infinite God, living in this physical body which is time and space bound and hence finite. Identifying ourselves with the body creates ignorance of this Reality and a misunderstanding that we are just physical and finite beings. This doubt and duality thus created between us and the Pure Self, the Divine Consciousness within, is called Spiritual Ignorance. In this ignorance, pain and doubt develops within, which like a screen that separates us from God.

*Andar agian dukh bharam hai vich parda door payeeaas.*

“The unseen God sits deep within the Self and cannot be realised as the veil of ego intervenes. In emotional attachment to Maya, all the world is asleep.”

How can this doubt can be dispelled?

*Anatar Alakh na jae Lakhiaa vich parda haumay paais.  
Maya moh sabh solaa eho bharam kahau kion jae.*

The spiritually ignorant, called *manmukh* in Gurbani, are blind to the reality of their real self.

*Jee kee saar na janee manmukh agianee andh.*

This is like an ocean wave, to think that it is separate from the ocean is due to ignorance. Waves cannot exist without the ocean. Superimposition of our bodily consciousness onto the Self gives rise to the world of names and forms. God is formless beyond the limited body, mind and intellect. The separation between us and the Reality leads to spiritual ignorance. This is caused by Maya and we get attached to the material world which causes duality.

*Eh Maya jit Har vsire moh upje bhaao duja laai.*

In this mistaken identity one accepts the body as oneself and gets bound to family, friends, material possessions, sense pleasures and so on. So the deluded man accepts the unreal to be real and infinite to be finite. Because of mental wilderness caused by such



ignorance, one takes this world to be stable and permanent. Emotional attachment to Maya is totally abhorrent and bad bargain. Speaking falsely under influence of Maya is like consuming poison and gives rise to more evil in the mind.

*Maya moh sabh dukh hai khota eh vapaara Ram.*

*Koor bol bikh khavnee bauh vadhe vitaraa Ram.*

He who has spiritual ignorance within, his intellect is dull and dim, and he does not place his faith in the True Guru. He has deceit within himself and so he sees deception in all other. Through his deceptions, he is totally ruined. If blessed by God such a person will meditate on God's Name and be absorbed in the divine melody.

*Antar agian bhaee mut madham Satgur kee parteet nahee.*

*Anadar kapat sabh kapto kar janay kapto khapeh khapee.*

*Satgur ka bhana chit na aaveh aapnay dua-ay phiraaee.*

*Kirpa karay je aapnee tan Nanak Sabad smaee.*

Spiritual wisdom is an antidote to ignorance. In other words, it is spiritual wisdom that can destroy the thick veil of ignorance. A breeze of spiritual wisdom cleans away the clouds of ignorance and one sees the vision of Reality.

*Nanak Gurmakh gian prapat haovay andher chukaaia.*

The darkness of ignorance gets dispelled and spiritual wisdom fights the lam of spiritual wisdom:

*Again anhera mil gaya gian depaio.*

Gurbani provides us that if we make *Naam Japna* our boat and install the intuitive understanding of Gurbani as the boatman, God Himself will take us across this vast ocean of ignorance. Gurbani reminds us to take this boat now. The purpose of life is served for those who have acquired divine knowledge. This can be done by connecting our *surti* with *Sabad* thru *Naam Japna*, love, devotion and good deeds. This will clean the accumulated dust of past Karmas from surface of the mind.

*Bhareeay mutt papan kay sung.*

*Oh dhopay Naavay ke rung*

So join the Sat-Sangat, sing God's glorious praises. With the brilliant jewel of spiritual wisdom, the heart will be illumined, and ignorance dispelled. The Sabad Guru within will give the healing ointment of spiritual Grace and one will meet a True Saint in whose company mind will be enlightened.

*Gian anjan Gur deea again andher binaas,*

*Har kirpa te Sant bhetia Nanak mun pargas.*

Divine knowledge comes by removing the ill effects of Maya from the mind with the help of Naam. The heart lotus blossoms when Naam comes to abide in the heart.

*Gian mati kamal pargas tit ghat Naamaay Naam nivas.*

Once the Naam/ Shabad Guru/ Satgur nestles in the heart one gets the discriminating knowledge (which separates the material knowledge from spiritual knowledge). Guru reveals the spiritual knowledge of God.

*Bibek budh Satgur te paaee Gur gian Guru Prab kera.*

Once ignorance is dispelled, and the mind purified of egoism and illumined with spiritual wisdom, all misunderstanding ends. When true wisdom arises, unreality vanishes and the only One Pure, All Pervading Consciousness remains. In the remembrance of God is divine knowledge and the essence of wisdom.

*Prabh ke simran gian dhyaan tutt budh.*

**Rabinder Singh Bhamra**

# Rhetorical structure in the Japu-ji

The Japu-ji, which is central text of Sikh scripture, has during the past century, been the subject of vast exegetical and interpretative literature. The linguistic aspects of the work – by which I refer to its vocabulary, grammar and syntax – have been described in some detail. Its poetic characteristics, i.e. its meters and use of *alankaras*, have likewise been subjected to close scrutiny. There is a veritable ocean of commentary on the content and theology of the work as well as on its historical, social and religious context. But in all of this literature there has been scant examination of the rhetorical nature of the Japu-ji. This is, to my mind, somewhat surprising, as the Japu-ji, is, I hope to show, a work embodying an extraordinarily sophisticated and complex rhetorical structure. This structure cannot, I believe, be considered an extraneous or ornamental aspect of the text. It is part and parcel of the basic nature of the work. An understanding of Guru Nanak's rhetoric is essential, I believe, for fully understanding not just what the Japu-ji means, but also the precise means by which its content is conveyed to its audience. Although a full treatment of the rhetorical structure of the Japu-ji cannot be carried out in the limited space available here – such a study would require book-length treatment. In any case, I would like to make some general points about Guru Nanak's rhetoric in the hope that I can encourage further exploration of what I believe to be a neglected facet of Japu-ji.

The term 'rhetoric', as conventionally used, refers to the art of using language so as to persuade or influence others. The study of rhetoric focuses on language not, as is the case with linguistics, as an end in – and of – itself, but rather to elucidate how a writer or orator uses language in effecting particular ends, most specifically the attention of an audience towards a particular point of view or

course of action. The study or rhetoric draws from the vocabulary and insights of not only linguistics, but also of poetics, pragmatics, logic, and psychology. This study has been an integral part of the western Greco-Roman civilisation, but has been surprisingly absent in various Indian Shastric traditions. Of course the study of some phenomena that fall under the purview of rhetoric in the western sense have fallen under the jurisdiction of such fields of knowledge as *alankara sastra*, *vyakarana*, or *kavya*, but the precise configuration of interests that collectively constitutes rhetoric in the west has been surprisingly absent from the Indian landscape. This may, in part, explain the failure of *tikas*, editions and translations of the Japu-ji of sufficient complexity and depth to defy simple characterisation as being simply one thing or another. Nevertheless, there is a sense in which the Japu-ji, on at least one level, is a work designed to serve certain pragmatic ends and to lead its chanter or hearer to particular states of awareness and to encourage him to carry out particular patterns of behavior. Moreover, the form of the Japu-ji – the particular words selected by Guru Nanak, the syntactic constructions and poetic devices employed, the order in which verses are given and the formal ways in which they are linked – is inexorably linked to the message being promulgated in the text. Guru Nanak's message and the external form through which that message is conveyed mirror one another and are thoroughly interconnected.

The notion that there is a direct connection between the form and the message of the Japu-ji can hardly be surprising when one considers the importance within the text, and, indeed, within much of the entire Adi Granth of such notions as Japu-ji 'repetition, chanting', *namu* 'name', *sabadu* 'word, sound', *bani* 'word, sound, utterance, revelation' and

also' when one bears in mind the belief, often iterated in the Japu-ji, that the highest good is obtained when the individual, through the salutary effects of chanting particular words or sounds, carried out under the tutelage of the Guru, allows himself to be merged with a greater all pervasive God, equated with Truth, and which is itself constituted of primordial sound (*ikonkar*) or articulate speech (*sabad, vani*). To chant the Japu-ji leads one to inevitably apprehend its essence. The formal structure of the Japu-ji, involving components of grammar, syntax, poetics and logic, is a seamless whole fashioned in such a way as to most expeditiously effect the transition from chanting or hearing the text to apprehending it. When one first reads the Japu-ji, much of this structure is not obvious. The more one examines the text, however, the more Guru Nanak's genius as a rhetorician becomes apparent.

Perhaps the most obvious rhetorical device evident in the Japu-ji is the use of a set of 'key words,' each of which begins a succession of lines of text, often spanning more than one verse. Each 'key word' governs a connected portion of text, within which we can discern yet other rhetorical structures and cohesive principles. The most important of these 'key words' are *hukmee* (92), *gaavai ko* (3), *sunai-ai* (8-11), *mannai* (13-15), *paca* (16), *asankh* (17-19); *akhree* (19), *ant na* (24), *kete/ketiya* (25-26, 35), *amula* (26), *aakhahi* (26), *gaavahi* (27), *jor* (33), and *tithai* (36-8). Often the use of one or another of these forms as a 'key word' is prefigured by its use in earlier text. This is done in such a way as to make the use of the key word as a dominant motif to same natural and inevitable. Thus, for example, the use of *hukami* as the dominant unifying element in verse 2 is "set up" by the use of the similar form *hukami* in the last line of Verse 1 (*hukam raja-ee chalnaa naanak likhi-aa naal*). [1]. The *mannai* that figures so prominently in 13-15 is foreshadowed at several places in [12]:

*Mannay kee gat kahee na jaa-ay.*  
*Jay ko kahai pichhai pachhuta-ay.*  
*Kaagad kalam na likhanhaar.*  
*Mannay kaa bahi karan veechaar.*  
*Aisaa naam niranjan ho-ay.*  
*Jay ko man jaanai jan ko-ay.* [12].

In addition to being prefigured, 'key words' are often echoed in later verses. The *suniai* and *mannai* of 8-11 and 13-15 respectively are reflected in various

guises throughout the remainder of the Japu-ji. Echoes of these two forms are often linked together, with that of *suniai* preceding that for *mannai* (e.g., *sunia mania mani kita bhau/antargat tirath mal naa-o*). [21]. The regular placing of forms such as *suniai* or *sunia* before *mannai* or *mania*, etc. has, of course a theological purpose behind it. It is through hearing the Word (*sabadu*), that one comes to accept or apprehend it. It is therefore essential to explore the ramifications of 'listening' before moving on to a sustained discourse of the ramification of 'accepting.'

The profiling of words having special significance is carried out by Guru Nanak in ways other than those just described. Often a single word is iterated in an *ostinato* manner for dramatic or rhetorical effect. We can clearly see this in the repetition of *gurumukhi* and *guru* in

*Gurumukh naadang gurmukh vayda*  
*Gurmukh rahi-aa samaa-ee.*  
*Gur eesar gur gorakh barmaa*  
*Gur paarbatee maa-ee.* [5].

Or of *jor* in verse [33]:

*Aakhan jor chapai nah jor.*  
*Jor na mangan dayn na jor.*  
*Jor na jeevan maran nah jor.*  
*Jor na raaj maal man sor.*  
*Jor na surtee gi-aan veechaar.*  
*Jor na jugtee chhuta sansaar.*  
*Jis hath jor kar vaykhai so-ay.*  
*Naanak utam neech na ko-ay.* [33].

Often, instead of a single word iterated for stylistic effect, we find the repetition of numerous words centered around a single semantic or etymological core, as in the following line from line 5, in which various verbal forms having to do with speaking or saying are profiled:

*Jay ha-o jaanaa aakhaa naahee*  
*Kahnaa kathan na jaa-ee.*

The technique of building verses or portions of verses around words that are etymologically cognate is most pronounced in the Japu-ji and can be far more complex than what has already been described. Guru Nanak was a master at summoning all the formal resources of the language in which he was composing and using them with extraordinary effectiveness in carrying out theological, moral, didactic, and poetic

ends. The specific ways in which he manipulated language were, not surprisingly, linked to the specific characteristics and qualities of the language in which he composed.

The language in which much of the Adi Granth is written, represents a transitional stage in the evolution of the new Indo-Aryan languages. The heavily inflected type of grammatical system characteristic of old and middle Indo-Aryan had been reduced about as far as was possible without at the same time totally eliminating the ability of the remaining inflections to express grammatical relations and categories of different types, but where a morpho-syntactic system of the type characteristic of many present-day new Indo-Aryan languages had not yet fallen into place. A consequence of this state of affairs is that those grammatical suffixes that remained in this language were called upon to serve myriad grammatical functions. Thus, for example, the vowel – ‘i’ is the sole overt marker of numerous homophonous morphemes. It is used as the marker of the verbal absolutive [e.g. *hoi* ‘having been (=Hindi *hokar*), as one of several options for the third person, singular, present tense of verbs whose stems end in vowels (e.g., *jaai* ‘he/she/it goes’), as one of the options for the second person singular imperative (e.g., *taari* ‘save’), as a marker of the ablative singular in various nominal, adjectival, and pronominal paradigms (e.g., *mani* loco sg. of *manu* ‘body’, *niramalu* loco sg. of *niramalu* adj. ‘pure’: *iki* loco (and also agentive) sg. of *iku* ‘one’), and as a variant of – o – or – u as a nominative masculine of some pronominal stems (e.g., *si* ‘he’, (e.g., *a*, *u*, *e*, *i*) are likewise ‘saturated’ in their being used for multiple grammatical tasks, cutting across the nominal, verbal, adjectival, and pronominal systems of the language.

It is frequently difficult to determine whether in a particular verse a given form is a locative of a noun or a homophonous absolutive or imperative of a verb stem. This state of affairs, rather than being an obstacle to Guru Nanak is something that he harnesses to his own advantage. Verses are constructed, in a virtuosic manner, which revel in the ability of the language to make important semantic (and, by extension, theological) distinctions by means of small-scale linguistic distinctions:

*Sochai soch na hova-ee jay sochee lakh vaar.*  
*Chupai chup nah hova-ee jay laa-ay rahaa liv taar.*

‘There is no insight to be gained through introspecting, even if I ponder a hundred thousand times. There is no solace in silence, no matter how deeply I mediate.’

*Kathnaa kathee na aavai tot.*  
*Kath kath kathee kotee kot kot.*

Literally, ‘there does not come (*na avai*) any deficiency/damage/loss/end of narration (even though) I speak (*kathi* 1st sg. present of *kathi-* ‘to say, speak’), having repeatedly spoken (*kathi kathi*) crores and crores of times (*koti koti koti*);

(The scope of the Lord’s order) is so vast that it cannot be narrated, even if that narration be carried out crores and crores of times’.

There are many other ways in which Guru Nanak utilises different kinds of rhetorical structures and strategies in order to make out moral, theological, and didactic points. Once again, the majority of these are firmly rooted in the specific linguistic properties of the language that Guru Nanak appropriates for composing the Japu-ji. Although space limitations deny an extended discussion of ways in which this is carried out, some of the more important of these can be enumerated as follows:

**The use of symmetrical clause structures:** Whole verses, lines of verse, or even portions of lines frequently have symmetrical grammatical structure; e.g.,

*Ant na siftee kahan na ant.*  
*Ant na karnai dayn na ant.*  
*Kaytay aakhahi aakhan paahi.*  
*Kaytay kahi kahi uth uth jaahi*

**The use of rhetorical questions:** Such structures pervade the entire Japu-ji. Interrogatives such as *kiva*, *keha*, *keta*, etc. are employed to ask questions whose answers are either self evident or delayed until later in the verse. Verse 27, beginning with the extraordinarily moving words

*So dar kayhaa so ghar kayhaa it bahi sarab samaalay.*  
*Vaajay naad anayk asankhaa kaytay vaavanhaaray.*  
*Kaytay raag paree si-o kahee-an kayta gaavanhaaray.*

is, in form, an elaborate answer to the series of rhetorical questions posed in first three lines of verse.

**The use of reduplicative compounds with intensive force:** We frequently find in the Japu-ji intensive reduplicative compounds used to stress the vastness of some group of entities or parties whom Guru Nanak wishes to allude. e.g., *paataalaa paataal lakh aagaasaa aagaas*. [22]. ‘hundreds of thousands of hells (piled upon) hell and heavens (piled) upon heavens’, *seeto seetaa* [37] ‘Sitas upon Sitas’. Constructions showing similar interest composition are also used to describe those individuals who epitomise some quality or trait: *paatisaahu paatisaahib* [26] king of kings, *gaavaaraa gaavaar*. ‘greatest fool among fools’.

**Use of relative-correlative constructions:** Although the use of relative-correlative constructions is a basic element of Indo-Aryan syntax at all stages of the language family’s development, the use of these constructions can often impart a didactic tone to a discourse.

In Japu-ji this proclivity for didactic uses of these constructions becomes very apparent when Guru Nanak gives us back-to-back sequences of these:

*Jin ayhi likhay tis sir naahi.*  
*Jiv furmaa-ay tiv tiv paahi.*  
*Jaytaa keetaa taytaa naa-o.*  
*Vin naavai naachee ko thaa-o.*

**Juxtaposing of opposites:** This is handled in various ways, ranging from the formation of simple compounds (e.g., *utam neech* (2) *dukh sukh* (2), to the use of larger sentences incorporating a formal antithesis (e.g., a formal antithesis (e.g. *hukmai andar sabh ko baahar hukam na ko-ay*, (2), and to the employment of sentences having a complex internal logical organisation, such as ‘if p then q if not p then not q (e.g., *tirath naavaa jay tis bhaavaa vin bhaanay ke naa-ay karee*. “I bathe in sacred places if I am pleasing to Him; without His blessing what good is my bathing?’ In this last example the ‘not q’ of the logical formula has been posed in the form of a rhetorical questions whose understood answer is negative in force.

**Use of Chiasmus:** Chiasmus, an inverted relationship between the syntactic elements of parallel phrases is used occasionally in the Japu-ji with rhetorical effect: e.g., *naanak nirgun gun karay gunvanti-aa gun day*. [7] ‘Nanak, the Lord imparts virtue to

those without it, and increases it in those who already possess it’.

In reading the Japu-ji and other sections of the Adi Granth I have often been struck by the discrepancy between one’s sense of these works when one reads them in their original language and when one reads them in translation. The Japu-ji, perhaps as much as any work in any Indian religious tradition, is harmed when translated from its original tongue. In translation, Guru Nanak’s words can seem redundant and tedious. Lines of verse such as

*So-ee so-ee sadaa sach sahib*  
*Saachaa saachee naa-ee.*  
*Hai bhee hose jaa-ay na jaasee*  
*Rachnaa jin rachaa-ee. [27]*

which in the original make rhetorical use of the complex of related words *saachu*, *saacha* and *saachi*, profile the alliteration of ‘s’ and ‘j’ as well as play on the alternation between present and future tense forms of the verbs ‘to be’ and ‘to go’, come across in translation as tautological or simply bewildering.

Guru Nanak’s diction, which in the original has a stately nobility, is generally not captured in translation. The loftiness of the Japu-ji’s language which, in my mind, rivals that of portions of the King James or Martin Luther’s German Bible, is mutilated by translations that render the propositional content of the poetry without capturing the essence of the formal structure, both poetic and rhetorical, which carry the intent of the poet to the audience. To a great extent these remarks pertain to all poetry. But they are particularly apt as regards the Japu-ji. The Japu-ji is a masterful work of rhetoric. Nanak’s choice of vocabulary, his choice of syntactic constructions, his linkage of one verse with another, are carried out with an eye towards rhetorical ends. To study the work without reference to the rhetorical stratagems everywhere evident in it is to miss a major portion of what the work is intended to be. Just as importantly, it causes one to fail to grasp just why the work has had such a pronounced effect on those who have studied it most closely.

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# Religious tolerance in Sikhism

**G**uru Nanak, the founder of Sikhism probably never intended to initiate a new religion. Essentially a man of God, he wanted the Hindus of his time to be good Hindus and Muslims to be good Muslims, urging them to live in peace and harmony and be tolerant of each other. Were any proof needed, this is provided in the fact that when he passed away, the Hindus wanted to cremate and the Muslims insisted on giving a burial. His incipient utterance "there is no Hindu, there is no Muslim" (all are human beings) immediately after his enlightenment stresses this. What is termed as religious tolerance is fundamental to the creed that Guru Nanak expostulated, and reflected in his person most vividly. Born in a Muslim majority region, Bedi by caste, devoted to Vedic studies, he came to be known as:

*Baba Nanak Shah Faqir*

*Hindu Ka Guru*

*Musalman Ka Peer.*

[Guru Nanak the Super Seer

Guru of the Hindu

And Peer of the Muslim].

After his own sister Bebe Nanki, the earliest follower who glimpsed the divine in Guru Nanak was the village head, Rai Bular, a Muslim. For his constant companion, he had Mardana, a Muslim bard. While he went on pilgrimages also to Haridwar, the distance and the travail of travelling in those times did not deter him from undertaking a pilgrimage to Mecca and Medina to pay his homage in the manner of a devout Muslim. It is said that during his pilgrimage to the Muslim shrines, he dressed himself in blue, like that of a Muslim pilgrim. He had no reservations in joining the Qazi and the Muslim Nawab when invited to offer Muslim prayers, "provided their heart's were in it." At Mecca, when said to have been asked who, in his opinion was, holier, a Hindu or a Muslim, Guru Nanak's reply was "without good deeds both would be miserable."

No wonder Sikhism, the faith that Guru Nanak espoused is remarkable for its tolerance in the comity of world religions.

The fundamental postulate of Sikhism enshrines the essence of all the living creeds:

*There is but one God.*

*Truth incarnate.*

*The Master Creator*

*Unafraid*

*Disdains none.*

*Image Eternal,*

*Beyond Incarnation,*

*Self-Existent, True,*

*Realised through the grace of the Guru.*

In the days of Guru Nanak, India was passing through one of its worst phases, having repeatedly been invaded from the north-west since the 12th Century. The periodic incursions had devastated and demoralised the Indian people, more especially in the North. Guru Nanak was a visionary who realised the need to put an end to the scourge. Together with the practitioners of the Sufi faith, he brought home to the Muslims of India that the invaders did not distinguish between the Hindus and Muslims when they attacked in savage hordes. He inculcated secularism and patriotism amongst the Muslims as much as in the Hindus. While talking about the foreign onslaughts, not once did he condemn Muslims but only the ravaging Turks, Mughals and Afghans whom he addressed. Said Guru Nanak:

*Ander pooja padhi kitabon*

*Sainjam Turkan bhai*

[‘Covertly do you pooja and read Islamic holy books But yet live the Turkish way of life!’]

Guru Nanak satirised the rituals and practices of both Hindus and Muslims. Babar’s invasion during Guru Nanak’s times was the last such incursion from the north-west. The Mughals thereafter made India their home and settled in the land of their conquest.

It is said that during his ‘pilgrimage’ to the holy shrine in Mecca, Guru Nanak who had reached after an arduous journey, lay down to rest as soon as he arrived at his destination. Heedless, he was fast asleep with his feet towards the sacred Kaaba when the guard while taking his rounds during the night was scandalised and shouted, “Who is it sleeping with his feet towards the House of God?” Guru Nanak who was virtually in slumber replied: “Brother I am much too tired, pray turn my feet in the direction where God is not.” Hearing this the security guard who had already picked Guru Nanak’s feet found himself in a whirl – where God is not! He had lifted Guru Nanak’s legs to turn them around. Instead, his touched his head upon his feet and washed them with his tears.

Guru Nanak later went to the Holy shrine of Lord Jagannath at Puri. Finding the ceremonial rituals a merely mechanical exercise, he withdrew and sitting in a corner, a little distance from the shrine articulated his arti of the Lord, his companion Mardana playing on the Rabab.

*The sky is the platter,*

*The sun and the moon are the candles.*

*And this constellation of stars, pearls in showers.*

*The sandalwood fragrance is the incense.*

*And wind is the flywhisk*

*And all the forests Your flowers,*

*What wonderful arati that is !*

It was similar to what Guru Nanak had done earlier at Haridwar. Finding the devotees offering Ganga water to their ancestors in heaven with their face towards the Sun, he turned around and started offering water in the manner of the fellow pilgrims, but towards the West. When told that the Sun was in the East, he said that he was offering water to his crops in the West: the message was clear!

Similarly, Guru Nanak would bring home the fact what true Islam really meant.

*It is difficult to be a true Muslim:*

*He who remains steadfast in times*

*And trials is a true Muslim.*

*He should first have faith in God*

*And shake off his false conceit.*

*Being the Prophet’s devotee means*

*Shedding the fear of death*

*And accepting the will of the Lord.*

*With faith in the Creator, rid of conceit,*

*If he is kind to one and all,*

*Says Nanak, he can a true Muslim be called.*

Guru Nanak laid emphasis on truthful living:

*Truth is Supreme*

*But above all*

*Is truthful living.*

A true Hindu and a true Muslim can most certainly co-exist. Guru Nanak, therefore, wanted that Hindus “to be true Hindus and Muslims to be true Muslims.” The Sikhs were born out of this fundamental truth, religious tolerance being the virtual postulate of Sikhism.

Perhaps understanding the mystique of Sikhism helps make the assertion more convincing. It is altruism that while the Sikh faith has undergone changes owing to the inevitable process of evolution

during the 500 years that it has been in existence, religious tolerance, remains intact. For a true Sikh, Guru Nanak prescribed *Naam Japna*, *Kirt Karni* and *Wand Chhakna* – ‘contemplation, working hard and sharing one’s earnings with others.’

A change in emphasis was effected in the Sikh way of life by Guru Har Gobind, the sixth Guru after his father Guru Arjan Dev, the fifth Guru was tortured to death by the Mughal emperor Jahangir. Guru Har Govind embraced both *miri* (temporal power) and *piri* (spiritual authority). The Sixth Guru came to be known as *Sachcha Badshah* (True King). He established *Akal Takht*, Throne of the Timeless. And yet Sri Hargobindpur, the town he founded on an enchanting location on banks of the River Beas housed a mosque, probably the finest in the region.

The change in Sikh religion became more pronounced during the time of Guru Gobind Singh, the tenth Master when his father Guru Tegh Bahadur, the ninth Sikh guru, was arrested and cruelly executed in Chandni Chowk at Delhi, because he refused to be converted to Islam, or work a miracle to prove that he was a godman to whom normal law of the land might not be applied. Essentially a man of peace, Guru Gobind Singh then took to the sword in order to fight tyranny and injustice. He established the Khalsa on Vaisakhi Day in 1699; an initiation ceremony involving the steel sword was instituted; initiants were to keep their hair unshorn; weapons were to be worn as a matter of course; smoking was forbidden; and many (though not necessarily all) who thus entered the Khalsa adopted the name ‘Singh’.

Before he passed away, Guru Gobind Singh declared that there would be no Guru in person henceforth and that the eternal Guru would live with his followers in the Scriptures (The Holy Granth) and in the gathered community (The Panth). The Holy Granth was immortalised by Guru Gobind Singh towards the close of his life. Its unique catholicity is evidenced in the fact that, along with the hymns of the six Gurus, are incorporated the compositions of as many as 36 men of God belonging to various castes and creeds, religions and avocations. Among them are Jaidev of Bengal, Surdas of Awadh, Namdev, Trilochand and Parma Nand of Maharashtra, Beni, Rama Nand, Pipa, Sain, Kabir, Ravidas and Bhikhan of Uttar Pradesh, Dhanna of Rajasthan and Farid of Multan. Kabir was a weaver, Sadhna a butcher, Namdev a barber, Ravidas a tanner, Farid a Muslim

divine, Bhikha a learned scholar of Islam and Surdas a Hindu mystic and poet.

The fact was that, a century later, Sikhism was not made the state religion during Maharaja Ranjit Singh’s rule. The Maharaja’s regime was essentially secular with patronage evenly distributed amongst the Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs. His prime minister was a Hindu Dogra, his foreign and interior ministers were Muslims.

It was the British colonialist power that tried to foster the sense of differences for reasons of their own. In the aftermath of Anglo-Sikh Wars, Hindu religious practices began to be followed amongst the Sikh masses; there were idols even on the premises of the Golden Temple.

In order to meet this challenge, the Singh Sabha Movement was launched towards the close of the nineteenth century. It was a reformist movement which laid stress on the distinctive Sikh ethos. The process continued in one form or another until 1950 when a statement of the Sikh Rahat Maryada (the Sikh way of life) was adopted by the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee, the statutory Sikh Council. which defines a Sikh as follows:

*A Sikh is any person who believes in Akal Purakh; in the ten Gurus (Guru Nanak to Guru Gobind Singh), in Sri Guru Granth Sahib, other writings of the ten Gurus, and their teachings; in the Khalsa initiation ceremony instituted by the tenth Guru; and who does not believe in any other system of religious doctrine.*

The Sikhs were created as a socio-political entity. Guru Nanak, the founder of Sikhism, was very concerned about with the socio-economic plight of his people. His exhortations were that one must work hard and share earnings with others. “A life of action is superior to a life of contemplation.”

Commenting upon those times, Guru Nanak said:

*Kaliyug is like a dagger  
Kings are butchers, Dharma has taken wings  
And disappeared  
In the dark night of falsehood  
The Moon of truth is nowhere to be seen.*

Agonised by the atrocities perpetrated by Babar’s invaders, Guru Nanak was fearless in his remark:

*The dogs have ravaged the gem of a country.  
When they die, none will ever remember them.*

He was equally harsh on the administration:

*There is none who receives nor gives bribe:  
Even the King administers justice  
When the palm is greased.*

The Mughuls ruled India during the evolution and growth of Sikhism and the emperors often sought solace from the Gurus. Pursued by Sher Shah Suri, Humayun came to Guru Angad Dev, the second Sikh guru, asking for help. Guru Amar Das, the third Sikh guru was visited by Akbar who was deeply impressed with what he witnessed and offered a tract of land to the Guru's daughter Bibi Bhani as a wedding gift. Akbar again visited Guru Arjan Dev, the fifth Sikh Guru, and as recorded by Abul Fazal, his prime minister and court historian, the King was fascinated by the Guru's 'handsome appearance, charming manners and princely style of living.' At the Guru's request, the sovereign reduced to one-sixth taxes from the state because of scarcity conditions prevailing at the time.

However, relations of the Sikh community with the State deteriorated soon after Akbar passed away. Jahangir had Guru Arjan Dev tortured to martyrdom because the Guru had blessed Jahangir's son Khusro, the son of Jodha Bai who had sought his support.

Guru Hargobind, the sixth Sikh Guru, who was called *Sacha Padshah* (The True King), assumed the mantle of *Miri* and *Piri*, *Shakti* and *Bhakti*, *Deg* and *Teg*, one symbolising temporal power and the other spiritual power, one to smite the oppressor and the other to protect the innocent. According to Hari Ram Gupta, the renowned historian, Guru Hargobind emerged as a saint, a sportsman, a soldier and became a hero of the Punjab since conquest by the Mughals.

Guru Hargobind and the four Gurus who succeeded him then maintained regular armies, built forts and fought over a dozen battles with the Mughals and vanquished the imperial forces 12 times.

The Sikh Gurus were spiritual leaders but very much involved in social change. Guru Nanak discarded meaningless rituals and ceremonials, Guru Angad laid stress on children's education, Guru Amar Das raised his powerful voice against the obnoxious practice of Sati. They laid the foundation of new townships, Kartarpur by Guru Nanak, Khadur Saheb by Guru Angad, Goindwal by Guru Amar Das. Amritsar by Guru Ram Das, Tarn Tarn by Guru Arjan Dev and Hargobindpur to Guru Hargobind. Anandpur Saheb was founded by Guru Tegh Bahadur and developed by Guru Gobind Singh.

Guru Hargobind instituted the *Akal Takht*, a temporal seat as distinguished from Harimandir Sahib, sanctum sanctorum of the Sikhs. In due course Sarbat Khalsa, assembly of the representatives of the Sikh people, came to hold here when important issues involving the community were discussed and decisions then taken by the *Gurmatta*. Thus *Akal Takht*, *Sarbat Khalsa* and *Gurmatta* came to be recognised as foundations of the Sikh polity.

The Sikh concept of a welfare benign state is *Halemi Raj*, a state in which truth forms the basis of spiritual as well as temporal activity. However, the establishment of Sikh Raj is only found in Sikh historical writings, there being no reference to this in the Holy Granth. The Sikh Panth has tradition of combining *Miri* and *Piri*, amalgamating spiritual and temporal entities: when there is temporal crisis, the spiritual considerations are subdued and vice versa. The relationship between the spiritual and temporal is organic, not mechanical. The Sikh concept is not that of a theocratic state. There is no "Order of Priesthood". The establishment of the Khalsa Panth by Guru Gobind Singh was not designed to institute a communal outfit but of was all-pervading, a religious, social and political brotherhood, giving opportunity to the down-trodden and oppressed to find an expression. The Sikh concept of the state is the marriage of Divine Truth with Humanism.

It is desirable that politics be distanced from religion, but this Sikhs find irksome because of their being a minority community. The Sikh tradition of fearlessness goes back to Guru Nanak's time, who admonished Babar, till Guru Gobind Singh who waged a life-long holy war against unjust Mughal rule, yet religious tolerance is fundamental to Sikh faith. Guru Nanak prescribed this and Guru Gobind Singh solemnised it by enshrining the all-embracing Holy Granth as the Guru in spirit exhorting that those who seek God can find Him in the holy Word.

Religious tolerance remains, indeed, fundamental to the Sikh faith.



Dr. Kartar Singh Duggal

# Pavan Guru, Paani Pita, Maata Dharat Mahat

Air is our teacher, Water our father, And the Great Earth our mother ...

[Guru Nanak]

While the governments of the world move at a snail's pace in solving the energy crisis, a grassroots movement at the consumer level can turn the tide around. It is just a matter of realisation, consciousness, and making some lifestyle changes. It is starting to happen around the world. It is significant and it is the only thing we can do right now.

It is very simple: reduce the demand on energy!

It pains me to see how well-off Sikhs (and South Asians in general) in both the East and the West are so complacent over one of the biggest crises in the world right now. We have not shown any concern (unless it affects our pockets), and little leadership and vision in this area.

Addicted to cheap supplies from the third world, driving the biggest gas guzzlers, buying huge houses that ultimately end up owning us, and stuffing the landfills with disposables, we show our affluence by hogging the energy, trashing the environment ... and taking a lot of pride while at it.

I hate to start this article by blasting ourselves, but I think you will appreciate where I am coming from if you read on.

Recently, I found myself on a long drive with a few teens. Being the tree hugger and all that I am, I wanted to use the time en route in a useful discussion on the environmental degradation and our responsibility as Sikhs.

I am ashamed to say that I was totally unsuccessful.

With all due respect to their good behaviour

otherwise, they were absolutely not interested in such an important issue; and mind you, I was not lecturing. I was listening and trying to create a dialogue, but all they had to offer was their enthusiasm about the 12-cylinder Ferrari their relative bought, or the 10-bedroom beachfront pool house their friend owns.

When I brought up the point that global warming is not so far out and that it is affecting our lives every day, one of them mentioned that her family had a large mansion in India they can go to if something like the wildfires got to them. (Great job, parents!)

Even though my ears started hurting from all the materialistic chatter, I didn't give up. As a last resort, I told them that they could only speak if they talked about Sikhi values, benevolence or taking care of Mother Earth.

Well, there was total silence for the next ten minutes, and then one of them spoke up: "There are these organic jeans at Gap for a hundred and eighty dollars that are so cool.....!"

Now that you understand where I am coming from, let us get to the point.

Common sense change at the grassroots level will reverse the energy crisis, and the environmental crisis. And I expect and hope that Sikhs around the world will not only be a part of that change, but be the very leaders.

Why?

Because it is fundamental to our faith and tradition. Our faith is a green faith. Earth is designated as



our physical Mother in Gurbani and we have the obligation to take care of it. We have the duty to leave a better world for our next generations.

I derive my inspiration from the great environmentalists like Bhagat Puran Singh who spent all his life lobbying and caring for the environment (and yes, looking after the disabled).

I first came across his extraordinary writings on the desertification of Punjab when I was young. His volunteers handed me a recycled paper pamphlet that talked about it all, as we walked out of Darbar Sahib.

While most of those were used by people to wrap around left-over Parshad or to wipe hands, I saved mine and asked my Dad to read it for me. I still remember all the words uttered ... *The rivers are being poisoned ... The land is becoming a desert ... We need to live simply, and we need to plant trees if we are to save our future ...*

Gurbani stresses, over and over again, that we lead simple lives by, for example, consuming less.

And today that message is so relevant. Reducing the demand at the consumer level is the best way to solve the global crisis of energy and the environment.

I am citing some changes that we have easily incorporated in our lives at home, in order to reduce our energy footprint. Please take what you can and think of your own creative ways that work for you.

Be the change, and spread it forward.

- We have taped shut our clothes dryer. With so much solar heat outside, the line drying of clothes is

working just fine. It also allows us to breathe fresh air and smell the roses while we fold our laundry in the backyard. It's one of the simplest ways of using the alternative energy resources directly and reducing the dependence on fossil fuels. Energy savings : 20%.

- By planting trees around the house, we have developed a mature shade-giving canopy over the years. The temperature underneath the shade is 15-20 degrees cooler than the ambience. Who needs the air conditioner ? We open the windows in the night when the temperatures are low and let the house cool. In the morning, we shut windows, pull the shades, and enjoy the moderately cool house. Energy savings : 20%.

- We drive less. I have managed telecommuting from home for a few days out of the month and repay my employer by working for an extra hour those days. (With the saving in drive time, that is an easy thing to do.) By making simple changes in driving habits such as car pooling, reduced speeds and accelerations, well-inflated tires and clean air filters, 10% to 30% of fuel consumption can be saved. The national gas bills may have gone up, but ours have gone down.

- Once or twice a week, I walk to the grocery store for eco-shopping trips. First, I get my exercise and second I do my shopping. I don't understand the idea of using energy to burn energy; i.e. driving to the gym or using a treadmill or both.

- We have literally stopped visiting shopping malls unless we must have something that's not available online.



It used to be that I would go to malls and buy things I absolutely didn't set out for. We have saved thousands - YES, thousands of dollars in the last three years from spurious shopping. That takes care of *dasvandh* right there and leaves us with more time and money to invest into greening and other community projects.

- We try to buy locally manufactured goods even if we have to pay extra. There are hidden costs of shipping involved with buying cheap imported goods. Shipping overseas pollutes environment, kills wildlife, and is bad for the local economies. Here, the savings may not show up in our account, but they help the world energy supplies and local economy.

- Weddings, birthdays, graduations? We give one of these things: spiritual, educational, local handicraft items or plants. It saves on a lot of headaches, time and driving around while enriching the loved ones and the environment.

- With all the conservation mania, you would wonder if we ever have any fun in our lives. You bet we do! Ever heard of eco-vacations? We hike, kayak, swim, sail and snorkel at nearby destinations. We have tent-camped for over ten years in the most pristine state and national parks in the U.S., but never once have we run into another Sikh family having eco-fun. (Too busy visiting international shopping destinations?) Reduced flying and forgoing of expensive resorts results in energy savings of over 75%.

You probably have read about all the simple changes we have made in our kitchen. [If not, you can read them at <http://gurmeetkaur.blogspot.com/>.]

My neighbour was shocked the other day when we compared our energy bills. We consume less than 50%

of the energy and water they do. We have the same size houses and yes, we do shower every day. With all the savings in energy costs, we can afford to eat healthier, local and organic foods.

We made all these changes gradually, so they were not as hard to make as one might think. Over time, they have become our lifestyle. We keep looking for new ways to contribute to the reversal of global warming. The most important thing is awareness and the feeling of responsibility.

Also, what helps is that we are not ashamed to be called conservationists. We are proud of it. Carrying our water in reusable glass jars, toting our cloth shopping bags, are statements we love to make. "Reducing, Reusing and Recycling" is the mantra we are more than happy to share with the world. Sometimes we get called 'poor' or 'cheap' in affluent circles, and we just smile.

How else will this become a grassroots movement if we were not to pour out our passion, overcome false pride, and educate and inspire the world with all we have?

"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it's the only thing that ever has," writes noted American cultural anthropologist, Margaret Mead.



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## On the website

# An Atheist's Discovery

**W**e were very impressed with the website and agreed that religion in general is no longer needed, we can all be humanistic and live in peace and harmony. We are in the process of making a website which will hopefully help to destroy the religious doctrines which divide humanity. We were doing great with knocking out Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, Baha'i, even Buddhism but we have gotten very stuck with Sikhism. This religion is (to put it nicely) "a big pain in the –" (please pardon the language). We have only found one site which tries (very poorly) to argue that even this religion is not needed, but the argument is irrational and very unscientific unlike the very rational arguments you use.

When we read the following from the website, we found it to be amazingly interesting; "Doubt Everything, Find Your Own Light." As Ali Sina writes, *if you look for meaning in life, don't look for it in religions; don't go from one cult to another or from one guru to the next. You can expend all your life or look for eternity and will find nothing but disappointment and disillusionment. Look instead in service to humanity. You will find "meaning" in your love for other human beings. You can experience God when you help someone who needs your help. The only truth that counts is the love that we have for each other. This is absolute and real. The rest is mirage, fancies of human imagination and fallacies of our own making.*" Why is this interesting? Because we found this religion of Sikhism to be in agreement with you! This is why we have a problem. We tried to look at their holy text (Adi Granth) but didn't find the usual absurdities we found in the other religious books. In fact its refreshingly inspiring and very good ! May be you can have some better luck?

We tried to visit a couple of websites and got more of a shock. Did you know that they believed in democracy, freedom of speech, choice, expression, freedom of religion, pluralism, human rights, equality between men and women, equality of all people regardless of race, religion, caste, creed, status etc. 300 years before the existence of the USA ? Theirs is the only religion which says in their religious scriptures that women are equal in every respect to men. They even had women soldiers leading armies into battle against "you know who" (the usual suspects – Muslims !) Their history is a proud one, they fought in both World Wars. Even Hitler praised them for their bravery and Aryan heritage !

This religion is hard for us to try and criticise. You may find some faults overlooked by us. In their holy book, there is a round earth, water is made from chemical elements, there is even mention of the evolution process, big bang and life on other planets ! This is pretty crazy and amazing stuff, who would have thought that these New York taxi drivers (there are lots of Sikh taxi drivers in NY) would have such an amazing faith ? We read up some information of what

Bertrand Russell had to say about Sikhism, this is the man who destroyed Christianity (same applies to Islam and Judaism) and exposed its absurdities, but even this great man got stuck when it came to Sikhism ! In fact he gave up and said "that if some lucky men survive the onslaught of the third world war of atomic and hydrogen bombs, then the Sikh religion will be the only means of guiding them in life. Russell was asked whether he was talking about the third world war, "but isn't this religion capable of guiding mankind before the third world war" ? In reply, Russell said, "Yes, it has the capability, but the Sikhs have not brought out in broad daylight the splendid doctrines of this religion which has come into existence for the benefit of entire mankind. This is their greatest sin and the Sikhs cannot be freed of it."

Please bear in mind that Bertrand Russell was a great philosopher and free thinker. We have been trying for weeks now to find a way to fairly and rationally criticise and find fault with this religion, but have failed. We even found out that there now are many people converting to this religion in the USA and Europe as well as Russia (mostly well educated and affluent white people). We tried to find some of their literature and see what kind of claims they make, but unfortunately they have no missionary material as they do not have missionaries.

People become Sikhs by usually learning by chance or coming in to contact with them. They are currently the 5th largest religion in the world and growing quite fast in the West and Russia. Please help us as we are stuck; to give you an example of what they are all about we found the following websites: <http://www.sikhnet.com> (this is a pretty good site and helpful) <http://www.hope.at/sikhism> (this site is very easy to follow, check it out, they have a Woman's section and a Marytrs section, it looks like that you are not the only one trying to expose the falseness of Islam, Sikhs scholars did it hundreds of years ago and got killed for it !) <http://www.sikhs.org> (this is the site that was on CNN when Sikhs in the USA were mistaken for Arabs and Middle Easterners and were attacked by mindless morons).

Please help us out, we can't make our website about religion being the cause of war and disharmony **when we have this one and only religion which makes a hell of a lot of sense !** Lo ! (I thought Atheism had all the answers but am kind of stuck now.) We look forward to hearing from you, we respect your great views and want to promote them to everyone, thank you for your time, take care.

Dr. John Smith  
Atheist Society (via e-mail)





# Shabad Guru in my life

I remember when I first left home for college. The insecurity of making new friends. The longing for connection. Searching to tell a story about myself that would capture people's interest, create the relation ad as a child - an identity that would work in this boundless and unknown new life.

Slowly, over time, the conversations began. And I remember that so many people found connections with each other, not necessarily by what they loved, or enjoyed; but by sharing their pain with one another. What they had experienced as a child. What injustices they felt in their own lives, and in the world.

Through the months and years, some bonds formed from shared interest. But other bonds formed from the opposite - from what people felt angry about. What they rebelled against. What they wanted to see altered in themselves or in society.

A few years later, a window began to open up inside of me. A small little glimmer of a voice said, "It is not my wounds that make me beautiful". I began to resist my own self-definition that was rooted in painful memories of the past, or anger at the state of the world. I could feel something else inside - something that didn't need any of that anger or pain - to be worthy, to be special, to be strong, to have friends and create connection.

There was another Identity deep within - pure, happy and light. Eventually, the *Shabad Guru* came into my life. And this feeling of defining myself by my inner negative feelings versus defining myself by my inner positive feeling took on a whole new dimension.

What I have found by meditating on the *Shabad Guru* as manifested in the Guru Granth Sahib is that the Guru does not relate to the negative at all. In fact, there's been many a time when I've come across a line and said to myself, "The Guru can't say that, can He?"

The Guru's sayings totally challenge the way I think about the world. A couple of examples:

*The one whose touch pollutes the world,  
Even he knows Your mercy.*

[Ravidas, SGGS, p 1106]

*So many are  
Continually beaten down  
By endless pain and hunger.  
Even these  
Are your Gifts to us,  
O Great Giver.*

[Guru Nanak, Japji: 25]

*This poisonous world  
That you behold  
Is really simply  
The Divine  
In form.*

[Guru Amar Das, Anand: 36]

In my journey since my college days, I have been able to redefine "me" to myself in much more positive terms. But the teachings of the *Shabad Guru* challenge me to go even further.

The *Shabad Guru* asks me to see the positive aspect of every and any situation. That no matter how negative it may appear or seem on the surface, the Light of the Divine is at the heart of it. The hand of the Creator is guiding it. It has purpose beyond what my mind can know or imagine. We see a lot of ugliness in life. We see a lot of pain. And what happens is that when we see this ugliness, somehow our mind decides to live there. To wallow in it. To think that happiness, peace, and bliss rests outside of ourselves. We complain bitterly, or feel victimised when the physical environment does not act the way we want. Or worse - when the environment harms us.

But the Guru's wisdom is a defence against that. The Guru's words ask us to enter into a direct, transcendent experience that the Divine lives in the essence of all things. And whatever is happening is happening by the hand of the One, which guides all and does all. It's a difference of horizon. The mind can have a very finite, limited horizon. This moment. This lifetime. What I want. What I don't want. Constantly measuring every person and event against an idealised fantasy of what would serve "me".

Or the mind can have an infinite horizon. One that sees this life in the context of a vaster, much larger play. One that sees all things, including oneself, being carried along. Even the ugliest, most terrible, awful experiences can be re-framed in a positive way.

That is what the power of the *Shabad* gives, so that the mind can feel genuinely positive even in the face of the worst situations. That is victory. That is Fateh! And that is a human life worth living.

So, as we celebrate the 300th Anniversary of *Guru Gaddi*, we learn and re-learn to appreciate the Guru's message of *Chardhi Kalaa!*

May the *baani* of Guru Granth Sahib transform our thoughts so that we may leave every negative feeling behind and bask in the bliss.

*Ek Ong Kaar Kaur Khalsa*



## History and Her-Story

Our local gurdwara has spawned a nascent and energetic Sikh Women's Association. Recently, they hosted a programme to celebrate the life of Mata Sahib Kaur.

For those on unfamiliar territory, Sahib Kaur, nee Sahib Devan, had a brief but telling part to play when the first amrit ceremony was held by Guru Gobind Rai in 1699. This event marked the beginning of the Khalsa institution.

In a dramatic gesture, the Guru had demanded a head from the followers. After considerable reluctance, one man offered his head. The Guru repeated his call, brandishing a blood-stained sword until he had five volunteers. He then appeared with the five, alive and well, nobly attired, and proclaimed them the first Khalsa. He then knelt before them and asked the Five to initiate him in turn. He then became Gobind Singh.

From this dramatic beginning, a nation was created; these were the final touches to the message of Guru Nanak that matured under the tutelage of the nine Gurus that followed him. Gobind Singh was the tenth in that line. And, at this rite in 1699, Sahib Devan added sugar puffs (patashas) to the bowl of Amrit.

From that day, initiated Sikhs (Khalsa) look to Guru Gobind Singh as their spiritual father, and Sahib Kaur as their spiritual mother. (Mata is an honorific indicating 'mother').

When I got the call to speak about her, sure enough, like any 'ten o'clock scholar', I hurried to my modest library for a spot of research. Can you imagine my surprise at the paucity of available information? The classic reference work in Punjabi on Sikhism – Bhai Kahan Singh Nabha's *Mahaan Kosh* – carried barely a three-inch column on her. The other authoritative work, edited by Dr. Harbans Singh, the 4-volume *Encyclopaedia of Sikhism in English*, had just one column (half a page) entry.

We have the names of her parents, but not her date of birth. The two sources even clash on when she appeared at Anandpur where the institution of the Khalsa was founded – in 1699 or 1700? If the later date is correct, as suggested by the Encyclopaedia, what does it do our belief that she added patashas to the Amrit at the First Ceremony?

She outlived Guru Gobind Singh, and communicated with the far-flung Sikh community via letters and directives. She died sometime between 1734, the date

on her last missive to Sikhs, and 1747. A memorial to her stands at Bala Sahib Gurdwara in New Delhi.

She may have spent her last years in Delhi, which was, at that time, under rulers absolutely and despotically against Sikhs. And that makes me wonder!

My purpose here is not to cavil at historical details; it is to point out that every year we unfailingly honor this woman as the mother of the Khalsa, and yet her known bio is so skimpy.

We all live and die. What lessons can we draw? How little do we know of our pioneering women? How do I look at her and others like her?

The magic, the meaning and the measure of a life - indeed of history - are found not in the celebration of an individual or an event, but in the interpretation.

History is a narrative. What does it tell us about the time that Guru Nanak trod this earth, particularly about the place of women?

In traditional Hindu society, scriptures were not open to women, female infanticide was not uncommon, and widow remarriage was not permitted. It was best for a widow to commit sati and perish by submitting to being burnt at the pyre of her dead husband!

Society operated by the edicts of that Hindu law-giver, Manu. The essence of his teachings on women can be summarised in one sentence: a woman is subject to her father's will before marriage, to her husband's thereafter.

There were only two major religions in India at that time: Hinduism and Islam. The lives of Muslim women were not much better, except that Islam was then the politically dominant religion in India.

We all know that Sikhism's founder, Guru Nanak, spoke eloquently about women. He clearly rejected the restricted space of women in Indian life. Kabir, too, rhetorically asked, "If circumcision makes a Muslim, what are we to do with a woman? Won't she remain a non-Muslim?"

Yes, one can preach a message of gender equality, one can exhort people to think, and one can even legislate equal rights, but it is like taking a horse to water: there is no easy way to make it drink.

To make reality of a recommendation or even of legislation requires a revolutionary change in the mindset. A cultural paradigm shift is necessary. Such a life-altering modification does not happen in an hour, a day, a year or even a lifetime.

I offer some unrelated, but not irrelevant, examples to drive the point home. In the United States, women won the right to vote only in 1920, but now, 87 years later, we were still debating if the country is ready for a woman president. This country lived through the painful reality of a civil war in 1860, but a hundred years later in 1965, a voting rights bill was necessary. And racial discrimination still continues to fester.

Obviously, the laws change many minds; that's their intent and that's why they are enacted. But many of us continue to cling to outmoded views.

Nevertheless, Guru Nanak's message did resonate with people. Under the tutelage of the third Guru, Amardas, the heinous custom of sati was rejected, widows remarried instead of being banished from life, and many women were appointed to positions of authority to preach the message of Nanak. But you should note that this occurred three generations after Guru Nanak.

Paradigm shift occurs, but slowly and haltingly.

Sikh history and culture have effectively sidelined and marginalized women. Look at how little we know of our pioneering women. Our culture also sidelines young people, but I save that for another time.

We have effectively written young people and women out of our own history.

I offer you another example, but from the time of Guru Gobind Singh, the Tenth Master.

History tells us that at a difficult time, in December 1705, in the midst of a battle against overwhelming odds, forty Sikhs chose to walk out and desert their Guru. History also tells us that when they reached their homes, one woman - Mai Bhago, aka Bhag Kaur - shamed them and challenged them by drawing a line in the sand. To a man, they rose to the occasion. She led the band of forty back to the Guru and into battle, where they each earned martyrdom. They have etched a place in our hearts, and for the past three hundred years, Sikhs worldwide have remembered them every day in their daily prayers as the Blessed Forty.

But what do we know of their intrepid leader, Mai Bhago? Not much more than the two lines I have penned here.

Clearly, she was no ordinary housewife. She must have been adept at the use of weapons, excellent on horseback, and unmatched in leadership skills. The forty battle-hardened veterans would not have followed a lesser leader. And these are not skills that one can learn overnight.

Mai Bhago's story tells me that in the more than two centuries from Guru Nanak to Guru Gobind Singh, the roles of Sikh women had changed. They had become equal in many ways. There was a meritocracy at play here, not gender-determined destiny.

Yet, what does history tell us about their personal stories? Close to nothing! And they lived nine generations after Guru Nanak, until the further liberation on the First Vaisakhi Day.

When we read about the events of 1699, young people often ask why were there no women in the first Five who accepted the Guru's challenge. And, why was no Guru a woman?

History is a narrative rooted in culture and time. When we read history, we need to look at the events and the people, and judge them by the perceptions, not of today, but of the standards of that time and the values of that culture. Context is all-important. If the context is lost, the interpretation will not stand.

History tells us that in 1699, heeding the Guru's call, about 80,000 people came to Anandpur; surely many, if not almost half, must have been women. Surely, no public address sound system existed at that time; perhaps many women were busy with infants clambering all over them, and they never heard the call for a head. If 80,000 attendees had to be fed, who do you think prepared the langar? Even today, those cooking the langar in gurdwaras are predominantly women.

Also, keep in mind that, in Indian/Punjabi culture, one assumption remains paramount, and you can easily see shades of it even today. It is that a woman will follow the religion, lifestyle and culture of the husband's family.

Such a pattern of expectation may have evolved from the need to preserve landholdings in a joint family, where the arable acreage determined economic well-being. Lives were such then. Things are different now, but our old habits are slow to shed. Progress is not always evident, and never is it linear.

Look at the Darbar Sahib in Amritsar, the premier Sikh place of worship, where women may not sing the liturgy. Some years ago, a one-time exception was made for a group of visiting American converts to Sikhism. But the ban on women remains.

I rest my case with one more example. Some months ago, in the middle of an unbearably hot summer, I had to make a quick one-week trip to India. I had not been to Amritsar for 28 years, and decided that this was a "must" stop. I reached there very late in the evening, at a time when the Guru Granth, ensconced in a palanquin, is ceremonially escorted to the adjoining

building of the Akaal Takht for the night. People stand in long lines for the opportunity to participate in this service. Women are not allowed to do so.

Tired as I was, unthinkingly I walked to the head of the line. The man in charge realized that I was perhaps ignorant of the ways, and invited me to put my shoulder to the palanquin.

But then, I quickly saw a group of women standing quietly by the side. Always a little brash, I pointed out to the man that these women were waiting well before me, and deserved a chance. His answer was simple: "Women are not permitted to perform this service". All I could do was politely say, "In that case, I would gratefully stand alongside them".

Thus, I declined the opportunity of a lifetime. What made the difference to me was that many women smiled approvingly at me, as did some men.

A movement cannot progress, cannot flourish, if we leave half the people - women - out of the reckoning, and if their lives go unrecorded. But that is exactly what we have done.

I look at Mata Sahib Devan, Mai Bhag Kaur, and innumerable others as mileposts in our slow and tortuous journey for human rights, equality in gender issues and justice. We tend to remember the people, and not the causes they lived for, or their lessons.

And here we are today. The message was carried forward from Guru Nanak to Guru Gobind Singh. Have we been true to the message, or have we regressed?

From every life, we need to draw some lessons.

Mata Sahib Kaur, Mai Bhag Kaur, and many others - stalwart pioneers, all - who made Sikhism possible, were living, breathing women with full lives, not just adjuncts to men. In our historical narrative, we have reduced them to two-dimensional cardboard cutouts.

Our pioneering women were important voices and a significant presence in our journey forward that was started by Guru Nanak, to create an egalitarian society without gender inequality. But look at the management of our institutions and activities therein; one cannot escape the conclusion that our women are the invisible half.

Our onus is to see where we are now - at what point in that journey. The journey never ends.

Mata Sahib Kaur's story, like that of Mai Bhag Kaur and many others, is really every woman's story.

*Dr. I.J. Singh  
New York*

# Ethereal Vision of Guru Gobind Singh

## Artistic Impressions of a Virtuoso

A unique painting exhibition highlighting the celestial vision of Guru Gobind Singhji, the tenth Guru of the Sikhs was organised on the occasion of Baisakhi on Sunday, 13th April 2008 at *Le Meridien* in New Delhi.

The exhibition was hosted by Mrs Charanjit Singh, Chairperson of *Le Meridien* and inaugurated by Sardar Khushwant Singh, the eminent Novelist and Journalist.

Artist Saranjit Singh's every stroke is a paean, an ode to his dreams. His genius lies in his honesty, his attention to detail and his commitment to his craft. Each time he puts his brush to Canvas he creates harmony as one can see from his latest works on

Guru Gobind Singhji, the ethereal saint, philosopher and scholar.

Saranjit Singh was born in the Punjab in December 1958 and obtained his M.F.A. in Painting from the College of Arts, New Delhi. He is an artist who paints in reverence. He has done many solo and group shows and has intensively read Guruji's hand written scriptures, poetry and studied some of his books, the *Akal Utsat*, *Bichitra Natak* and *Sawaiya* during the last seven years. His innumerable visits and long stays at *Damdammna Sahib*, *Anandpur Sahib* and *Keshgarh Sahib*, evoked the emotion, the creativity, the highly delicate, heavenly and celestial art-form that Saranjit's brush put on canvas for his current creations.





# "The Artistic Impressions of a Virtuoso"

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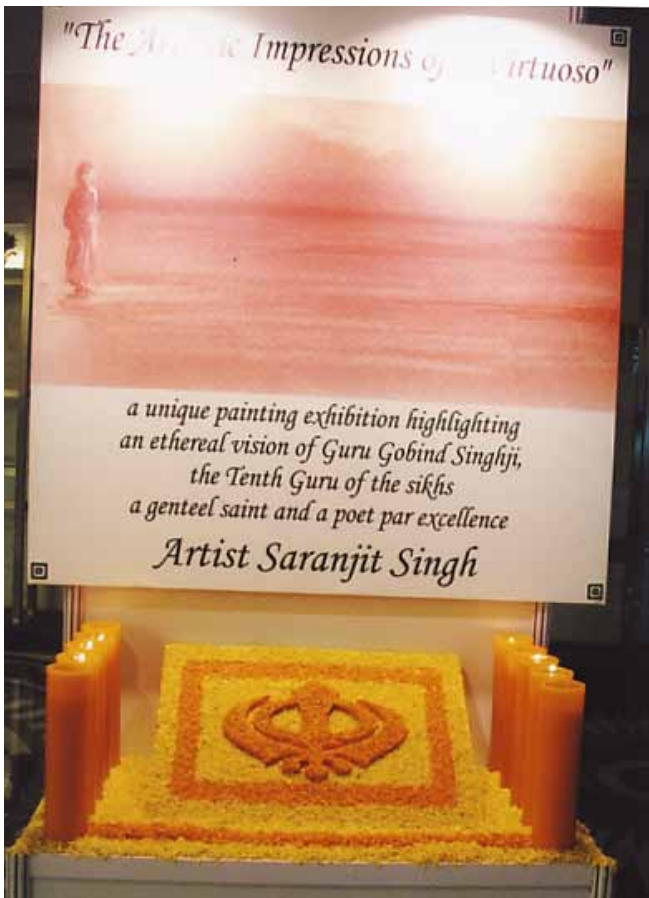


*a unique painting exhibition highlighting  
an ethereal vision of Guru Gobind Singhji,  
the Tenth Guru of the Sikhs  
a genteel saint and a poet par excellence*

**Artist Saranjit Singh**

*Born In Punjab On December 1958.  
M.F.A. In Painting From College Of Arts, New Delhi.  
Lives and Works in New Delhi  
He has had many solo and group shows*

Presented by <b>MIRĀRT</b> Fine Arts	Prices on request		Organised by <i>Miran</i>
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S. Khushwant Singh and Artist Saranjit Singh with their admirers.

# Hola Mohalla:

**H**ola Mohalla or Hola Mahalla or simply Hola is a Sikh festival that takes place on the first of the lunar month of Chet which usually falls in March. This, by a tradition established by Guru Gobind Singh, follows the Hindu festival of Holi by one day; Hola is the masculine form of the feminine sounding Holi. The word "Mohalla" is derived from the Arabic root hal (alighting, descending) and is a Punjabi word that implies an organised procession in the form of an army column. But unlike Holi, when people playfully sprinkle colour, dry or mixed in water, on each other, the Guru made Hola Mohalla an occasion for the Sikhs to demonstrate their martial skills in simulated battles.

Together the words 'Hola Mohalla' stands for 'mock fight'. During this festival, processions

are organised in the form of army type columns accompanied by war-drums and standard-bearers and proceeding to a given spot or moving in state from one gurdwara to another. The custom originated in the time of Guru Gobind Singh who held the first such mock fight event at Anandpur in February 1701.

The foothills of the Shivaliks in Ropar district of Punjab's north-eastern region, especially around the historic townships of Anandpur Sahib and Kiratpur Sahib, have, since 1701 been playing host to Hola Mohalla. Recently, the Indian government accorded it the status of a national festival. The military exercise, which was personally supervised by the Guru, was carried out on the bed of the River Charan Ganga with the famous Hindu temple of Mata Naina Devi in the Shivaliks as the backdrop.



# the festival of soldier-saints

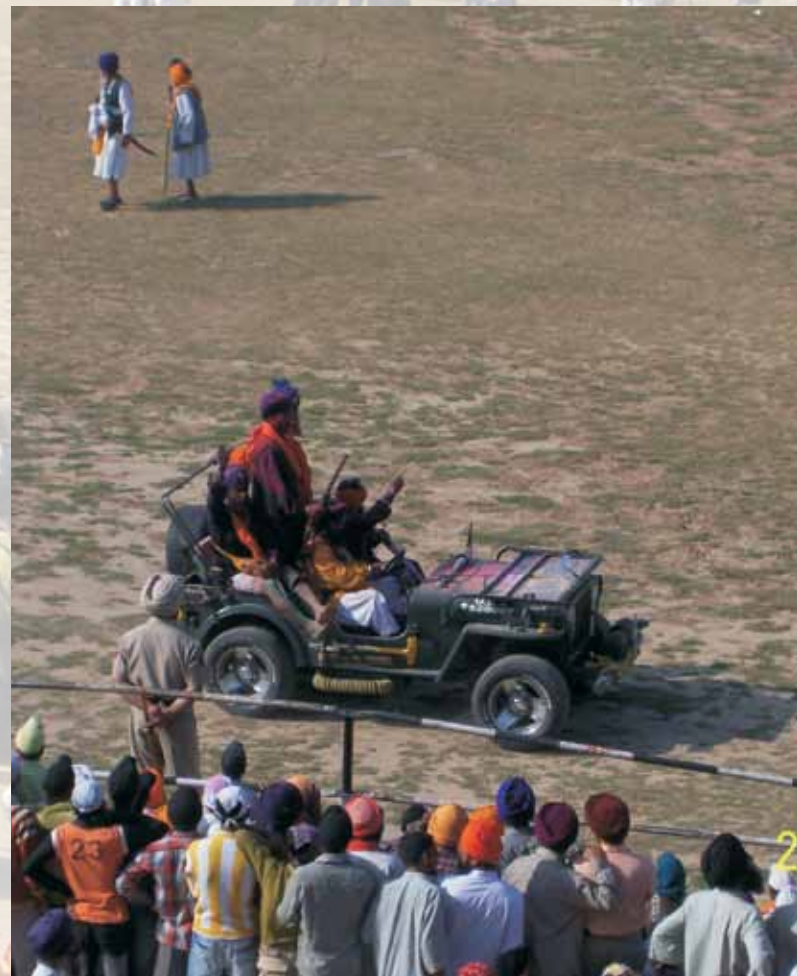
This annual festival is replicated at other Gurdwaras worldwide. It extols the people for valour and defence preparedness, concepts dear to the Tenth Guru who was at that time battling the Mughal empire and the hill rajas.

On this three-day grand festival, mock battles, exhibitions, display of weapons and the like are held followed by kirtan, music and poetry competitions. The participants perform daring feats, such as Gatka (mock encounters with real weapons), tent pegging, bareback horse-riding, standing erect on two speeding horses and various other feats of bravery. Modern mounts, such as motorcycles and jeeps, are used with equal aplomb!

There are also a number of Darbars where the Sri Guru Granth Sahib is present and kirtan and religious lectures

take place. On the last day a long procession, led by Panj Pyaras, starts from Takhat Keshgarh Sahib, one of the most holy of Khalsa religious seats, and passes through various important Gurdwaras including Qila Anandgarh, Lohgarh Sahib, Mata Jitoji and terminates at the Takhat (Keshgarh).

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



22/03/2008







*All pictures by Amarindar Singh Chopra.*

# Anād Kāv Tarang 2008

## ਅਨਾਦ ਕਾਵ ਤਰੰਗ



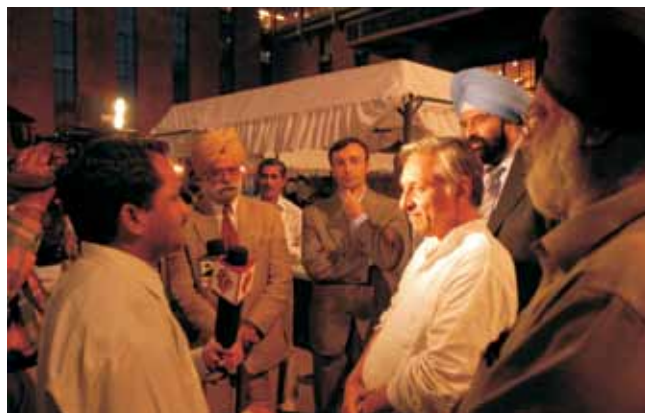
Leonardo Aman Dhyan Singh playing the pakhawaj, with his brother Luigi Hari Tehal Singh.

On 8 April 2008, at New Delhi's Stein Auditorium, the *Anad Foundation* moved joyously, even if a bit elliptically, into the domain of contemporary poetry. It was nonetheless a decisive move imbued with classical dignity and a childlike desire to look into the future, to caress, as it were, the modern. It moved with the avowed zeal of cultural activists. It was not surprising therefore to see the *Anadis* move in with their paraphernalia of a rich musical heritage following the tender but enthusiastic footsteps of a nine-year-old prodigy, Leonardo Amar Dhyan Singh, who mesmerised the audience with the dexterity with which he touched the pakhawaj and made it come alive. He indeed was the little magician who ushered us into this new and resonant world of poetry.

The occasion was to celebrate poetry. It was also an occasion to honour one of the finest living Punjabi poets, Surjit Patar, whose stature as a writer has grown over the past decades across continents and has assumed a near iconic status amongst the Punjabi readers.

Leonardo Amar Dhyan's performance – short, luminous and crisp – was followed by a cascading

spell of the poetic word which some of the best known Indian poets wove as the evening deepened into a saturated night. A large number of litterateurs from various languages had come together to participate in this ceremonial of poetic exuberance. A few of these poets were invited to the stage to recite poems in honour of their friend and colleague Surjit Patar who was being felicitated as the first recipient of the *Baljit Kaur Tulsi Kaav Tarang Sanmaan*.



Mani Shankar Aiyar at the Anad Foundation's festival.



The young and graceful Anamika opened the evening with her poignantly feminist poems in Hindi. Satchidanandan, the eminent Malyali poet, followed with his poems in Malyalam that carried an incisive imprint of political morality. The veteran Balraj Komal regaled with his *nazms* in Urdu and had an old world resonance. The high point of the evening, however, was the recitation of poems by widely respected Hindi poet, Ashok Vajpeyi whose style was playfully mocking and intuitively philosophical at the same time.

The ever busy groom of the day was undoubtedly, Bhai Baldeep Singh who came briefly onto the dais to give a succinct but emotionally charged look at the background of the award – the initial deliberations involving the eminent lawyer KTS Tulsi in whose mother's memory the award is instituted, Dr Upinderjit Kaur, the Minister of Education, Languages, Civil Aviation, Vigilance and Justice in the present Government of Punjab made an impassioned case about why the scope of the award needed to be widened to include all the Indian languages.

It was also an occasion of remembrance. The legendary poet, Surjit Patar, was honoured with an award instituted in memory of one of the most poignant and forceful women poetesses of the Punjabi language, the late Baljit Kaur Tulsi who started writing while still a school going child in an idiom which was markedly feminist and unusually combative and intrepid in questioning the repressive patriarchic modes of governance. The award was gracefully presented by Dr. Upinderjit Kaur and accepted with touching humility by Surjit Patar who brought the evening to a close with evocative recitation of some of his highly political, reflective and introspective poems he has written in the last quarter of a century.

Guest of Honour was Mani Shanker Aiyer, Cabinet Minister for Panchayati Raj and Development of the North Eastern Region.

*Dr. Madan Gopal Singh*

# A Symphony of the Desert



*The Kamaycha*

**G**hewar Khan is a large man. And yet, if you were to pass him on the street, you would be unlikely to notice him, except for his size and perhaps the bright bandhini turban on his head. This is equally true of his three brothers and his father. Except for Ghewar, they are all of average height. Their father, Sakar Khan, is almost diminutive. In appearance, they are indistinguishable from millions of other Rajasthani rural folk. Yet they are internationally respected musicians. The Government of India has honoured them with a national Sangeet Natak Akademi award. Ghewar and his brothers are regular jet setters and Ghewar has been overseas ninety times, to perform at international venues.

Ghewar Khan's village, Hamira, about 20 kilometres from Jaisalmer in the far west of Rajasthan, bordering Pakistan, is little different from hundreds of others. Dusty and dreary, the cow dung littered streets are lined with anonymous sand coloured houses of the ubiquitous Jaisalmer stone, interspersed with thatched huts and the occasional house painted in riotous colours. Cows roam the narrow lanes, chewing cud, mooing occasionally when they have enough energy to do so. Goats dart in and out of courtyards, ready to eat anything that vaguely resembles food.

Situated in this stark desert country, Hamira is not what you might call a rural idyll, and it was certainly not so when I visited the village at the height of summer. Yet in June this year, Hamira etched itself on my memory, my heart and indeed on my spirit. Sakar Khan, his four sons – Ghewar, Sattar, Firoze and Darre – and their children entranced us with divine music and traditional Indian hospitality. But before I embark on that story, I must make a small digression.

Bhai Baldeep Singh (BBS) is a musicologist, a musician of international repute, a scholar of Sikh scriptures, a restorer of ancient instruments, a teacher and much more besides. After tireless research into



Sakar Khan and his sons with Bhai Baldeep Singh, the renowned musicologist.

the endangered traditions of Indian music, and painstaking efforts to keep alive our invaluable and intangible heritage, BBS has launched a label entitled 'World Music Heritage Series'. He plans to bring out a CD of Sakar Khan's music as part of this series. And it was to photograph Sakar and his sons for a booklet to accompany the CD, that we went to Hamira.

What made Bhai Baldeep Singh choose to produce a CD on Sakar Khan? Because he is probably the foremost exponent of the relatively unknown stringed instrument called the *kamaycha*, (a descendent of the *rabab*), which is the favourite instrument of the *Māngañiār* community of folk musicians in Western

Rajasthan. The other well known community of folk musicians in Rajasthan is the *Langas*, but that is another story.

Arguably the most colourless state in India (in terms of landscape) and the most colourful state (in terms of people and its legends of romance and chivalry) present-day Rajasthan is what used be many different princely states. Some of them were big and powerful, like Marwar and Mewar, and others were smaller states, vassals of the mightier Rajputs. Apart from being known for their valour in battle and their beautiful women, the rulers of Rajputana, as it was then known, were famed for their patronage of the arts. When India attained independence and became a Republic in 1947, the princely states were abolished. Many royal families lost their political and financial power. Artistes, who had been employed at royal forts and palaces as poets, bards and performers and without whom any religious rites, festivals and solemn occasions would be unimaginable, found themselves without patrons or means of livelihood.

It was in this milieu that Sakar Khan grew up. Born in 1938, to Chuhar Khan and Badli, Sakar Khan grew up in a humble household with limited financial means. In the absence of court patronage, the only



Camels in a dust storm en route to Sakar Khan's village



The doyen sitting under the *chhatra* from where he played his *kamaycha*.

way to earn a living was by singing and playing musical instruments at weddings and ceremonies at the homes of their village *jajmans* – the local, village patrons. However, their lives changed when the ethnomusicologist and folklorist Komal Kothari visited the Jaisalmer area in 1976 and recognised Sakar Khan's talent. Kothari facilitated the first radio broadcast of a Rajasthani folk song by Sakar Khan. The rest, as the saying goes, is history.

Sakar Khan gave his first stage performance at the Rabindra Auditorium in Jaipur. He came to the notice of the Sangeet Natak Akademi in New Delhi, which recorded a performance by him in Jodhpur. Suddenly, the doors of the world were open to him. He regaled audiences at national and international functions and festivals, in countries such as France, the USA, the then Soviet Union, and Japan and won worldwide recognition. Among other awards that came his way, Sakar Khan was honoured by the Government of Madhya Pradesh with the prestigious 'Tulsi Samman Award' in 1990. In 1991, the Sangeet Natak Akademi award was bestowed on him.

Most of us urban dwellers have been to concerts in auditoria. Some of us may even have been lucky enough to have participated in small *baithaks* which have a charm of their own. But I, for one, had never heard musicians play in their own village homes nor amidst the sand dunes, nor sitting under a *chhatra*

on the banks of a lake in otherwise arid Rajasthan. Perhaps every musician is particularly inspired when he is surrounded by things that he has known since he was born. It was when we heard Sakar Khan and his family perform in Hamira that their music acquired a special vitality and depth. Here, in their own home, they performed not just with their fingers and voices, but with their hearts.

Ghewar had invited us to lunch one afternoon. We accepted reluctantly, not wanting to offend them, and not wanting to put them to the trouble of entertaining us. Time in the desert moves at a different pace than it does in the city. When BBS and I arrived at Sakar's house at two in the afternoon, they were all fast asleep – three generations of men, stretched out on the floor with one ineffective desert cooler trying to cool the hot and stuffy room. We thought we had made a mistake about the date, or that they had forgotten they had invited us. Slightly embarrassed, we pretended that we had just happened to come by chance (although we will not go into how we could do that considering Hamira is not exactly on the route from BBS' house to mine in Delhi!) and wanted to see what they were up to! Suggesting they go back to sleep, we tried to beat a retreat but were immediately restrained and reminded that lunch had been cooked for us! Then, one by one all the men, aged seven to seventy, slowly sat up and started wrapping their *safaas* on their heads. Slowly,



*Sakar Khan and his four sons play for their jajmaan Roop Singh.*

almost imperceptibly, a few of their neighbours drifted into the house, including Sakar's younger brother Pampey Khan, who is a brilliant musician in his own right. *Kamaychas* emerged out of bags and started to be tuned. *Dholaks* and *harmoniums* seemed to walk into the room of their own accord.

And then the music began. I don't think anybody told them to, but the young grandsons first started to sing. In perfect unison, almost as if they had practised for this event, their high pitched voices in tune with the octaves of the *kamaycha*, they sang *maands* and classical ragas. They sang their hearts out. Instruments would change hands, somebody would play the harmonium, and almost on its own it would shift to another while the person who was playing the *khartaals* would start playing the *dholak*. Without being asked to, almost as if he knew it was his turn, Pampey Khan took out his *shehnai* from a locked box that appeared in front of him and the most evocative ragas flowed from the simple looking instrument that is traditionally played at weddings. At my request he played a most beautiful rendering of 'Kesaria Balama' looking into my eyes all the time, followed by various raga *maand* variants such as *bikaneri*, *jodhpuri* and *jaisalmeri maand* on the *been* or flute. The understanding between them, the unspoken communication and the absolute teamwork would have put the Brazilian football team to shame! Two hours flew past. Suddenly, since I was the official photographer, I realised that if we did not get on we would miss the light for the photography session we had planned for the afternoon. Shaking off the reverie evoked by the music, we brought ourselves back to the real world. But not before BBS had joined them in a show of virtuosity.

I did not realise that rolling sand dunes can become as resonant as an acoustically designed theatre. One morning, we took Sakar, Ghewar and Darre out on the dunes. The idea was to photograph them playing music

in their natural environment. I could never have imagined the magic of listening to their lilting songs and the plaintive notes of the *kamaycha* on the dunes. It is almost as if the harsh and unforgiving landscape is balanced by the beauty of the music. As if they are made for each other.

The arid desert may not yield many fruits and vegetables, but it has grown some awe-inspiring forts, fantastic palaces and very, very stirring music.

*Text and photographs by  
Nripjit Singh (Noni) Chawla*



*Nripjit Singh (Noni) Chawla spent many long years in the corporate sector, including several as the CEO of different companies. He now divides his time between management consulting, teaching, photography, travelling and fishing.*





## Home is the Punjab: Bhaiyya to Bhaaji

The tenth and final Sikh Guru, Gobind Singh, who was born as Gobind Rai in Bihar's capital, Patna, almost 340 years ago, would have approved of this sociological trend in contemporary Punjab.

The old advisory to people to adapt to the culture of the places they go to, "When in Rome, do as the Romans do", has been assimilated with gusto by the migrant population of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh, in 'The Land of the Five Rivers'.

Indeed, with a *kara* around his wrist, a long-flowing and unshorn beard, a turban, and 'Singh' suffixed to his name, the bhaiyya from the heartland has transformed into bhaa-ji in Punjab.

In a study by Punjab Agricultural University's Department of Economics and Sociology - with a sample size of 240 migrants (120 local labourers and 120 farmers) - a whopping 81% of migrants reported a change in the language they speak, the food they eat and the clothes they wear. Pegged at more than a million in a city of about five million people, there is one migrant from UP or Bihar for every five Punjabis.

The study, carried out by Dr. M.S. Sidhu, Dr. A.S. Joshi and Inderpreet Kaur, employed something called a multi-stage sampling framework, wherein samples

were taken from districts, blocks and villages. It also zeroed in on local labourers and farmers for cross-references.

Interestingly, in similar studies in 1978-79 and 1983-84, 33% and 40% of migrant labourers had reported a noticeable change in their language. In the last survey, however, the change in language went up to 76%. Also, 84% of respondents reported a change of preference from the traditional favourite rice to wheat. Similarly, 88% had switched from dhoti to pyjama-kameez. Some went for the more comfortable lungi, even as the womenfolk made the sartorial switch from sari to salwar-kameez.

Like Ranjit Kumar, who now calls himself Ranjit Singh, nearly 11% of people from Bihar and UP use Punjabi surnames. The 25-year-old, who came from Bihar to Sainian Bahurian village in Gurdaspur district to work in the farm of Mann Singh, is as much Punjabi as anybody around him.

Sukhram, too, is no exception. He came to Sunam in Sangrur from Purnea in Bihar, some fifteen years ago, to work for Mohinderpal Singh Dhindsa.

Now, with a *kara* on his wrist and a beard, he is indistinguishable from the people around him in this nondescript town.

*Jatinder Singh*

# A Tapestry In the Making



## Genesis and Team-Work behind the Los Angeles Baisakhi Celebration

**A**pril 6, 2008. Los Angeles, California. Its 6:45 am on a Sunday in Los Angeles, California, and the morning dawn promises a beautiful spring day. On Preuss Road, in front of Guru Ram Das Ashram, Asa di Var has concluded and a silver stretch limousine waits, while Sikhs of every site and colour prepare to escort Sri Guru Granth Sahib to the Los Angeles Convention Centre. Two motorcycle police officers attend on the party. It will be their job to accompany the limousine and its entourage as the Guru Granth Sahib makes the trip from Guru Ram Das Ashram to the Conventional Hall.

As the Guru Sahib is brought to the limousine, hundreds of other Sikhs get into their cars. The entourage departs. The motorcycle police officers drive alongside with lights flashing, sirens blaring, stopping traffic and escorting the limousine and the line of cars that follow through the traffic lights. In the heart of downtown Los Angeles, which is one of

the most powerful and influential cities in the world, the Sri Guru Granth Sahib is treated, appropriately enough, as an honored dignitary.

Today, the Sikhs of Southern California are to celebrate Baisakhi. With 15,000 visitors each year, over 20 Gurdwaras and Sikh centres in the area come together to organise this amazing event. The collective effort takes months of planning and coordination. Broadcast live over [www.SikhNet.com](http://www.SikhNet.com), this particular celebration has a world-wide following. In addition to the Sikhs in Southern California, Sikhs from other parts of the country specifically travel to Los Angeles to participate in this event. The only facility big enough to accommodate the 15,000 people who attend is a large hall at the Los Angeles Convention Centre.

Big trees begin as small saplings. The Sikh population of Southern California has grown exponentially in the last two decades, which explains, in part, why this event has become so large.

## Sikh Dharma in a New Land

Although Sikhs of Indian origin had come and settled in California over a century ago, it was not until the late 1960s and early 1970s that Sikh Dharma crossed cultures. During that time, the United States was in the midst of a powerful revolution. Not the kind of revolution that involved guns or political parties, but a deeper revolution of hearts, minds and consciousness. It was the time of the 'hippies' the 'flower children.' And this time was to change the face of the United States forever. The young people demanded civil rights for black Americans, equal rights for women. They challenged not only the political status quo, but also the spiritual status quo of their era. Many in this generation let go of their traditional Christian or Jewish faiths and turned their eyes to the East. Zen Buddhism, Tibetan tantra, transcendental meditation and, of course, Yoga; of every stripe and colour.

In the midst of this boiling cauldron of experimentation, rebellion and spiritual longing, a Sikh came to the West from India. Having been an officer in the Indian Army, a series of events earned him an invitation to teach in Canada. He eventually made his way to the East-West Cultural Centre in Los Angeles, California where the elite went to broaden their minds. But this particular



master was hugely popular with the hippies, as well. In time it was these hippies, these flower children, who would become his most dedicated students. His name was Harbhajan Singh.

It is not surprising, in retrospect, that many of these students of Harbhajan Singh became fascinated with the Sikh tradition. He himself, in later years would talk about how it was never his intention to 'create' Sikhs. But the mission of the Guru is greater than the individual vision of any man and in time, the hippies abandoned the dress of their sub-culture, and started dressing like their Sikh teacher. Turbans, kurtas, churidars, and cummerbunds replaced the tie-dyed t-shirts, torn and ripped jeans, and un-kept hair. The fledgling community purchased property in Los Angeles on Preuss Road, and under his direction established Guru Ram Das Ashram. They, in significant numbers, became Sikhs born of the Western world - planting their roots to create a new life with a new vision.

The first Baisakhi celebration for the American Sikhs of Los Angeles took place in 1973. By 1974, a new tradition had taken root, the tradition of giving Amrit during the Baisakhi weekend. In 1974, for the first time in history, one of these Western-born Sikhs, Dyal Singh, served as one of the *Panj Piaray*, administering Amrit to the nearly 100 Sikhs who had gathered that year to receive it. Since that year, an Amrit ceremony has been held at the Guru Ram Das Ashram on Baisakhi weekend. This year, 11 people took Amrit across a range of culture. Indian born, Indian-descent and Western-born Sikhs taking Amrit together.

For the next decade, Guru Ram Das Ashram kept to itself, hosting its own quiet and humble Baisakhi celebration. At the time, there were perhaps five other Sikh Gurdwaras in Southern California. And, in the words of Kirtan Singh, Secretary of the Gurdwara at Guru Ram Das Ashram and one of the main coordinators for the Los Angeles Baisakhi celebration, each of the Gurdwaras, "did its own thing."



**Dr. Bibiji Inderjit Kaur, wife of  
the late Bhai Sahib Harbhajan Singh.**

But in 1984, months before the perfidious attack on the Harimandir Sahib, S. Harbhajan Singh asked the Guru Ram Das Ashram sadh sangat to invite and include as many other people in the Sikh community as possible to participate together in the Baisakhi kirtan programme. He insisted that the community reach out to all the Gurdwaras to work together for the Baisakhi celebration. Kirtan Singh, looking back, remembers what an inspiring time it was. "He only saw us as the Khalsa," he said, "and inspired us about the importance of reaching out and serving in the spirit of unity in the Sikh community."

After 1984, slowly, the face of Baisakhi in Los Angeles began to change. In the 1980s, Guru Ram Das Ashram would organise the set-up and the space, and then extend invitations to the Jathas from the different Gurdwaras to do kirtan at Baisakhi. The celebration would take place in the Robertson Recreation Centre or the Newbury School Auditorium. 500 or so people would normally attend.

Today, there is a committee of sevadars from many of the Gurdwaras in Southern California. This committee meets twice or three times a year to plan and organise the Baisakhi celebration. Different groups take charge of different aspects of the event - whether it's langar or organising the programme, doing the set-up and decorations, or organising the parade that takes place through the heart of Los Angeles. The Lankershim Gurdwara takes on the coordinating seva for the parade each year since a parade was first begun in 1998. Over 20 Gurdwaras and Sikh centres help fund and do seva for this event. It takes thousands of hours of volunteer time, tremendous commitment, communication and coordination. But the result is an amazing experience of unity - where all of the Sikhs in Southern California come together as one sangat and celebrate the birth of the Khalsa.



Sevadars at the Vermont Gurdwara preparing the langar.

## The Guru's Langar

At the Harimandir Sahib, in Amritsar, over 60,000 people partake langar each day. Here at Baisakhi in Los Angeles, California, the number is not quite so dramatic, and it is only for one day. But still, preparing langar for 15,000 people is an amazing undertaking.

Hardeep Singh Viridi is an Indian-born United States citizen who came to the USA 25 years ago. In 1990, he moved to Los Angeles and in 2006 he moved to the state of Indiana. But during his time in Los Angeles, he coordinated the langar preparation. Even though he no longer lives in Los Angeles, Hardeep Singh loves doing this seva so much that he flies back to the city every year to organise the Baisakhi langar.

"I lived here almost 15 years, and I love all these people," he says. "I come here to do my seva."

There are a team of around 50 people who prepare the langar – and it takes two days to do so. On Friday, Hareep Singh said, they get the materials. On Saturday, the chopping and cooking begins: "We start Saturday morning and cook until 2 am on Sunday morning," he explains.

Another team of over 100 people volunteer to serve the food throughout the day at the Sikh Study Circle on Vermont Avenue in Los Angeles, where most of the langar is prepared.

The Los Angeles Baisakhi programme begins about 7:30 in the morning and continues until the Nagar Kirtan ends at 5:00 pm. During that time, they serve an average of 3000-4000 breakfasts, and 8000-9000 lunches. 2008 proved to be the largest langar ever, and Hardeep Singh estimates that over 10,000 lunches were served.

"It's a big job," he says. "Gurmit Singh is the restaurant owner of *India Tandoori*, and he brings the clay oven (to the conventional hall) so we make the naans fresh and serve it to the sangat. The rest of the cooking is done at the Vermont Gurdwara."

Other volunteers include Manjit Singh "Papu," Chatter Singh, Amarjit Singh, Rajbirinder Singh, Toni Singh, Sarban Singh, and Sarabjit Singh. Another sevadar, Joginder Singh, also used to live in Los Angeles for many years. Though he now lives in Seattle, like Hardeep Singh, he flies to Los Angeles every year to be part of the langar seva.

## Kirtan Across the Generations

Sunday morning at 7:30, the convention hall has been transformed into a gorgeous Guru's Darbar. Murals of



Jathas from the Sikh community of Southern California doing kirtan at the Los Angeles Baisakhi celebration.



At about 10 a.m, the adult Jathas begin. This year, the Los Angeles Baisakhi kirtan programme included Bhai Kulwant Singh of Raseda Gurdwara; Academy of Bhai Mardana Mother's Groups; Bhai Sobha Singh Gurdwara Sadh Sang Narco/Corona; West Covina Gurdwara Mother's Groups; Bhai Gurpreet Singh, Akal Kirtanee Jatha, Bareilly Wale; Bhai Randhir Singh, Sikh Study Circle of Vermont Gurdwara; Dashmesh Khalsa Kirtani Jatha Bombay, Wale; Bhai

forests line the walls. The lights are dim, but spotlights focus on three richly decorated platforms at the far end of the room. The platforms are draped with beautiful brocade cloth, giving the feeling of a royal tent that one might find in the centre of a field in the Punjab hundreds of years ago. The centre platform holds the Sri Guru Granth Sahib, nobly robed in red ramallas, sitting atop two tiers of gorgeous, glinting steel blades.

Over the course of the day, jathas from Gurdwaras across Southern California will take turns on the tented platforms, singing kirtan for the sangat. The kirtan starts at 7:30 am with a musical recitation of Guru Gobind Singh's *Jaap Sahib* by the Jatha of Guru Ram Das Ashram.

From 8 am to 10 am, the children's jathas take the lead. The kirtan continues with children's groups from Gurdwara Alhambra; Gurdwara Nanak Sadan of Raseda; Guru Nanak Sikh Temple of Buena Park; Valley Sikh Temple of Canoga Park; Sikh Gurdwara of LA, Lankershim; Sikh Dharma, Guru Ram Das Ashram of Los Angeles; Sikh Centre of Orange County in Santa Ana; Sri Guru Singh Sabha of Walnut; Ujjal Didar Singh Memorial Foundation and the Los Angeles Youth Jatha.

For two hours, the children's groups take their place next to the Sri Guru Granth Sahib, colourful and bright in their matching kurtas, wearing turbans and kirpans, playing the tabla, the harmonium and other instruments. Their sweet, young voices fill the room with the sound of the Guru's Shabad. They have been practicing for months.



Attar Singh, Sikh Temple of Alhambra; Gurshabad Singh & Jatha of La Jolla, San Diego; Bhai Joginder Singh, Valley Sikh Temple, Canoga Park; Bhai Sohan Singh Rasia, Los Angeles Wale; Bhai Gurdeep Singh, Sikh Gurdwara of Lankershim; Dharma Kaur & Jatha from Espanola.

## Mai Bhago Spirit of Baisakhi Awards

For the last few years, during the Los Angeles Baisakhi programme, the Sikh Community of Southern California in conjunction with Sikh Dharma International have honoured Sikhs groups and individuals who have done outstanding service for the Sikh and global communities.

This year, during the Baisakhi programme, a special *Mai Bhago Spirit of Baisakhi* award was given to Sikh women from the United States and Canada who are doing extraordinary service in the realm of media work.

Mai Bhago represents the quintessential feminine Khalsa spirit. With a tender heart and a warrior's strength, she led the 40 Sikh men who had deserted Guru Gobind Singh's army back into battle -to regain their honour, and to liberate their souls.

This year's *Mai Bhago Spirit of Baisakhi* awardees continued that mission by using media to promote an understanding of and respect for the Sikh identity. This year's honorees were:

**Dr. Harjot Kaur Singh, a medical doctor and Sikh Canadian film producer.** Her film, *By the Guru's Grace – Journey through the Sikh Experience*, shares the history and ethos of the Sikh faith. It is geared towards Western audiences who have little experience with the Sikh community and culture. She lectures and teaches around the world about Sikh history and the Sikh faith.

**Inni Kaur Dhingra, VP of Spectrum Communications and member of the editorial board of the Nishaan Journal.** In addition to her work as a writer and editor with the Nishaan Journal, Inni Kaur has chaired the *Spinning Wheel Film Festival* in New York City and is active in the interfaith community. She helped organise the Sikh art exhibit at the Rubin Museum in New York City last year, titled *I See No Stranger: Early Sikh Art and Devotion*.

**Penny Yogiraj Sandhu, President and CEO of JusPunjabi 24 Hour Punjabi Channel.** In 2006, Penny Yogiraj founded and launched the first 24-hour Punjabi Channel based in the United States. The channel features programming about the spiritual values, culture and history of the Sikh tradition. Born and raised in the Punjab, it was her desire to establish an American Punjabi channel in the United States to reach out to the large Indo-Punjabi/Sikh community and give them a voice in their adoptive country.



Dr. Harjot Kaur Singh, Penny Yogiraj Sandhu, Shanti Kaur and Eric Santiestevan (accepting on behalf of Valerie Kaur) and Inni Kaur.

**Shanti Kaur, Sikh writer and Chairwoman of the International Khalsa Council.** Shanti Kaur is an American-born woman who adopted the Sikh path early in life. For over 30 years, she has been the pre-eminent historian of the development of Sikh Dharma in the Western Hemisphere, where the Sikh faith has found its home in the hearts and minds of people from every culture. She also travels and teaches Sikh faith and history around the world.

**Valarie Kaur, Sikh American film director and writer.** In the aftermath of September 11th, Valarie Kaur traveled around the United States, speaking with people and documenting incidents of hate crimes and hate violence. During that time, Sikh men, with their distinctive beards and turbans, were targeted. The result of her journey is a full-length independent documentary feature film titled *Divided We Fall: Americans in the Aftermath*. Valarie Kaur could not attend the event, and the award was received in her name by Eric Santiestevan who composed the music for her film.

After receiving her award, Shanti Kaur talked about the importance of Sikh women to the strength and success of the Sikh community. "It is the feminine energy that has the ability to endure and the ability to never give up," she said.

In a corner of the 'bazaar area', a mini-theatre was set-up to show clips of the films produced by the awardees. The clip from Valarie Kaur's *Divided We Fall* drew attention from the younger Sikhs who saw their own dilemma as Sikhs and Americans reflected in her film. Dr. Harjot Kaur's film, *By the Guru's*

*Grace*, included interviews at each of the Takhts and highlighted the uniqueness of the Sikh lifestyle. After watching the movie for a while, one parent remarked, "Where can I get a DVD of this? It can teach my children much better than I can."



*California State Board of Equalization Chair Judy Chu (centre podium) addresses the Los Angeles sangat. Accompanying dignitaries from left to right are: Los Angeles County Supervisor Mike Antonovich; California State Senator Mark Ridley-Thomas; California State Assembly Member Mike Eng; Dr. Piara Singh of Vermont Gurudwara; Sardarni Amrit Kaur of Sikh Dharma International; Hari Jivan Singh Chief of Protocol for Sikh Dharma International; Los Angeles City Councilman Bernard C. Parks and Kirtan Singh, Guru Ram Das Ashram of Los Angeles.*

California and Amritsar, Punjab are in collaboration to become Sister Cities.

Other dignitaries who attended the event and gave their greetings and warm wishes to the Sikh community included California State Assembly Member Mike Eng; California State Board of Equalisation Chair Judy Chu; California State Senator Mark Ridley-Thomas; Los Angeles City Councilman Bernard C. Parks; Los Angeles County Supervisor Zev Yaroslavsky and Los Angeles County Supervisor Mike Antonovich. Dignitaries from California who have participated in the Los Angeles Baisakhi Celebration in years past include United States Congressman Brad

## ‘... live their values’

In 2002, after the September 11th attacks in New York City, it was more important than ever to educate the public about Sikh identity. The Los Angeles Baisakhi Celebration became one way to bring Sikhs into the public eye after that event. Every year, dignitaries from the state of California and the city of Los Angeles come to Los Angeles Baisakhi and speak about their commitment to protecting the Sikh identity and the Sikh community. The current Mayor of Los Angeles, Antonio Villaraigosa, has been a visitor and a dignitary to the Los Angeles Baisakhi celebration for 5 years. He makes a striking figure in the turban he dons when he attends and tells the reporter he wears it out of respect to this “community of peace” who “live their values.”

“When I first put on a turban (during the Baisakhi celebration) so many years ago, I did it as a sign of great respect for the Sikh community,” Mayor Villaraigosa said. “Today we acknowledge and celebrate the (Sikh) spiritual nation.” The Mayor of Amritsar, in India, Shwait Malik also attended the Baisakhi celebration in Los Angeles and spoke to the sangat. Mayor Malik congratulated the Sikhs on their celebration, honoured their presence in California for the last 100 years, and invited them to spend time in the holy city of Amritsar. Currently, Bakersfield,

Sherman, a senior member on the Committee on International Relations and the Ranking Member on its Subcommittee on International Terrorism and Non-proliferation. In 2004 Congressman Sherman authored U.S. House Resolution 528, criticising France’s decision to ban religious articles and symbols, including the traditional Sikh turban, in state schools. His resolution encouraged France to respect the freedom of all to practice their religious faith without state interference. Congressman Sherman also wears a turban when he participates in the Los Angeles Baisakhi Celebration.

Over the years, many most respected Sikh dignitaries from India have also graced the Los Angeles Baisakhi celebration, including Singh Sahib Joginder Singh Vedanti, Jathedar Sri Akal Takhat Sahib, Singh Sahib Tarlochan Singh, Jathedar Keshgar Sahib and Singh Sahib Iqbal Singh, Jethedar Patna Sahib.

This year, Sikh Dharma International’s Dr. Bibiji Inderjit Kaur, wife of the late Bhai Sahib Harbhajan Singh and S. Guru Amrit Kaur addressed the gathered Sikh community. Bibiji invited the community to attend the 300th anniversary celebrations of Siri Guru Granth Sahib in Hazoor Sahib this year. Sardarni Guru Amrit Kaur spoke to inspire the community to rejoice in the traditions given by the Tenth Master Guru Gobind Singh.



## The Nagar Kirtan

Another beautiful aspect of the Los Angeles Baisakhi is the Nagar Kirtan that takes place through the heart of downtown Los Angeles every year. The point person to organise the Nagar Kirtan each year is Gurdip Singh Malik.

Gurdip Singh Malik came to the United States in 1972, and lived on the East Coast for many years. He moved to the West Coast in 1978, and then to Los Angeles in 1985, where he set up a garment business. In 1999, to honour the 300th anniversary of the Khalsa Panth, many individuals from the Lankershim Gurdwara in North Hollywood got together with Kirtan Singh Khalsa and the Guru Ram Das Ashram sevadars



include Sukhminder Singh Sandhu, Sohan Singh Chaudhry and Surinder Singh. Thousands of Sikhs participate in the Nagar Kirtan each year, providing the most colourful display in all of Los Angeles during the Baisakhi celebration— sharing faith and educating others about the Sikh identity.

## The Guru's Entourage

The limousine and the line of cars continue to make their way to the Los Angeles Convention Centre. Another car comes along and cuts into the line, but the people in the car are not wearing turbans. Seeing this, one of the motorcycle cops pulls the car over – to find out who these folks are and why they are driving in the Guru's entourage. It is a funny moment. In an era where Sikhs are targeted for their turbans, here is a couple targeted for not wearing their turbans! They protest to the police officer that they are indeed Sikhs, yes they are Sikhs – even though their hair is shorn, the beard on the man is missing, and they don't wear turbans – they are Sikhs and they are supposed to be part of the escort. Reluctantly, the police officer waves them back in the line. He is still not sure – but he shrugs it off and gives them the benefit of the doubt.

Seeing all this brings a smile. It is the Guru's way of reminding us that what happened at Baisakhi was powerful and important. It was for that time, but also for all times to come. And what Guru Gobind Singh started on that first Baisakhi, the form he gave his Sikhs, is here to endure.



The Los Angeles Sikh Community parades through the heart of downtown Los Angeles.



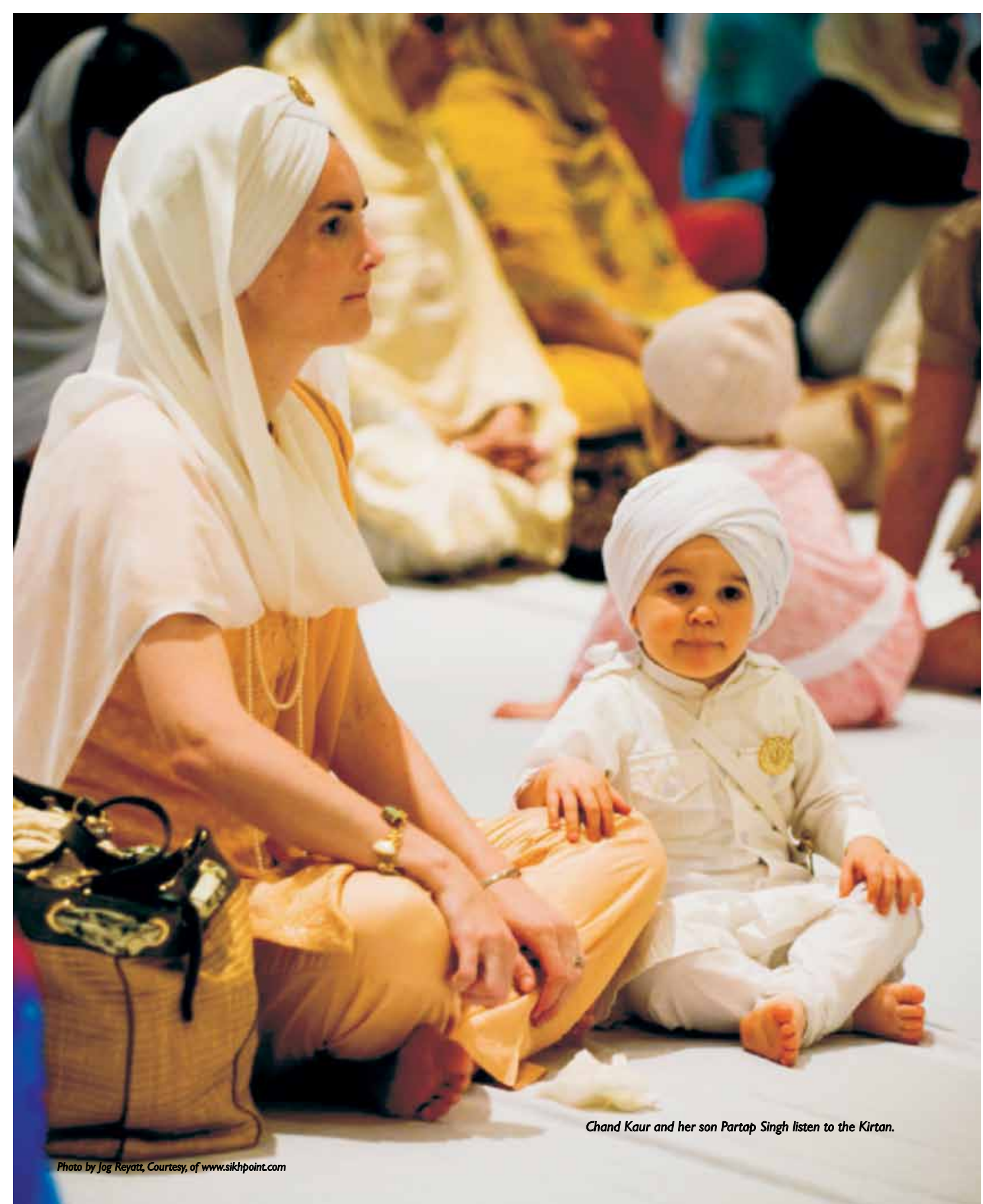
Escorting the Guru Granth Sahib to the Nagar Kirtan.

and planned the first Nagar Kirtan for the Los Angeles Baisakhi Celebration.

"It was a joint effort," Gurdip Singh recalls, "to help our kids and our community. The first year we had five floats. Now, all of the Gurdwaras participate. This year, we had 13 floats. Every float has a Sikh theme regarding the religion or Sikhs principles of life. It's the combined effort of all the people together, the cooperation of everyone, that makes this successful."

For Gurdip Singh, the impact of the Nagar Kirtan on the children is extremely important. "The children in school are in the minority," he says. "It gives them a great boost to be with the community this way. The kids love it because they can relate to it. Everyone is together – it is great for their morale."

Dr. Gurnam Singh Pannu played a key role in starting the Nagar Kirtan programme and Joginder Singh Sidhu helps design the floats. Other sevadars



*Chand Kaur and her son Partap Singh listen to the Kirtan.*

## The Guru's Court

One of the truly unique aspects about the Los Angeles Baisakhi Celebration is the extraordinary transformation of an ordinary convention hall into a sacred Gurdwara. That transformation is the responsibility of Sikh designer and artist, Seva Kaur. In India, Seva Kaur is best known for the beautiful decorations she designed for the Harimandir Sahib during the 400th anniversary celebration of the Adi Granth. In the United States, however, it is her work designing the Los Angeles Baisakhi which has earned her tremendous reputation.



Photo by Jog Reyatt, courtesy of www.sikhpoint.com

*Guru's Darbar.*

"I want the people who come to be inspired," she said. "I want them to be moved by the majesty and royalty of the Guru so that they can feel proud to be a Sikh and to bow their heads."

This year, the theme of the Los Angeles Baisakhi celebration was "The Living Spirit of Guru." With paintings of forests and drapes resembling tents, Seva Kaur's vision was to make the hall feel like Anandpur Sahib in 1699. "My idea is to make it feel like you are there, looking down from the hills at the tents of Guru Gobind Singh, and you can't help but want to be part of it."



Photo by Jog Reyatt, courtesy of www.sikhpoint.com

*At the Guru's Court.*

It takes months to plan and an entire month before Baisakhi to go through the process of purchasing the materials, and creating the sets and decorations for the event. A team of 50 volunteers begins the actual decorating on Friday morning and then decorates until late in the evening on Saturday to get the convention hall ready. Some of the key sevadars include Dr. Hari Bhajan Singh who coordinates directly with the Convention Centre, and Sada Simran Singh who manages the set-up process over those two days. Also assisting is Jai Pal Singh who is Seva Kaur's husband and an architect. "When I can't figure something out, he can," she says. But, in the words of one of the attendees, the decorations are breath-taking.





Scenes from the Guru's Court.

Photo by Jog Reyatt, courtesy of www.sikhpoint.com

## SOVEREIGN

Divine Nectar  
Flows.

Divine Grace  
Bestowed.

Dyed in crimson red  
I walk to  
Anandpur Sahib.

Compassion - *Daya*  
Faith - *Dharam*  
Courage - *Himmat*  
Dedication - *Mokham*  
Adorn me.

The silence  
The stillness  
The fragrance  
Fill my soul.

Guru  
Blesses.

The Jewel  
Sovereign - *Sahib*  
Adorns me.

The bond  
Is sealed.



**Inni Kaur**

*Special report to the  
Nishaan by  
Ek Ong Kaar Kaur. She  
works as the Director of  
Communications for Sikh  
Dharma International.  
www.sikhdharma.org*



The Royal couple with the Bhangra dance troupe

# Bhangra in St James' Palace

## The Prince of Wales Reception to Mark Vaisakhi

### Speech by HRH The Prince of Wales

“I must say that I am enormously grateful to Harbinder Singh, for not only his marvellous works - I always enjoy listening to him because I learn a great deal from him about the great history of the Sikhs - but I am particularly grateful to him for having helped put together such a marvellous gathering of the Sikh community here today.

Harbinder and I are very keen to find a way of helping and celebrating with all of you, or at least with some of the Sikh community, the Festival of Vaisakhi and it has been an enormous pleasure to welcome all of you here, some of whom I know we have met on previous occasions. I was so pleased to hear about the plans to build two

new Gurdwaras, one in Leamington Spa and one in Gravesend, and I have received many invitations to come and open Gurdwaras to attend various celebrations; whether I can manage them all, I am not sure.

But nevertheless, I have been so impressed by the way in which the Sikh Community raises money and does so many remarkable good works all over this country. More than anything, I am particularly grateful to the “*Gabru Punjab De*” dance troupe for their marvellous assistance in helping to make the celebrations even more special. As Chairman of the Royal Collection’s Trust, I must admit to a certain amount of anxiety at one point

that a sword or two might go through the painting behind the stage – but fortunately not! It was wonderful to see their performance. My wife and I were slightly disappointed that there were no further demonstrations of sword wielding skills such as we saw a year or so ago, but I am not going to volunteer to place a melon on my chest!

Picking up on what Harbinder was saying, it is absolutely true that this is why it is so important to help you celebrate some of these great festivals of your Community. The United Kingdom owes an immense debt of gratitude to the courage and sacrifice of Sikh soldiers and this, of course, is most famously exemplified in the purely appalling conditions of the First World War, and later in Asia during the Second World War. One only has to visit the immaculately maintained Commonwealth War Grave Commission Cemeteries in Flanders or in Rangoon, Delhi, or Singapore, to see the scale of this sacrifice and, symbolically, to see Brothers-in-Arms who fell together, at rest together.

Their acts of courage and heroism have enabled four generations to live in peace in Europe and, from that point of view, it is the greatest privilege and pleasure, as far as my wife and I are concerned, to have representatives from the old Sikh Regiments here, those British Officers who served in those Regiments with us here today. There aren't, I fear, very many left, but to enable us to pay a tribute to them today is something very special, particularly, when I think that the Sikh Brigade Association was established in 1948, exactly the same age as I am now. So I feel a slight affinity in terms of the fact that it is their 60th anniversary too!

I think many of you will know that for a long time I have had the greatest admiration for Sikh martial traditions and can hardly believe it is now six years since I inaugurated the "Jawans to General" touring exhibition which, with the "Portraits of Courage" lecture series at the Imperial War Museum, did much to raise public awareness, but also, I am so pleased that we were able to include a visit to Anandpur Sahib, the site of the initiation of the Sikh Khalsa in 1699 during our most recent visit to India two years ago. That was, indeed, a very special occasion for both of us. The generation present today, and especially



Prince Charles with invited guests at St. James Palace.

its values, stand I think as an exemplar for present and future generations. I did just want to take this opportunity to commend the work of the Maharajah Duleep Singh Trust and the Anglo Sikh Heritage Trail in ensuring that these values are properly understood, and disseminated.

While Sikhs are rightly known for their soldiering skills, you are only slightly less-known for your skills as "stewards of the soil". As Harbinder Singh was mentioning, of course this is the festival of Vaisakhi which celebrates harvest and man's connection with the soil, man's relationship to nature, which you probably know I feel very strongly, in this regard, that we are losing our sense of harmony with nature, and the world around us, which is causing even greater problems as far as the survival of this planet is concerned. But I have long been fascinated by these farming traditions and, therefore, I could not be more delighted with my *Bhumi Vardaan Foundation*, which I started two years ago in Punjab, is promoting organic farming and the conversion of farming land to an organic system across the Punjab. We now have some 2,600 hectares either converted or under conversion and the farmers receiving a premium. I am enormously proud of being able to make a small contribution in this area to this remarkable part of the world.

So Ladies and Gentlemen, nothing could give my wife, nor I greater pleasure than to be with you today, and I can only salute the Sikh Community, particularly on this special occasion of Vaisakhi.

# Sikhs in Britain: part of a great future



24 April, 2008: Harbinder Singh Rana at St. James' Palace, London

*“*Your Royal Highnesses, Honoured Guests, may I welcome you on behalf of the Anglo Sikh Heritage Trail. It is an extreme privilege to be here in these surroundings today and we are grateful to your Royal Highnesses for your hospitality. As this (Bhangra) dance performance has own, the Festival of Vaisakhi demonstrates the vitality, the energy, the vibrancy, the joy of life, and the high spirits which define the Sikh psyche. It is a tradition of affinity with the land and farming which has been the mainstay of our community through the centuries. Even today a state covering less than 2 per cent of India's land mass produces over 40 per cent of the grain output. Rightly, Punjab became known as the state that “feeds the rest of India”.

Yesterday I was in Liverpool at the inauguration of the “Sikhs in Print” Exhibition of the remarkably talented Singh Twins. It was appropriate that the organisers chose St George's Day for the launch. I have been looking more closely at his life. Born in what is now Turkey he followed his father to become a professional soldier. He refused to take part in the persecution and torture of Christians and was himself executed for his beliefs. I am not sure if he had a beard but if the Sikhs were to have a patron saint it would be he! This remarkable martyr, whose colours are represented in the Union Jack, is also an eternal manifestation of the spirit of Vaisakhi.

It was the British Historian, F. Yeats-Brown who said, “A remarkable people, the Sikhs, with their Ten Prophets, Five distinguishing marks, and their baptismal rite of water stirred with steel; a people who have made history, and will make it again.” And how we did make history! As the history of India cannot be written without reference to the Gurus of our faith and so the history of Britain cannot be written without reference to the Sikh martial tradition. That history stands before us today in the shape of the Sikh Brigades Association and other veterans.

Yet, when we move on from that history to look to the future we see



Prince Charles with Sikh military veterans.

a Britain where the Sikhs are not perceived as strangers. Much coverage was given in recent days to the speech by Enoch Powell some 40 years ago and I was saddened to note that he had specifically mentioned the Sikhs by virtue of their appearance. He was right to talk of ‘rivers of blood’ but they were the wrong rivers. The rivers of blood that link Sikhs to Britain are those in France, Belgium, in Mesopotamia in Afghanistan, in Burma and many other theatres of war where we served and died for Britain. They are not the rivers of blood arising from racial disharmony. The values that make us great are the values that make Britain great and we are determined to be a part of a great future.”



HRH The Prince of Wales with Colonel & Mrs Harinder Singh Attari.

# The Jewel of the Crown

In Praise of His Royal Highness  
the Prince of Wales

It was on Thursday, 24 April 2008 at a reception to celebrate the festival of Vaisakhi and to honour members of the Sikh Brigades held at St James's Palace at London, that I first met His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales and his wife. It was a magnificent sight as the door from the palace opened to the beat of two Sikh youngsters playing the Bhangra dhols; His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales was ushered, in most dignified manner. What we saw was a couple full of grace, good manners, ingrained with courtesy and dignity, which begets instant liking and great admiration. I now realise that greater the man, the greater is the flow of courtesy. There was an aura of 'character' around him, when he talked, when he walked and even when he stood still. Character cannot be developed in ease and quiet. Only through experience of trial and tribulation can the soul be strengthened, vision cleared, ambition inspired and success achieved. Men are indeed what their mothers made of them. How true the Spanish proverb, 'Every cask smells of the wine it contains'. To sum up my first impression about the Prince, I will give a twist to 'Veni, Vedi Vici', and state that, 'He came, He saw and He conquered'!

When I shook hand with the Prince of Wales, I instantly got strong vibrations of affection and was reminded of what Emerson, the American poet and essayist had written, "I hate giving of the hand unless the whole man accompanies it". After exchange of greetings, I did make a mention about the 'Kohinoor' after all, this jewel had gone from the family of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, Emperor of the Punjab, the family to whom we are related, at which the Prince pre-empted me: 'But everybody wants it back': I said 'We are proud of the fact that you have preserved it. Had that not happened, this would have by now exchanged many more hands.'

And then, as I presented a framed picture of that magnificent warrior, General Sham Singh Attariwala, a look at his eyes revealed his character, for as they say, 'the eyes indicate the antiquity of the soul', and I

am a firm believer of the saying, 'When the character's right, looks are a great delight.' This was indeed a most delightful experience of my life.

Then I requested His Royal Highness to read the lines inscribed below the picture of my forefather General Sham Singh Attariwala, who fell martyr during the Battle of Sabraon, fighting against the British on 10 February 1846. It is stated that 'The British recognised the bravery displayed by the General and dispatched his body in a most dignified manner on elephant back to his native place Attari, in district, Amritsar of the Punjab, in keeping with the true traditions of the British Army.' This was so mentioned in the handwritten dispatches signed by the C-in-C. How true what an English writer, compiler Thomas Fuller has written, 'Praise from an enemy implies real merit.'

To this I have received a reply and a letter of thanks from the Royal Highness the Prince of Wales, "Their Royal Highnesses were deeply touched that you thought of them in this way". That shows true character of the Royal family and the British nation.

The Prince of Wales love for tradition is admirable and I have strong belief that this factor really strengthens the nation. It is said 'the subjects love is the king's best guard.' So come what may, the words spoken by King Farouk of Egypt in 1950 'In a few years there will be only five Kings in the world – the King of England and Four Kings in a pack of cards', have a deep underlying meaning.

If you go by the words spoken by the British Diplomat David Ormsby in 1962, it may well be that the Britain will be honoured by the historians more for the way she relinquished an Empire than for the way in which she acquired it.

Lastly I submit that His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales is the true 'Jewel in the Crown' – and not the Kohinoor.!

Colonel Harinder Singh Attari.





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