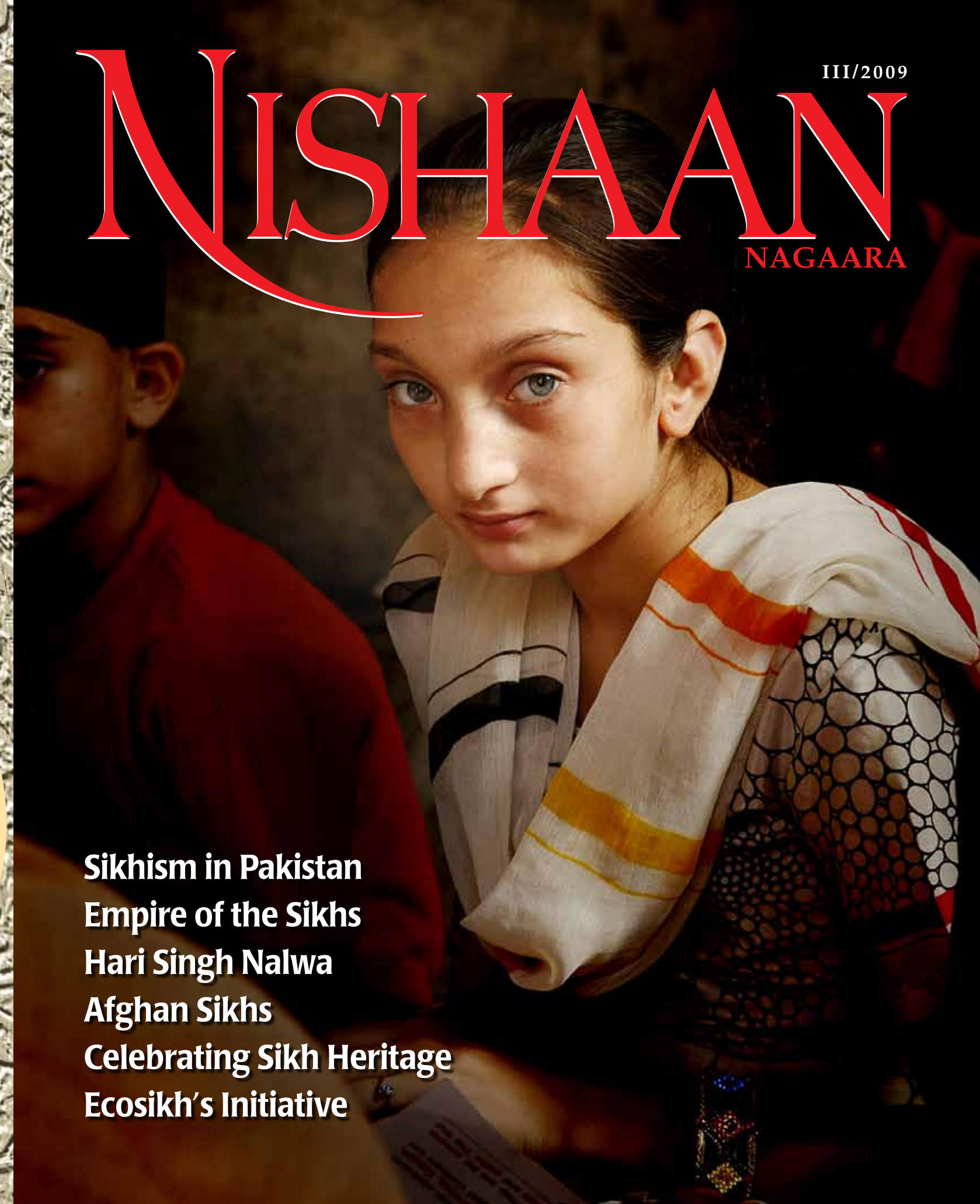
III/2009

NISHAAN

NAGAARA



Sikhism in Pakistan
Empire of the Sikhs
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Afghan Sikhs
Celebrating Sikh Heritage
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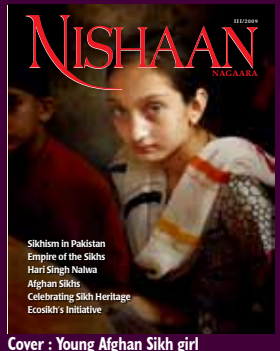

Cover : Young Afghan Sikh girl
Photo by Malkiat Singh

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Editorial

Sikh Global Presence and 'Af-Pak'

We all know that Sikhism traces its roots to Guru Nanak just over half a millennium ago. Even then *Sikhi* was not meant to be restricted or circumscribed to Punjabis, Punjab or its adjoining areas. Had it been designed by the Gurus to be a movement restrictive in scope by geography, ethnicity, race, language, culture, cuisine or music, neither Guru Nanak nor the following Gurus would have traveled to the accessible world at that time to preach their message.

That message was universal and the Gurus personally spread it tirelessly over a period of over 200 years across the known world. That's why strains of music reverberate in the *Guru Granth* from many distant parts of the subcontinent. That's why many regional dialects from parts of India find a place along with many languages from outside India in Sikh culture, worship and practice.

Yet, not surprisingly, most Sikhs remain of Punjabi origin. But some realities are changing. True that we have no definite head counts and our estimates perhaps err on the low side, but we know that Sikhs are now found all over the globe, and perhaps 3 to 5 million out of the 22-25 million Sikhs live outside India. Their ubiquitous presence emerges clearly from the 40-year old good-hearted 'humour' that Sikhs with hot and ready *langar* greeted the first astronauts to land on the moon.

Contemporary geopolitical and economic realities have so affected our lives and defined our biases that we are perhaps best aware of the Sikhs that live in the West – primarily Europe and North America, including Canada. Our history in African nations (Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, others) and in countries adjoining China – Singapore, Malaysia, the Philippines, Myanmar, Indonesia, Thailand, Hong Kong – is even longer and reasonably familiar to us even if not as much in the details. Australia and New Zealand and some Pacific Islands have vibrant Sikh communities.

But communities of Sikhs have existed far longer in lesser travelled places, especially the region where the Afghan and Pakistani borders intersect – places like Orakzai, the North West Frontier Province and Swat, right in the heart of Taliban-controlled territory. Modern realities of war and peace have thrust these Sikhs on to centre stage.

Generations of Sikhs have also made their homes in Iran, Iraq and neighbouring countries in the Middle East with their crazy quilt of laws governing non-Muslims. These little known but vibrant communities of Sikhs tend to be forgotten, unless they are faced with a crisis – as is the case today.

Realities are periodically thrust in our face. We are pleased, for example, that turbaned, *keshadhari* Sikhs serve with honour in the Pakistani forces. We are chagrined when the Taliban demand an exorbitant tax from Sikhs living in Taliban-territory within Pakistan, as they have recently done. Imagine a tax for just being a citizen of a different religion than the rulers. Sometimes it is Sikhs in France who demand our attention because the local government will not allow them to wear turbans in public space; at other times it may be a Sheikhdom in the Middle East that frown on a gurdwara in their land.

Matters are better in North America, but not always and not entirely. For instance, the struggle to be able to serve as *keshadhari* Sikhs in the armed services of the United States remains unresolved, even though *keshadhari* Sikhs serve in the armed forces of not just India, but also Malaysia, Singapore, Great Britain and Canada, among others. But these matters are not for today and I leave parsing them to another time.

We meet local Sikhs when we visit gurdwaras in Pakistan that are maintained by these small, often economically deprived, communities of Sikhs. But they and their isolation are forgotten as soon as the airplane clears their air space.

Even a cursory perusal of Sikh history will tell us that these Sikhs have been closer to us than we think. The Gurus traded with their communities. Many of them continued to come to visit the Guru on a regular basis to cement their ties to Sikhism and its universal and eternal message. Maharaja Ranjit Singh, too, helped define for them a place of dignity and honour within the Sikh fold.

Similar communities of Sikhs, like the *Sikligars*, also exist in remote corners of India. They, too, are deeply attached to *Sikhi* but remain largely out of our tunnel vision.

Sometimes their needs are largely existential, as for the *Sikligars*, more often they present faces of communal isolation and the need to find a meaningful connection with the world of *Sikhi*.

With Sikhs clearly having a global presence – living in places that we never heard of – how do we incorporate these isolated pockets of Sikhs into a global Sikh reality? Do we have the institutions with the vision and the wherewithal to do so?

The present issue of *Nishaan* aims to bring this concern to the forefront. These are matters that would take us more than a special issue to get a fix on but we need to start today.

A global community needs and deserves global institutions, not provincial ones with limited vision that are subject to and can serve only according to the vagaries of local laws and customs.

Sometimes I look askance at the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) or the Delhi Gurdwara Management Committee (DGMC). Sure, these premier representative Sikh institutions arose in difficult and different times in a country that was not free. Sikhs struggled mightily and non-violently to wrest control of their own places of worship (Gurdwaras) from the British who ruled India then. It was a titanic struggle that shook the British Empire to its core. The Sikhs prevailed. Thus were the SGPC and DGMC born.

But they are now no better than bureaucratic structures controlled by political agendas, compromising the independence of our institutions including the *Akal Takht*. The SGPC and DGMC remain limited by their own charter in their ability to evolve into transnational institutions with the ability to represent and speak for the worldwide diaspora of Sikhs.

Sikhs need to evolve institutions that can knit the worldwide Sikh community into a cooperative Sikh nation – a national identity without political lines drawn in the sand – such that our Punjab and India–based institutions become the largest partners representing the largest distribution of Sikhs, without being in the position to unilaterally dictate to non-Indian Sikhs.

Only by such international, multinational, multi-ethnic, semi-autonomous representation of Sikhs worldwide would we be able to address the lives of small communities of Sikhs across the many nations of the world – with some degree of freedom from the local political and economic constraints that govern political institutions and nations.

How to get the many pockets of Sikhs integrated and included into the worldwide presence of Sikhs and *Sikhi* will take a lifetime. It is challenge to which we must awaken.

In our steady march forward into the 21st century how do we create a whole that is greater than the sum of its parts?

I am looking to a strategy of global vision even though the most meaningful advice is to "think globally but act locally."

Dr I J Singh

Echoing the import of an article in *Nishaan*'s Issue 4/2001 on 'The Sikhs of Afghanistan' the word 'crisis' is seen in the context of today's situation in Af-Pak. It is derived from a Greek term, signifying a change or transformation or turning point from a current situation. Thus, the crises afflicting thousands of Afghani and Swati Sikhs, displaced from their home and hearth, in true tradition of their compassionate and heart-warming tenets of Sikhism, will be overcome and hopefully for the better from hereon. Guru Nanak Dev ji has stressed on the harvesting of love and brotherly sentiments enveloping all humanity; external barriers of caste, geography, culture or language should be shunned.

The very fact that these Afghani Sikhs were so wonderfully amalgamated in Afghanistan, like the proverbial 'pearl in the oyster', is testimony of the fact that their resilience and adaptability – the main requisition in their re-establishment in their lands – will ensure their steady growth and progress towards rebuilding of their lives. Historically too, Maharaja Ranjit Singh's extension of the Sikh Empire, with the aid of mighty warriors like Hari Singh Nalwa, up till the Khyber Pass, through sheer force of grit, determination and valour, exemplifies the power and resilience of the Sikhs.

The time is right to pick up the pieces and start afresh, with faith.

Editors

Sikhism in Pakistan today

Sikhism is today a very small minority religion in the Islamic Republic of Pakistan but its cultural, historical and political roots remain embedded in the country, the historically undivided region of Punjab.

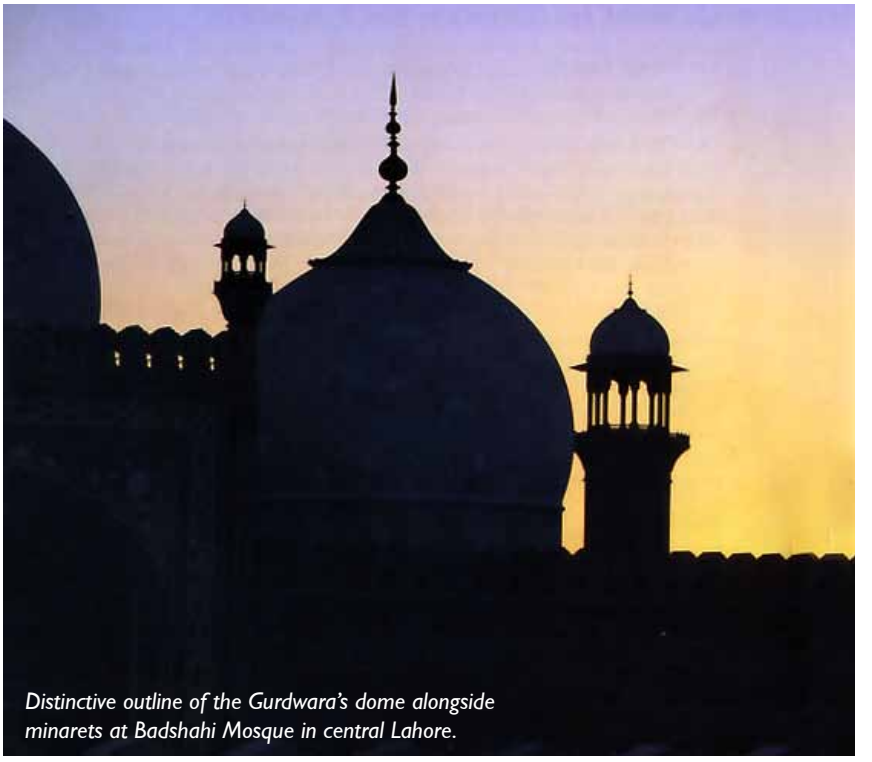
Pakistan is now a nation of 160 million, with 92.5 per cent Muslims, and Christians and Hindus making up the largest minority faiths with each absorbing 5 per cent and 1.5 per cent respectively, while Sikhs, Zoroastrians, Buddhists, Ahmaddis (an Islamic sect, but considered UnIslamic by Pakistan and some other Muslim nations) and some adherents to animist religions, make up the remaining one per cent.

Before the partition

Prior to the partition of India in 1947, which divided British India into its successor states of Pakistan and India, Sikhs were spread right across the region of Punjab and played an important role in its economy. Lahore, the capital of (now Pakistani) Punjab was then and is today still the location of many important religious and historical sites for Sikhs, including the Samadhi of Ranjit Singh. The nearby town of Nankana Sahib has nine gurdwaras, being the birthplace of Sikhism's founder, Guru Nanak Dev. Each of Nankana Sahib's gurdwaras are associated with different events in Guru Nanak Dev's life. The town remains an important site of pilgrimage for Sikhs worldwide.

After the creation of Pakistan

Nationwide, there are no reliable numerical figures for Sikhs in the country. Estimates vary widely, from 200,000 nationwide to around 2000 families, with little methodology or scientific technique cited by sources. The largest Sikh population in Pakistan is found in Peshawar, in the North West Frontier Province, which was spared the scale of violence during partition that raged in the Punjab. Sikhs are also found in sizable communities in Waziristan and Swat in the NWFP. There are also pockets of Sikhs in Lahore, Nankana Sahib and Hasan Abdal in the Punjab and Gwadar, Kalat and Quetta districts of Baluchistan. The (West) Punjab and Sindh provinces of Pakistan were mostly emptied of their Sikh and Hindu population in the communal massacres of partition, with nearly all leaving for India. Today, very large segments of the populations of East Punjab and Haryana and Delhi in India trace their ancestry back to towns and villages now in Pakistan, including that of India's Prime Minister Manmohan Singh.



Distinctive outline of the Gurdwara's dome alongside minarets at Badshahi Mosque in central Lahore.

There has been a minor increase in the population of Sikhs in Pakistan owing to the turbulent civil war and conflicts that have ravaged neighbouring Afghanistan. Afghanistan, like Pakistan, has had a small Sikh and Hindu population. There has been a massive exodus of refugees from Afghanistan into Pakistan during the past 30 years of turmoil up to the reign of the Taliban and the subsequent US invasion of Afghanistan in late 2001. Due to Pakistan's porous borders with Afghanistan, large numbers of Afghanistan's minority communities, based mainly around the cities of Kabul, Kandahar and Jalalabad have left, and some Sikhs have joined their kinsmen in Peshawar and Lahore. Others have emigrated to India or the West.

In the wake of partition of the country, Punjab was divided into two parts: East Punjab remained with India and West Punjab went to the newly created Pakistan. Millions of Hindus and Sikhs migrated from

Main entrance to Gurdwara Sacha Sauda.

Pakistan to India, and Muslims from India to Pakistan. The Sikh population in Pakistan was reduced to a microscopic minority and that too mostly in the tribal area of Swat. All gurdwaras, including the historical Sikh shrines, were closed.

As per an agreement arrived at between the governments of India and Pakistan, Sikh pilgrims could thereafter visit Gurdwara Janam Asthan at Nankana Sahib, Panja Sahib at Hassan Abdal (Attock district), Gurdwara Dera Sahib at Lahore and Samadh Maharaja Ranjit Singh at Lahore on the occasion of the birth anniversary of Guru Nanak, Baisakhi, Martyrdom day of Guru Arjan Dev and death anniversary of Maharaja Ranjit Singh every year. (Muslim pilgrims in reciprocation could visit their five shrines in India).

Some SGPC staff, which had been looking after these historical gurdwaras before partition, was allowed to be posted at Nankana Sahib, Panja Sahib and Dera Sahib to perform the religious service. After the 1971 Indo-Pak war, the Pakistan Government refused to issue/renew visas to the SGPC staff, including *granthis* (priests), *ragis* (devotional singers) and *sewadars*.

In 1979, when the Janta Party was in power at the Centre, a six-member delegation led by Gurcharan Singh Tohra, SGPC president, visited Pakistan to study the state of affairs of historical gurdwaras in the country. He also met General Zia-ul-Haq, then President of Pakistan.

Tohra raised the demand that SGPC staff should be posted at the gurdwara as per the practice before 1971. General Zia did not agree, but suggested that Pakistani Sikhs should be imparted necessary training for enforcing *maryada* (Sikh code of conduct) in the gurdwaras. He said he was prepared to send Pakistani Sikhs to India for the purpose.

Subsequently, General Zia persuaded about 50 Pakistani Sikhs to shift from Swat to Nankana Sahib. Some of them have been assisting the Wakf Board to run the gurdwara affairs in that country. These families are residing in the complex of Gurdwara Patti Sahib.

The new Pakistani Sikh generation and their children, 120 in number (70 boys and 50 girls) in the age group of 5-15 years have been getting education on *gurmat maryada*. These children rise early in the morning, bathe and then recite *shabad kirtan*. After their studies in school, they learn Gurmukhi and recite Gurbani in the evening.

These children have since been observing almost all historical events such as birth and death

S. Bishen Singh of the PGPC welcoming a Sikh Jatha at Pakistani side of the Wagah-Attari border.

anniversaries of the Sikh Gurus, *sangrand* (beginning of Vikrami month), *amavas* (a day before new moon) and *purnima* (full moon). They also participate in religious functions organised by the visiting Sikh pilgrims from India and abroad.

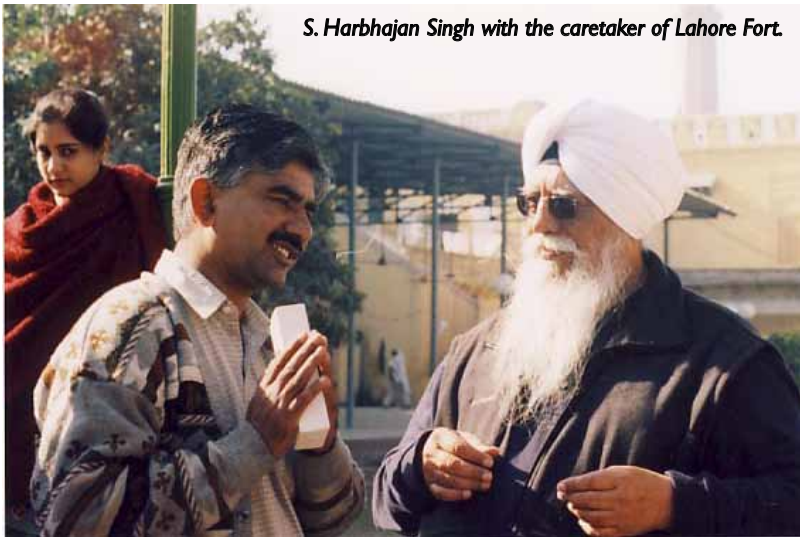
Balwant Singh, a young man who teaches these children, states that these youngsters are very eager to visit Amritsar and other historical Sikh shrines in India. Since their parents are small-time shopkeepers or businessmen, they cannot afford expenses for the pilgrimage. The SGPC and other Sikh organisations should extend all cooperation, including financial assistance.

It is these children who are likely to look after the *maryada* of Sikh shrines in Pakistan in the coming times.

Sikh community in Pakistan today

Until today, Sikhs have mainly kept a low profile within the monolithic population of Pakistan. Pakistan, as a constitutionally Islamic state, has had inconsistent and often intolerant relations with its minorities. Until 2002, Pakistan held a system of separate electorates for all its national legislative assemblies, with only a handful of parliamentary seats reserved for minority members. Minorities were legally only permitted to vote for designated minority candidates in the general elections. The regime of President General Pervez Musharraf professed an agenda of equality for minorities and promotion and protection of minority rights, however, the implementation of such measures has been slow.

The historical and holy sites of Sikhs are maintained by a Pakistani governmental body, the Pakistan Sikh Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee, which is responsible for their upkeep and preservation.



S. Harbhajan Singh with the caretaker of Lahore Fort.

Ardaas by Bhaiji from Swat at Nankana Sahib.

Nonetheless, many Sikh shrines have fallen into disrepair since 1947, as the remaining Sikh population and its corresponding manpower, economic power and political influence is minuscule compared to that of the pre-1947 community.

Emergence of the Sikh community

After the creation of Pakistan, the Sikh community's rights were diminished. Recently the Sikh community within Pakistan has been making efforts to progress in Pakistan. Harcharn Singh has become the first Sikh to join the Pakistan Army, the first time in the 62 year history of Pakistan. Prior to Harcharn Singh's selection no individual person who was a member of the Hindu or the Sikh community was ever enrolled in the army, but there are reports that the Pakistani Christian community has served in the army and some had even reached higher ranks with one even becoming a Brigadier in the army. Members of the tiny Parsi community have some representation in the Armed Forces as well.

And recently in Lahore greetings, such as *'Sat Sri Akaal'*, *'jo bolay so nihal'* and *'ballay ballay'* from car and bus drivers, motorcyclists and children were being exclaimed to Gulab Singh, the first-ever Sikh to be appointed as a traffic police warden in Pakistan.

Harcharn Singh with fellow Gentleman Cadets at the PMA, Kakul.

Traffic policeman at Lahore: Gulab Singh.

Gulab Singh was born near Nankana Sahib, but he now lives in the Defence Housing Authority. He said that joining the force as a sub-inspector was a dream come true for him. Pledging to do his duty wholeheartedly, he said that the loving welcome he had received from the public had added to his joy. After he joined his duty station by the second day, scores of children had forced their parents to drive around so that they could meet him. He was deputed on Alif Laam Meem Chowk on Aziz Bhatti Road in the Cantonment.

Commenting on his training process, Gulab Singh said, 'The attitude of my fellow trainees and officers was very good ... nobody ever forced me to do anything against my religious beliefs.' He said he had no problems wearing his *kara* or keeping his *kirpan* on him. He added that, as he was a vegetarian, green meals were arranged for him in the mess during the training period. 'I am very grateful to my officers for this gesture,' Gulab Singh said.

Guru Nanak Model School, Nankana Sahib

This is a school where Gurmukhi is being taught. The school headmaster is Azgar Bhatti and these are five Sikh and seven Muslim male and seven Muslim lady teachers. At Nankana Sahib, there are eight Government Schools and fourteen private schools, among which Guru Nanak Model School occupies the top position.

About 142 Sikh students study here and the number of Muslim students is 410, of which 120 are financially weak and enjoy full fee concession. This school was set up in April 1999.

While Sikh students recited Sukhmani Sahib, Japji Sahib and Rehras Sahib, the Muslim students recited verses from the holy Qu'ran.

Pakistan's Sikh diaspora

Although Sikhism as a monotheistic religion has therefore been secure from violence, Pakistani Sikhs have to suffer discrimination and therefore many Pakistani Sikhs have immigrated to the United Kingdom and Canada and there is a growing Pakistani Sikh community in Dubai. In the United Kingdom there are approximately 40,000 Pakistani Sikhs and in Canada around 18,000. Still Pakistani Sikh communities are often more likely to be integrated into the Pakistani community life than into the Sikh

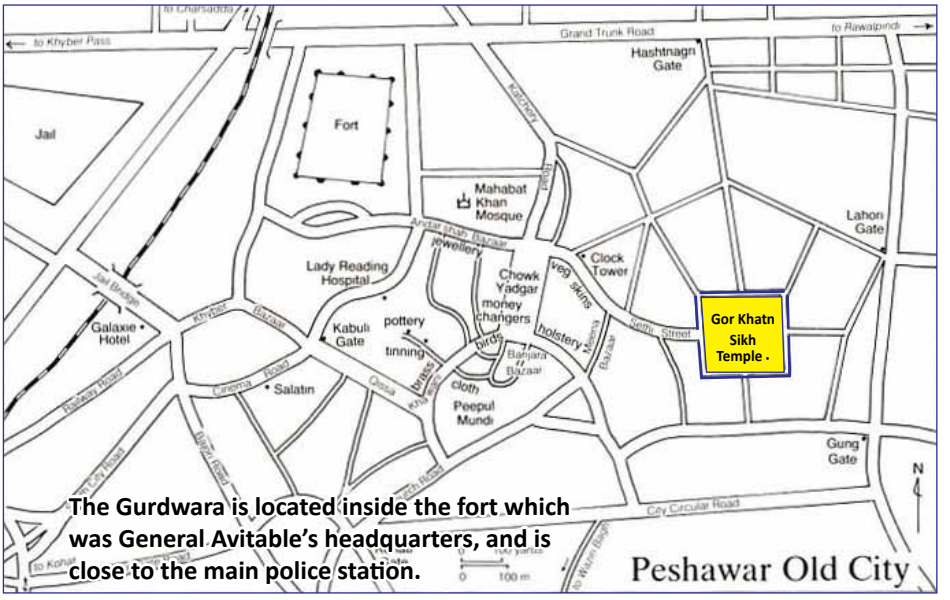
Sikhs from Afghanistan and Swat at Gurdwara Panja Sahib, Hasan Abdal.

community, as many Indian Sikhs are "patriotic" to India and Pakistani Sikhs believe that the Khalistan movement as the most important Sikh movement. As Pakistan, ruled by Zia-ul-Huq, supported the Khalistan movement many Pakistani Sikhs see themselves more on the Pakistani rather than on the Indian side.

Karachi's Sikh Community

When the gurdwara reverberates with sounds of *"Sat Sri Akaal,"* and *"Vaheguru ji ka khalsa,"* it is hard to believe than one is not in Indian Punjab but at Ranchore Lines in Karachi.

With approximately 3,500 members of the Sikh community residing in Karachi, the Narain Pura Compound in Ranchore Lines also houses 300 followers of Guru Nanak. The rest of the devotees can be found in the areas surrounding Kohinoor Centre, Jubilee Cinema, Garden Road and Manora.



The Gurdwara is located inside the fort which was General Avitable's headquarters, and is close to the main police station.

With six gurdwaras in different parts of the city, Karachi has its fair share of temples of the world's fifth largest religion. Nevertheless, the Gurdwara Sikh Sangat in Ranchore Lines is the only centre of all religious activity since the gurdwaras at Preedy Street, Saddar and Arambagh have been sealed owing to disputes. The temples at Manora, Bandar Road and Lee Market are not large enough to cater to the entire community.

The small-roomed Sikh Sangat Gurdwara is thus the place where devotees from all over the city convene during festivals. Around 80 worshippers can be accommodated in the rooms while the rest are accommodated in the adjacent veranda and the *langar khaana*.

Built in 1910, the blue-walled gurdwara, located off the congested and dilapidated roads of the compound, exemplifies the basic principals of Sikhism – simplicity and modesty.

The North West Frontier Province Sikh Community

Persecuted by Aurangzeb in the 17th century, or moving to the hills for refuge twice in the twentieth century, the Sikhs who have joined the Pakistan tribes in these mountain regions are a breed apart. The tribal principle of sanctuary to the *Amsaya*, or protected one, was what eased them into a region known for its traditional and rigid view of Islam. These anomalous 'tribesmen' – their beards rolled, wearing distinctive colourful turbans – are now part of the landscape, under the protection of one Pakhtun clan or another.

Says Charanjit Singh, a Sikh trader: "The Sikhs have an ability to completely integrate into the local culture." Jadran Afridi, a medical practitioner affiliated with the Pakhtunkhwa Qaumi Party (PQP), says that the Sikhs speak local Pakhto dialects fluently, treat their womenfolk as tribal Pakhtuns do. "They are as illiterate and hard headed as Afridi and Orakzais, and they are just as dependable in personal loyalty. Their hospitality is proverbial; every household keeps separate utensils for their Muslim friends."

"There was a time when hardly any Sikhs remained in Peshawar," says 70 year-old Gian Singh, visiting old friends. He's from Tirah, also in NWFP, where he moved to from Jalalabad after Najibullah's fall. "But now their families in places like Tirah are growing large, but business up there is shrinking." This has pushed many Sikhs down into Peshawar or nearby areas. "There must be close to a thousand Sikh families – about 10,000 people – living in Peshawar and the tribal areas," estimates Sona Singh, head *granthi* of Gurdwara Bhai Joga Singh in Peshawar's old Dabgari district.

Saroop Singh, who owns two shops and eight acres in Bara, is typical of the new generation of Sikhs, who have discarded their roles as Amsayas in search of independence and a better lifestyle. "Economic pressures

have weakened the ability of tribal clans to prevent outsiders from acquiring land," he says. Many Sikhs who made money in trading have bought land; but agriculture is rain-fed, and there is not enough arable land to go around."

The first casualty, even for the new generation, is education. Five years of religious schooling in Gurmukhi is about all the education most tribal Sikhs have had, and is promptly discarded when the exigencies of practical life take over. According to Sona Singh, the head *granthi*, every Sikh settlement has at least one *mohalla* school to teach the Granth Sahib, though not science, history or other subjects. "The aim is mainly to keep the religious rituals alive," he explains.

But the 'Frontier Sikhs' believe they have had a better deal than the 'Mona Sikhs' in Pakistan. They feel particularly indebted to General Zia-ul-Haq, who gave them the Gurdwara Bhai Joga Singh and allowed them to buy property in Pakistan. Some have visited India, but have chosen not to settle there.

"Life in Pakistan is better," says Saroop Singh, who has visited Delhi and Ambala several times. "There is more respect for the Sikhs here." Like most of the Frontier Sikhs, he believes that Khalistan will become a reality some day. When that happens, they say, they will gladly begin the long trek back.

The legacy of Nalwa

The greatest legacy of Maharaja Ranjit Singh is his conquest of Hazara and Peshawar and the consolidation of the north western frontier. But for this achievement, all these regions, along with the entire trans-Indus territories, would never have been part of India thus not part of the British Empire. Pakistan would thereafter not have inherited them. These would have been in Afganistan. Hence, Maharaja Ranjit Singh's achievement in this context is of great international import.

According to *'Ain-i-Akbari'*, all these trans-Indus areas were included in the Kabul kingdom which was one of their provinces like Multan. Kabul had Pakhly (today's district of Hazara) as one of the Sarkars like those of Kabul, Sewad (Peshawar area), lssa Khyl etc. though these areas were nominally under the control of Mughals "but the Mughal sway was always more nominal then real. They appear to have been content to levy revenue and there is nothing to show that any serious governance was attempted. The whole district paid only about half a lakh of rupees and the head of each tribe remained practically independent." This nominal sway of Mughals ended after Nadir Shah's invasion. All trans-Indus areas and some portions of Western Punjab were brought under the control of Kabul by Ahmad Shah Abdali, founder of modern Afghanistan, who succeeded Nadir Shah. Repeated invasions by Ahmad Shah Abdali could not subdue the Sikhs, but had just the opposite effect and greatly helped their rise to political power.

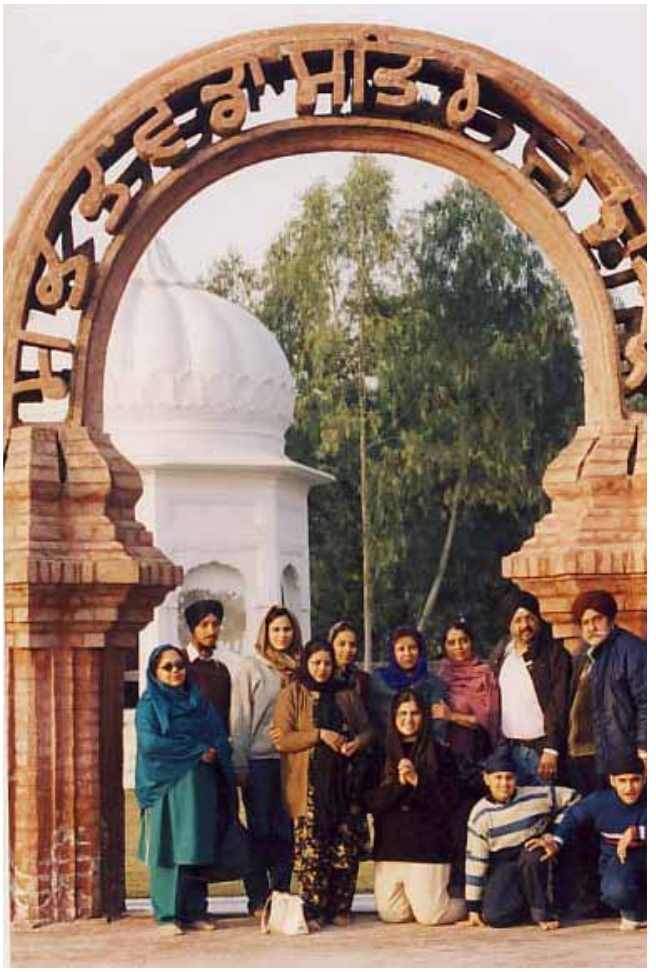
The Sikhs were successful in wresting most of the territory of Punjab from Ahmad Shah Abdali. Qazi Nur Mohammed in his famous *Jang Namah* gives details of the Sikh possessions. He concludes: "From Sarhind to Lahore, Multan and Derajat, the whole country has been divided among themselves, control over the western part of Sindh-Sagar Doab with areas of Fatehjang, Pindigheb and Bhakhar. The rule of Maharaja Ranjit Singh (1799-1839) will ever remain a watershed in the annals of the trans-Indus regions. Maharaja Ranjit Singh undertook to subdue and control effectively the ferocious tribes populating these regions. After the conquest and annexation of Multan and Kashmir, he led his legions

Langar sewa at Nankana Sahib.

across the Indus. This was a big challenge to the valiant Afghans who raised a cry of *Jehad* under Azim Khan Burkazi, ruler of Naushera. Ranjit Singh won a decisive victory and Ghazis were dispersed in 1823. Hazara, the country west of Kashmir, east of Peshawar and northwest of Attock, was conquered and annexed by Maharaja Ranjit Singh in 1820. Its first Nazim under Ranjit Singh was Amar Singh Majithia who ruled over the territory for two years. He suppressed the rebellion of Muhammad Khan Tarin and was able to defeat Dhund, Tarin, Tanol and Kharal tribes who were fighting against him. Lepel Griffin writes about the battle: "The battle was over, the enemy had taken to flight and the Sikh forces had retired from the field, when Amar Singh, thirsty and fatigued went down to the little stream Samandar to bathe and drink. He had only a few horsemen with him, when a party of the enemy troopers returning and seeing the weakness of the little party came down and killed Amar Singh and

his followers after a desperate defence." After the death of Amar Singh Majithia, who is also known as Amar Singh Kalan, Hari Singh Nalwa was appointed as Nazim of Hazara. He was not unknown to the Hazara tribes. When Maharaja Ranjit Singh led his army to conquer Mankera in 1821, he ordered Hari Singh Nalwa who was in Kashmir to join him there. At that time, Hari Singh Nalwa had only 7,000 men. On the way he was opposed by 20,000 wild tribesmen in the Pakhly hills. Pakhly or Hazara was the spot dreaded by merchants because these tribals demanded toll on the merchandise.

Hari Singh, after his vain efforts to induce the enemy to yield him passage, attacked with vigour and storming their blockade, defeated them decisively. It was no



One of the elegant entrances of Rohree Sahib Gurdwara with its stone-carved gate.

mean achievement to defeat about 20,000 Hazara tribals with only 7,000 men. Ranjit Singh was mightily pleased over this. Hari Singh Nalwa assumed his assignment in Hazara in February 1822 and undertook to punish the murderers of Amar Singh, his predecessor. He attacked Hasham Khan, who surrendered and produced the real culprits to be punished. Hasham Khan promised to thereafter be loyal.

In order to understand the defence measures of Hari Singh Nalwa, it is essential to understand geographical conditions of this region as well as the tribal distribution. Hasham Khan belonged to the northern area and was the leader of Karal tribe (or Karlani which is a branch of Khattak tribe). In order to have full control over this area, Hari Singh built a fort at Nara, near modern Abbotabad. The army was stationed there to keep the Pathans in check on this side. On the western side of Hazara territory, the Indus forms a natural defence. The north western side was bounded partly by Jhelum and partly by the a mountainous range known as Pakhli range. In the *Ain-i-Akbari,* the entire territory is known as Pakhli. The word Pakhli appears to have been derived from Pactyan nation, mentioned by Herodetus of Alexander's time. In order to control these ferocious tribes, Hari Singh Nalwa adopted a well-though-out policy. He built a strong fort in the valley surrounded by mountains and named it after the eighth Guru of the Singhs as Harkrishangarh and also founded a town named Haripur. The town was surrounded by a wall which was four yards thick and sixteen yards high and had only four openings. Drinking water was provided by digging a tank. Many small drains were dug to carry sullage water. Baron Hugal visited the town on 23 December 1835, and found the town humming with activity. In the upper ranges of Pakhli there lived mainly Jadus, Tanaoli and Swatis. They were warlike tribes and it was very difficult to control them. These were the tribes that had blocked the passage of Hari Singh Nalwa in 1821 and had been defeated by him with much smaller force.

Hari Singh built forts at strategic places and garrisoned them. Roads were built to link them so that reinforcements could be sent from one fort to another at the time of crisis. The policy of building fortresses proved very successful and very deterring for these tribes. The forts built in the upper ranges of Pakhli were Fort Nowan Shekar, Fort Dhamataur, Fort Darband and Fort Shinkari. An old one at Tarela was repaired, Afghans and Pathans considered themselves 'superior' to the people on the eastern side, looked down upon Indian Muslims and contemptuously referred to them as *Hindko*. Their pride was thrasled for the first time being defeated by the Sikhs who they considered infidels. They were agitated but began to say *Khalsa Hum Khuda Shuda* ("Khalsa too has become believer of God"). Khattaks had predominantly settled in Khattak country from the south of Kabul river on the low lands from Indus to Nowshera. They were fanatical, Yusufzais, the most numerous of the Peshawar tribes, were extremely warlike. Muhammadzai inhabited the area north east of Peshawar. The Gigians had their

settlements South of Muhammadzai areas and they were in open rebellion as their lands had been given to Barkzai chiefs under the Sikh governance. Afridis ruled supreme in the Khaibar area. Besides these, there were other tribes like Khalils, Mohammadans etc. who looked to their own Malik or Khan or council of elders – Jirga – for guidance in matters of common interest and not to the ruling authority at Peshawar. As such they were ever ready to take up arms when called upon by their chief/chiefs against the 'infidel' Sikhs. Hari Singh Nalwa knew how to match the warlike Afghans. He set up very strong administration in the Peshawar valley, and levied a cess of Rs 4 per house on the Yusafzais. This cess was to be collected in cash or in kind. For its realisation, personal household property could be appropriated or razed.

In such awe were his visitations held that 'Haria' was used by mothers to hush their unruly children. It was prudently realised that although the spell of Afghan supremacy was broken, the region predominantly populated by turbulent and warlike Muhammadan tribes could not be securely held unless a large army was permanently stationed there. A force of 12,000 men was posted with Hari Singh Nalwa to quell any sign of turbulence and to realise the revenue. The terror of the name of the Khalsa resounded in the valley. Part of the city of Peshawar was re-built and residence of the Barkzai Governor at Bala Hissar razed to the ground. Hari Singh Nalwa strengthened the Sikh control by garrisoning the frontier forts. In order to consolidate the defence of the north western frontier, Hari Singh Nalwa closely studied the topography of the Peshawar region. There were three rivers flowing from Afghanistan to Peshawar forming three water routes as well as land routes. Hari Singh Nalwa decided to build forts in this terrain in order to check infiltration and invasions by the Afghans from all these routes. The nearest mountainous pass to Kabul is the Khyber, only nine miles from Peshawar. On previous occasions, all important invaders had entered India through it. Hari Singh Nalwa decided to construct forts on all these strategic points.

On the banks of the Kabul river, Michni Fort was constructed and was put under command of Nichhatar Singh, son of the well-known general Dhanna Singh Malwai. In this Fort were stationed 300 infantry men, 100 horsemen, 10 artillery men, two big and two small cannon. Also, on the banks of *Barla* river a strong fort was built, 300 infantry men, 100 cavalry men and three cannon pieces were placed there and the required provisions supplied. It was placed under Lehna Singh Sandhanwalia, a well-known warrior. But the most important route was through the Khyber Pass, the traditional route for invaders since time immemorial. After surveying the entire area, Hari Singh Nalwa selected a rise the eastern end of the Khyber Pass which was part of the nearby village of Jamrud. It had remnants of a small mud fort. Hari Singh decided to build a fort there. The necessary material was collected and the foundation of a very strong fort laid on 17 October 1836. Hari Singh Nalwa himself laid the foundation of the fort after offering *ardaas*. Masons and labourers worked there continuously and were able to raise this historic fort in just a month and 25 days. Its walls were four yards wide and 12 yards high. It was named as Fatehgarh Sahib. Inside this were stationed 800 infantry, 200 cavalry, 80 artillery men, 10 big cannon and 12 small cannon. Maha Singh, a seasoned general, was appointed first commander of the fort. The fort faced scarcity of water overcome by harnessing a nearby stream that was under the control of the Afridis.

Major General Mohindar Singh Chopra, whose ancestral homes were left in now Pakistan, seen visiting Nankana Sahib Gurdwara with his family.

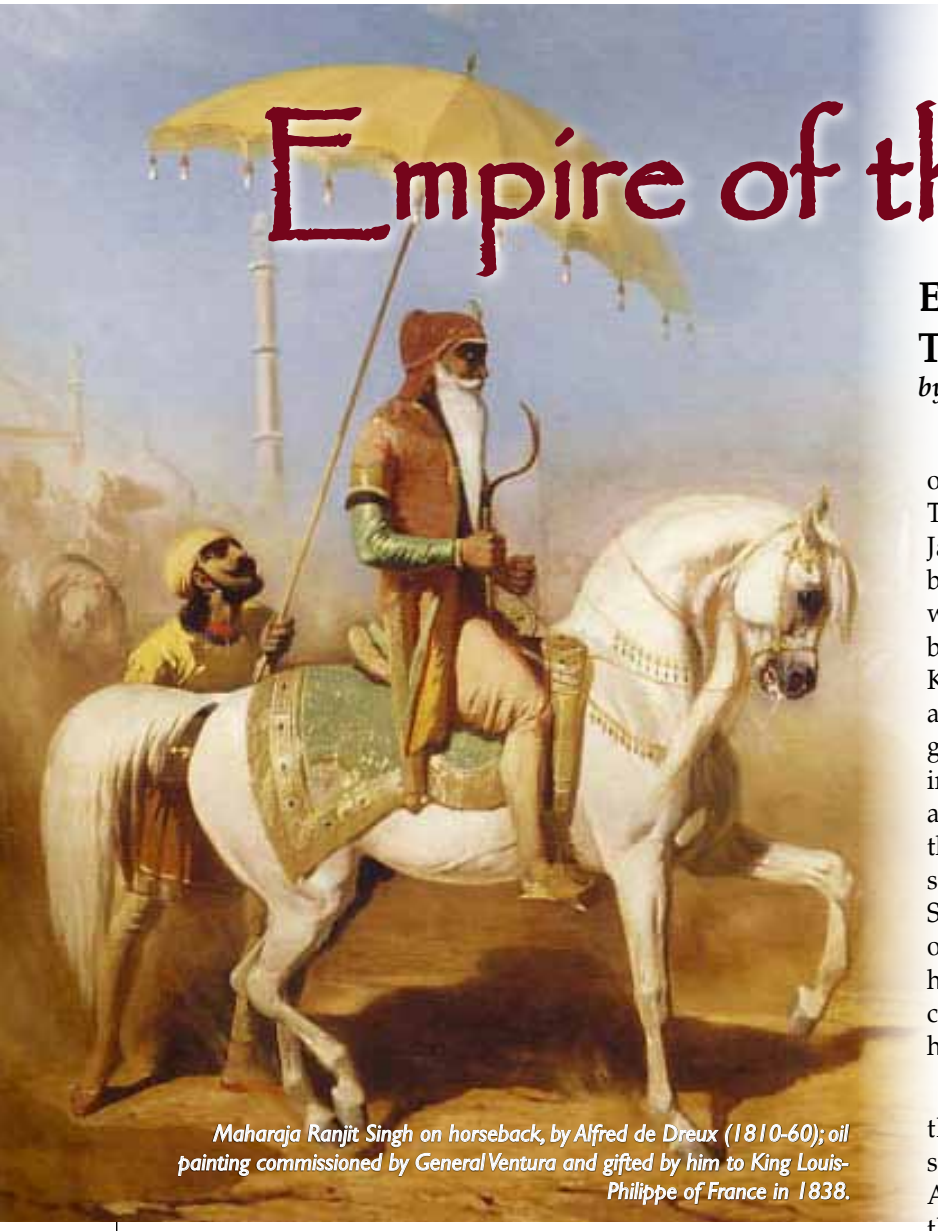
The Afridis were offered a *jagir* worth Rs 1,200 in return for control over the stream. An alternate arrangement of water was also made within the fort by digging a big well. Another important fort was built on the road leading to this fort linking Peshawar. It was just in the middle of the road between Jamrud and Peshawar and was named Burj Hari Singh and 100 men were stationed there. Besides this, Hari Singh also had old forts repaired including Attock, Khairabad, Shukkadar and Jehangira. This chain of forts on the north western part was linked by road so that reinforcements could reach in times of crisis. Peshawar was strongly fortified and it was linked to Attock by a line of towers erected at a distance of every two *kos*.

All of this has been inherited by Pakistan today.

Empire of the Sikhs

Extract from 'The Life and Times of Maharaja Ranjit Singh'

by Jyoti M.Rai & Patwant Singh.



Maharaja Ranjit Singh on horseback, by Alfred de Dreux (1810-60); oil painting commissioned by General Ventura and gifted by him to King Louis-Philippe of France in 1838.

With his southern border secured, Ranjit Singh began to pursue his ambitions of strengthening and extending his kingdom in the north. Zaman Shah would not trouble him any more as on returning home after being ousted from Lahore, he had been plunged back into the thick of court intrigues and, as a consequence of his execution of a powerful tribal leader, he had been blinded by his own younger brother Mahmud. His other brother Shah Shuja had fled to India, taking with him, along with his hopes of regaining the Afghan throne, the famous *Koh-i-Noor* diamond.

Shah Shuja sought Ranjit Singh's help to try and regain his kingdom. A cordial but wary Ranjit Singh was not keen on allowing a claimant to the Afghan throne to use Multan as his base, which in the Sikh ruler's view, was an integral part of India. So, in a sudden assault on Multan city, he invested it himself, though the Multan Fort under its brave commander Muzaffar Khan held out until it eventually fell to the Sikhs in early 1818.

Shah Shuja returned to Kabul for a brief stint on the throne before being thrown out again. This time he headed for Attock as its governor Jahan Dad Khan's guest. It was an unwise choice because the governor, on learning that Shuja was in touch with Wazir Fateh Khan, the power behind the Afghan throne whom Jahan Dad Khan passionately hated, had Shuja manacled and dispatched to his brother, Ata Mohammed, governor of Kashmir. Shuja soon found himself in a dungeon, cut off from his wife Wafa Begum and his blinded brother Zaman Shah. Even though these two, while residing in Rawalpindi, sustained on a pension they received from Ranjit Singh, Zaman Shah was busy intriguing with outside powers to regain his throne. Ranjit Singh had both families brought to Lahore where he could keep an eye on them. They were, however, honoured as state guests.

Shuja's wife, Wafa Begum, now entered the scene. Desperate over her husband's fate, she begged Ranjit Singh to rescue him from Ata Mohammed's hold in Kashmir before the latter dispatched him, in the style of her fellow Afghans. She offered Ranjit Singh the *Koh-i-Noor* (mountain of light) diamond in return for sending a military expedition to Kashmir.

Ranjit Singh, attracted by the idea, now turned his eyes to Kashmir, which was a prized possession of the Afghans, who had, in turn, taken it from the Mughals in 1752. Ranjit Singh was drawn to Kashmir for many reasons. He was lured as much by its wondrous lakes, valleys, snow-covered peaks, saffron fields, flora, fauna and flowering trees as by its exquisite crafts – carpets, shawls, walnut woodwork, jewellery, sapphires, beautiful women and much else. In 1812 the excuse he needed for a dramatic entry into Kashmir was, ironically enough, again provided by the Afghans, just as in the case of Attock and Multan.

Wazir Fateh Khan of the Barakzai tribe in Afghanistan, who had caused Zaman Shah to

The taking of Multan Fort by Sikh forces in 1818 [painting by Kirpal Singh].

be blinded, wanted to lay hands on Shah Shuja, the possessor of the *Koh-i-Noor* and currently the Kashmir governor's captive. But there was no way he could get to Kashmir with his forces since Ranjit Singh's Sikh army stood in his way at Attock. Thus, he had to seek Ranjit Singh's help in the invasion of Kashmir. With the modalities carefully worked out to the advantage of the Lahore Durbar, the combined Sikh and Afghan forces headed for Shergarh, where Shuja was imprisoned.

The man Ranjit Singh hand-picked to command the Sikh army in this joint expedition was Diwan Mokam Chand, an outstanding commander and wise in the ways of the world. It did not take him long to see through the game the Afghans were planning to play – to outpace Diwan Mohkam Chand, reach Shergarh before him and take custody not only of Shuja but of the treasury as well. The Diwan informed Ranjit Singh of this plan, who told him to outwit Fateh Khan and, if he persisted in his double-crossing, to deal with him accordingly.

Mohkam Chand rose to the occasion by taking a more precipitous but shorter route to Shergarh Fort and mounting an assault on it before the Afghans were anywhere in sight. Completely taken aback by being so easily outwitted, Fateh Khan hastened to join in the assault, and when Shergarh fell he and his men put their energies into looting the treasury while the Sikhs mounted a massive search for Shuja. On finding him they swiftly transferred him to the Sikh camp and from there to Lahore.

There was little doubt in anyone's mind that with the Sikh's conquest of Multan – the richest addition yet to their state – the next in line would be Kashmir, the second richest. And indeed, the very next year, Sikh forces defeated the Afghan army led by its governor, Azim Khan, at a hard-fought battle at Supaiya on 3 July 1819. Once again it was the Nihangs who decided the day, with their do-or-die charge against the Afghan horsemen and infantry. The remnants of the shattered Afghans fled into the hills, and the Sikh forces entered Kashmir's principal city, Srinagar, on 5 July. With the Afghans on the run from most of Punjab, Ranjit Singh's thoughts now turned increasingly to the North-West Frontier, the gateway to Afghanistan and Central Asia, Peshawar being the pivotal town of this wild and unruly region. But before he launched any major moves in this direction, the administration of Kashmir had to be placed on a sound footing.

Top: The first coin the misls minted at Lahore was a silver rupee bearing the Gobindshahi couplet in Persian; on the reverse (second from top) the coin carries the date 1822 (AD 1765).

Second from bottom: Silver rupee struck in Lahore in 1801, the year Ranjit Singh was proclaimed ruler of Punjab; the coin carries the Nanakshahi couplet, with the date 1858 on the reverse (bottom).

Srinagar was made the capital of the Kashmir Valley and from here, the governors, appointed by the Lahore court, would administer this vast region. That a great deal had to be done in Kashmir after years of Afghan misrule is graphically expressed in this quatrain by Gwasha Lal Kaul:

Khwast Haq keh in zamin-e-mina rang,

Chun dil-e-nai shawad ba fughan rang.

Kard bar wai musallat Afghan ra

Bagh-e-Jamshed dad dahan ra

(God willed that this enchanting land
Should become stinking
Like the smoking reed pipe with lamentation;
Placed it under the control of Afghan,
Gave away the garden of Eden to the vulgar.)

The first of the governors appointed to improve conditions in the woefully run and neglected valley, Moti Ram, the son of Diwan Mohkam Chand, outmanoeuvred Wazir Fateh Khan during the rescue of Shah Shuja. He gave priority to the restoration of law and order and the administration of even-handed justice; he was considered an outstanding governor, compassionate, popular and by all accounts incorruptible. Kirpa Ram, son of Moti Ram, also had a reputation for honesty and good governance and did much to add to Srinagar's appeal by laying out beautiful gardens like the Rambagh Garden on the eastern side. Bud Dal, on the western side of Dal Lake near the village of Badmarg is named after him the 'Diwan Kirpa Ram Ka Bagh'.

Another outstanding governor of Kashmir under Ranjit Singh was Hari Singh Nalwa. Like Ranjit Singh he too was born in Gujranwala and lost his father at the age of seven. His father and grandfather had fought alongside the Maharaja, the Sukerchakia chiefs Mahan Singh and Charat Singh. Hari Singh Nalwa had distinguished himself as a soldier time and again, at the siege of Kasur in 1807, Multan in 1810 and 1818 and Kashmir in 1819. He was a no-nonsense man, a strict disciplinarian, and considered at times to be too harsh. Yet he was a spiritualist, a reformer and a man with strong social concerns who constructed gurdwaras at Kathi Darwaza, Srinagar, Matan and Baramula, places that had been visited by Guru Hargobind. He did away with all the restrictions that the Afghans had imposed on Kashmiri Pandits regarding worship, dress and various customs, freed Hindus who had been made to convert to Islam to return to their original religion and abolished *bega* – forced unpaid service by villagers to government officials. He encouraged the cultivation of saffron by reducing the government share in its production and enforced correct weights and measures. He accorded priority to the government's humanitarian responsibilities, especially during the famine of 1820-22, when at a time of complete economic, social and political chaos, he geared up the entire administrative machinery to mount a rescue operation.

Like Ranjit Singh, Hari Singh Nalwa has attracted adverse judgments from a number of historians. Syad Muhammad Latif, while acknowledging him as a good soldier, regards him a failure as an administrator, and a tyrant. According to Henry T Prinsep, Nalwa was

removed from his post as governor because he was 'obnoxious to the inhabitants of Kashmir'.

What such comments from both contemporaries and later historians show, if not a deep-seated reluctance to give credit to the Sikhs or even a form of anti-Sikhism, is surely this: that it is rare to find accurate accounts of eventful times. The charges against Hari Singh Nalwa have been repeated amongst the voluminous commentary on Ranjit Singh – failure as an administrator, tyranny and much else, without any factual evidence. Who are we to believe when we are also told by a contemporary how much the Kashmiris benefitted under Sikh rule in Kashmir? 'Before Ranjit Singh took possession of the valley, her trade routes were not safe and the costly shawls were often looted en-route by the robbers. The Maharaja made special arrangements to safeguard the goods of the traders … in case of any loss of goods in transit, the traders were compensated. The trade routes were made safe to the extent that high way robberies became a thing of the past…The longest trade route was from Lahore to Petersburg via Kashmir'.

Ranjit Singh devoted much attention to the shawl making industry and helped promote this trade more than any other foreign power did. Shawl weaving came to account for almost one-third of Kashmir's revenue. Some years later, Russian shawl dealers started to visit Kashmir, although shawls intended for export to Russia had hitherto usually been dispatched via Kabul and Herat.

Ranjit Singh's agenda after Kashmir included the trans-Himalayan region of Ladakh, with its borders touching Kashmir, Baltistan and Tibet. A 30,000 square-mile tableland in Ranjit Singh's time, at a height of 14,000 feet, it is surrounded by mountain ranges 26,000 to 28,000 feet high. Its Buddhist population was of Mongolian descent, while its neighbour Batistan, with its capital of Iskardu, was ruled by a Muslim prince, Ahmed Shah. Ranjit's governor of Jammu, the Dogra Gulab Singh, also had his eyes on Ladakh. An obsessively ambitious man, he annexed it in 1834 with Ranjit Singh's consent. Since the latter was a ruler few men in their right mind would dare cross, Gulab Singh stayed subservient to him during his lifetime, but after his death the wily Dogra was to show his true colours.

More importantly, Peshawar, the last major symbol of Afghan rule in northern India, was also very much on Ranjit Singh's agenda; but before that, a number of lesser foreign territories throughout the Derajat belt had to be brought under Sikh rule. These included Dera Ghazi Khan, Dera Ismail Khan, Leiah, Mankera and Bannu. While the first two and the last lie west of the river Indus, the remaining two are located east of it. This entire region north west of the Indus, whether part of Peshawar province or outside it, was of great importance to anyone with designs on the strategically important city of Peshawar, which dominates the Khyber Pass through which all invaders have always entered India. So a year after annexing Kashmir, in 1820, Ranjit Singh personally led an expedition to Dera Ghazi Khan and invested this dependency of

Top: A Morashahi rupee, minted at Amritsar, is adorned with branches and berries, symbolising Ranjit Singh's passion for Moran, his Kashmiri love.
Second from top: General Hari Singh Nalwa, governor of Kashmir, minted this coin in 1822. The letters 'Har' on it in Gurmukhi are the first letters of Nalwa's name but also stands for the Almighty, underlining Nalwa's firm faith.
Second from bottom: The words 'Sahai Sat Guru' ('Help from the true Lord') were stamped on this unique golden rupee used by Mulraj, Diwan of Multan, to pay his troops during the siege of Multan in 1848.
Bottom: Possibly the only coin of its kind in existence, this Nanakshahi was minted at Amritsar in 1849. It lasted only a short time because the British annexed Punjab in March of the same year.

Kabul. It was a valuable acquisition since it brought Sikh forces nearer the route that Central Asians and Afghans had customarily taken into India on their way to its other rich regions, and nearer realisation of the Sikh's aim of cutting it off altogether.

The following year, the busy trade centre Dera Ismail Khan was annexed, and then when the key fort of Mankera fell, its Afghan governor was made a feudatory of the Sikhs. After the capture of Leiah towards the end of the same year, Ranjit Singh had the arid 1650 square miles of Bannu district in his sights. Its annexation, accomplished in 1825, consolidated the hold of the Sikhs on this area west of the Indus inhabited by the most turbulent people who harboured a fierce hatred of Hindus and Sikhs. It was first made a tributary of the Dera Ismail Khan region before being brought under the direct control of Lahore in 1836. The warlike tribes of this volatile region – Pathans, Baluchis, Sials, Awans, Saiyads, Qureshis and others – have lived by their own laws and codes of conduct for centuries, right up to the present time. In establishing his sway over these formidable people, Ranjit Singh succeeded where many other colonial powers in this part of the world had often faced grave problems.

Before the prized city of Peshawar was brought under Sikh control, many more possessions of the Afghans and other regional chieftains were taken over: Kohat, Manzai, Rawalpindi, Bhera, Jhang, Kangra, Kasur, Waziristan– the land of the Waziri Pathans – and a number of others. Finally, it was the turn of Peshawar.

Located almost next to the Khyber Pass, Peshawar was perhaps the most strategically vital city in India at that time. It had been used as the gateway into the Indian subcontinent over many centuries by the Lodhis, Mughals, Durranis, Nadir Shah of Persia and many others. Its name has many variants. The Chinese pilgrim Hieun Tsang referred to it in the seventh century as Po-lu-sha-pu-lo, while the eleventh century Muslim historian AD Alberuni called it Parshawar and sometimes Purshur. The Mughal Emperor Babur referred to it as Parashawaar, which was the name Akbar too preferred, although Akbar's court historian Abul Fazl used the name Peshawar (frontier town) as well. The original name of the city was Poshapura (amongst the many other names it was given). It became the seat of Gandharan art and culture around the middle of the first millennium BC and an important fountainhead of the Buddhist faith, despite the alien environment in which it found itself. Several historians hold the view that Peshawar was a part of the Kushan empire (first to third centuries AD).

In keeping with its critical strategic importance, the conquest of Peshawar demanded all of Ranjit Singh's tenacity and military skills. The first attack on it was launched from Attock in 1818 by his favourite general Hari Singh Nalwa. It was currently in the hands of the Barakzais, the powerful Afghan chiefs who had dispossessed the Durranis of it. The Barakzais, who had found it easy to defeat the Durranis, met their match in the combined Sikh forces, which first occupied Peshawar on 20 November, 1818. While its governor Yar Mohammad Khan Barakzai fled, the city's citizens raised a tribute of Rs 25,000 and offered it to Ranjit Singh for its protection. He, in turn, appointed Jahan Dad Khan, the former governor of Attock, to administer Peshawar. It was Ranjit Singh's frequent practice, as his conquests multiplied, to levy a yearly tribute on his fallen foes, instead of a policy of permanent occupation. He broke with this policy only if the tribute was not paid on time, or if the tributary tried to double cross him. Since he treated his defeated adversaries fairly, he did not take well to attempts to disregard agreements arrived at.

This, in fact, did happen in the case of Peshawar. No sooner had Ranjit Singh left for Lahore after appointing Jahan Dad Khan as governor, when Yar Mohammad Khan returned to expel him. Because of his other priorities in the north, it took Ranjit Singh several years to address the situation, which he finally did on 14 March 1823, the opportunity being provided by the Afghans themselves. Muhammad Azim Khan, former governor of Kashmir was now prime minister in Kabul, and there was no love lost between him and Ranjit Singh. He decided to assemble a formidable force to put an end to Ranjit Singh's spectacular career, and advanced from Kabul towards Peshawar, only to be met by the Sikh army at Nowshera.

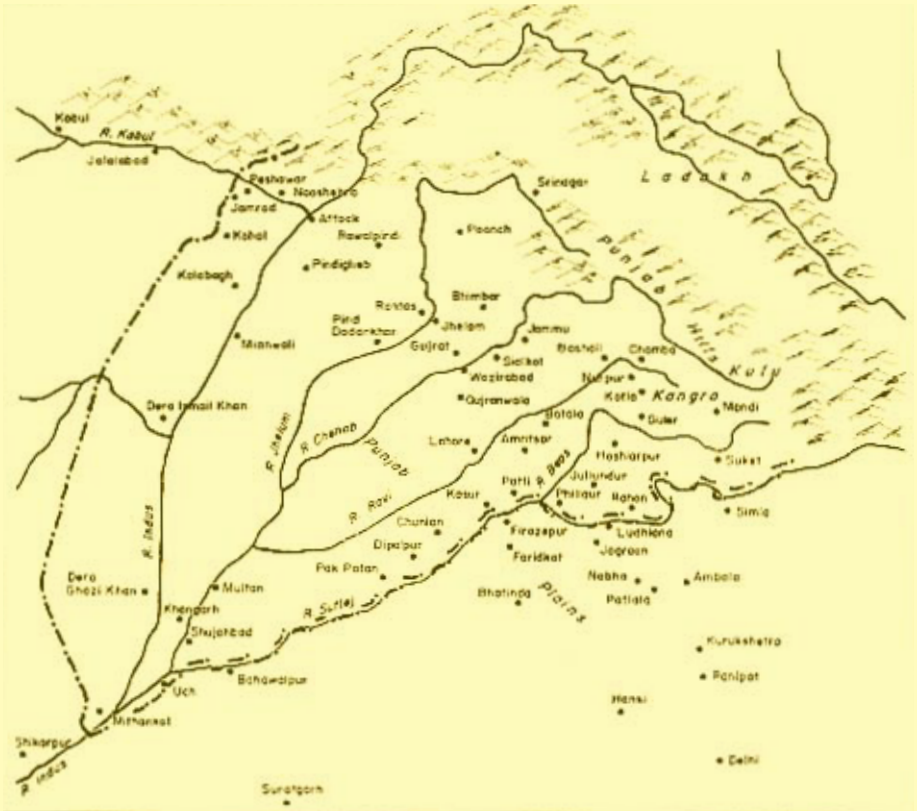
As the Gazetteer of the Peshawar District, based on first hand data, states: 'The Pathans fought with desperate valour, but could not make headway against the superior numbers and discipline of the Sikhs; frequently rallying, however, upon some low hills adjacent, they bore down bravely upon the enemy, who began to waver towards [the] evening, but regained their advantage when Ranjit Singh, seizing a standard, himself led them to victory. The last stand was made at sunset by a party of 200 Yusafzai, who fell gallantly fighting. In this action 10,000 Pathans are said to have been slain.'

After the battle of Nowshera, a victorious Ranjit Singh once again rode into Peshawar and with his customary liberality made Yar Mohammad Khan his tributary governor of Peshawar. The defeated prime

minister of Afghanistan, Azim Khan, a broken man, unable to deal with the humiliation of this defeat, died soon thereafter in May 1823.

The permanent Sikh occupation of Peshawar, however, was still years away. It wasn't until 1834 that the Sikhs brought it directly under the control of the Lahore Durbar. In the intervening years, the Afghan rulers made repeated attempts to re-establish Kabul's suzerainty over Peshawar, but Ranjit Singh always foiled them. In 1834, feeling it was time to take direct charge of Peshawar, he chose an able and trusted man to annex it, General Hari Singh Nalwa, who has been called "The Murat of the Khalsa" – after Napoleon's brother-in-law, Joachim Murat–an outstanding marshal of the French Army. With a force of 9,000 men, Hari Singh crossed the Indus and took up an unexpected position to the west of Peshawar. His moves unnerved the Barakzai Sardars, who fled and left the city to the Sikhs. In 1835, the Afghans under Dost Mohammad made an unsuccessful attempt to retake Peshawar, but it remained a part of the Sikh kingdom with Hari Singh Nalwa in charge of it with a force of 10,000 men.

The Sikh territories annexed by Ranjit Singh included Hariana, Jalalpur, Manawar, Islamgarh, Bajwat, Gujrat, Chunian, Dipalpur, Satghara, Jethpur, Haveli, Muhiyuddinpur, Jalandhar, Patti, Fatehgarh, Sujanpur, Hajipur, Mukerian, Rawalpindi, Sri Hargobindpur and Miani. The Hindu territories annexed by Ranjit Singh included Kangra, Sayyidgarh, Kotla, Jandiala, Samba, Kathua, Guler, Nurpur and Jaswan. With the exception of Jandiala, all these territories were in the hills close to the plains. In the process, about half a dozen chiefs were subverted, and the most powerful hill principalities of Kangra and Jammu suffered diminution. . . . The Muslim territories annexed by Ranjit Singh included Khushab, Kachh, Sahiwal, Kusk, Attock, Makhad, Jhang, Tulamba and Kot Nau. In the process, some Baloch and Sial chiefs were subverted and the rulers of Bahawalpur, Multan and Kabul lost some of their territories. Thus, before the conquest of Multan, the lower hills and upper and middle portions of all the five doabs fell under the effective control of Maharaja Ranjit Singh.



Territories of the Kingdom of Maharaja Ranjit Singh.

Nalwa, like Murat, was known as a general's general, and living up to his reputation, he soon initiated a project to build a fort at Jamrud, which dominates the entrance to the Khyber Pass. Within a year of its construction in 1836, the resentful Kabul regime, furious at the audacity of the Sikhs even to think of building a fort in their territory overlooking the traditional route they had taken into India for centuries, mounted an attack against it with a large force. They opened up with their guns on the walls of the fort and were about to begin an assault when Hari Singh, who had held back until the enemy advanced, suddenly fell upon them with his customary vigour, broke their ranks without much loss and put them to flight.

Soon, however, with the arrival of Afghan reinforcements, the ebb and flow of battle resumed with intensity. The outcome was in favour of the Sikhs, but at a terrible cost – the death of Hari Singh Nalwa. Badly wounded, this great warrior died the same night. His contribution to upholding the valour of the Khalsa is reflected to this day in the inscription still to be seen on the inner gateway of the Bala Hisar or the High Fort of Peshawar:

Victory to Purakh [The Supreme Being], through grace of Sri Akal. Under the liberal government of Maharaja Ranjit Singh Bahadur over the region of Peshawar in the [VS] year 1891 [AD 1834].

'Empires of the Indus'

Extract from 'The story of a River' by Alice Albinia

Ghostly rivers haunt the Punjab today, rivers dammed and diverted; vanished rivers sung about in Sanskrit hymns, rivers where Sikh Gurus were enlightened and went eternal; rivers flowing like moats past Mughal forts; rivers traversed by Afghan and Macedonian adventurers; rivers over which nations do battle.

Punjab means 'five waters'. The five rivers of the name are the tributaries which flow westwards to the Indus from India – the Beas, Sutlej, Ravi, Chenab and Jhelum – defining and shaping the fecund agricultural land they water. Where the five rivers join the Indus, Hindus wind the number five into their rituals. 'Five rivers, five prayers, five saints', a Hindu lawyer tells me, 'and five lights burning in our temples.' In the Punjab, the peasant Sufi cult of *Panj Piyara* venerated the five Shia heroes. For the Sikhs too, whose homeland is in the Punjab, *paanch* – five – became a holy number. 'I am composed of five elements,' sang Guru Gobind and chose five brave Sikhs to found his Khalsa movement and then gave the large Khalsa community five distinctive symbols of their faith. It is a cultural lacuna that in modern-day Punjab, three of the five rivers have been dammed into non-existence.

If Pakistani Punjab is haunted by its departed rivers, it is also haunted by its departed Sikhs. In 1947, Sikhs from West Punjab left Pakistan for India. The new map gave India the Sikh holy city of Amritsar but other major pilgrimage centres – such as Nankana Sahib, Guru Nanak's birthplace, which the Indians had argued should be made into "a sort of Vatican" – went to Pakistan. Since then, Sikhs in India have added a regretful clause to the *ardaas*, their formal litany:

Extraordinary visage of the Indus entering India, taken from an IAF aircraft over Ladakh.

Bestow on the Khalsa the beneficence of unobstructed visit to and free management of Nankana Sahib and other shrines and places of the Guru from which the Panth has been separated.

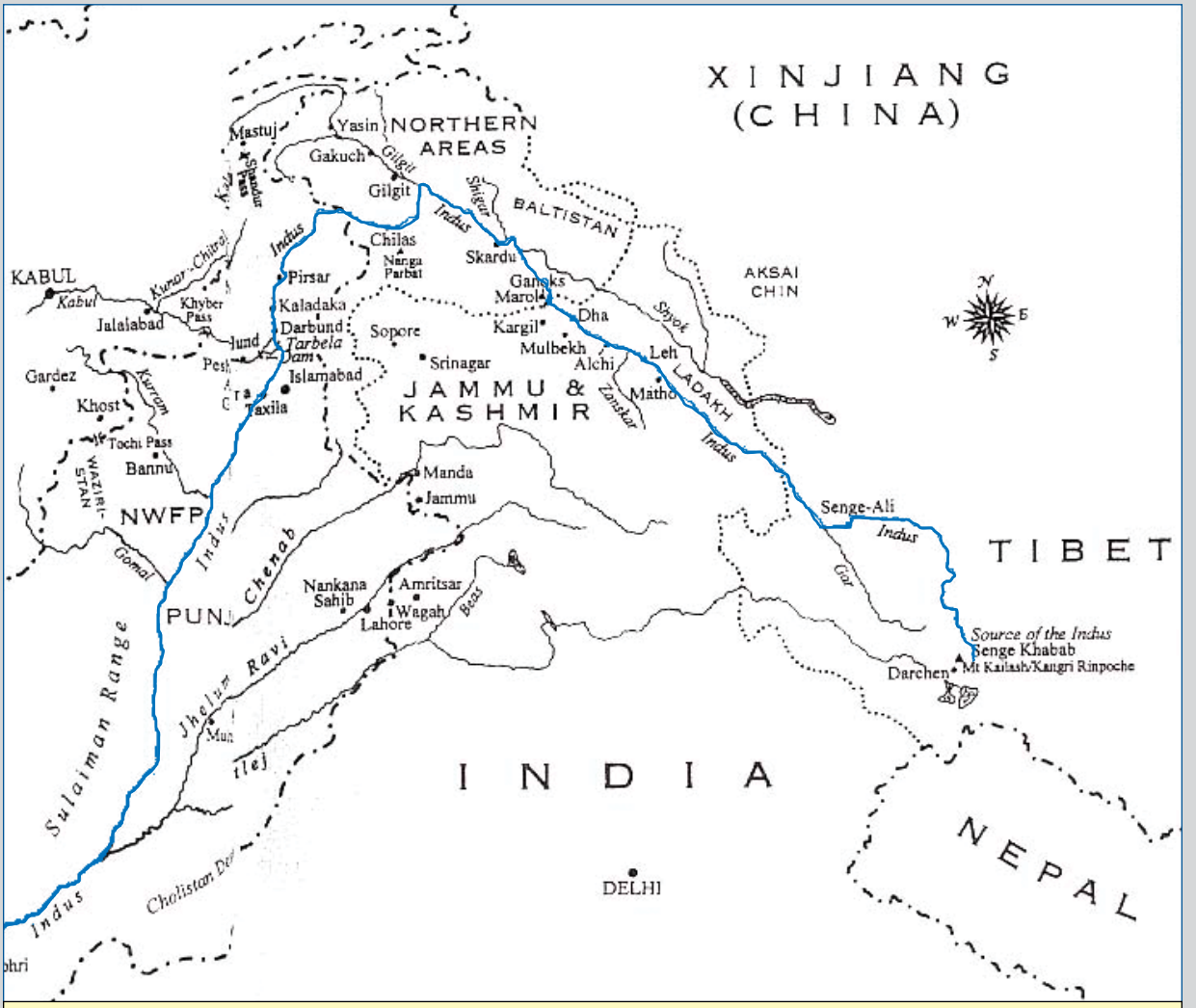
They console themselves with Guru Nanak's aphorism that 'union and separation are part of the pleasure and pain of life.'

Although very few Sikhs remain in this Islamic Republic, monuments and memories of the Sikh era still punctuate the landscape. There are Sikhs in Peshawar on the frontier with Afghanistan, where gurdwaras (Sikh temples) are crumbling. In Quetta, further south along the Afghan frontier, I stay on a street, Gordat Singh Road, named after a nineteenth century Sikh philanthropist. And in the Punjab there are the Indian Sikhs, who come here on pilgrimage.

On a quiet Friday morning in February, just before I leave Sindh behind and travel north to the Punjab, I am standing in the Hindu library on the island of Sadhubela in Sukkur, admiring the luminously coloured nineteenth-century paintings of Hindu gods and goddesses that have been preserved here. I can see the divine lovers, Radha and Krishna, elephant headed Ganesh, and even Zindapir (skimming over the Indus on four palla fish). But the biggest, most resplendent and prominent paintings are of a white-bearded man sitting cross-legged on the ground and listening to his disciples. "Who is that?" I ask the young Hindu librarian. "Our Spiritual Master," the librarian says, "Guru Nanak Sahib".

Most Hindus in Sindh are *Nanakpanthis*, followers of Guru Nanak. The boundary between Sikhism and Hinduism is less defined in Sindh than elsewhere in the subcontinent and during the 1881 and 1891 censuses, *Nanakpanthis* could not decide whether they were 'Hindu' or 'Sikh' and gave different answers each time. To this day in Pakistan, many temples and gurdwaras are combined in a way.

Until Nanak's nativity, Talwandi was a modest, run-of-the-mill hamlet between two rivers. Four and a



The river Indus from its source in Tibet to Sind and the Arabian Sea.

half centuries later, when I visit Nankana Sahib, I traipse around six different gurdwaras commemorating every detail of Nanak's famed childhood. There is a gurdwara where he was born, another where he went to school, a third in the alley where he played as a child, a fourth near the tree he sat under, a fifth in the field where he tended buffalo, and a sixth marks the spot where he was shaded from the sun by a cobra.

There is also a sacred tree, an empty concrete *sarovar* (bathing tank) – and several thousand Sikh pilgrims from India. The Pakistan Government allows carefully monitored pilgrimage groups from India to visit three holy places: Nankana Sahib, Lahore and Panja Sahib in far western Punjab. The visits were scrutinised down to the last detail: "even our hotel room numbers are written on our visas,"

Top of the mountain at Hasan Abdal where the local pir hurled the boulder upon which Guru Nanak's handprint is seen at Panja Sahib Gurdwara.

an old Sikh lady tells me. As I sit talking with Sikh pilgrims on the lawn outside Nankana Sahib's impressively large, yellow-painted, domed and pinnacled central gurdwara, they point out their Pakistani Intelligence minders : uncomfortable-looking men lounging on the grass not quite out of earshot, sipping sticky soft drinks.

In a large pre-Partition house opposite Nanak's birthplace, I meet another of Pakistan's hybrid breeds. Tall, strapping Pathan Sahab – as he is known to his neighbours – who wears a dark red Sikh turban, yet he hails from Parachinar, one of the 'tribal agencies' that border Afghanistan. In 1947, Punjabis massacred each other as they migrated in different directions to their respective new countries, and this is why it is with some trepidation that Indian Sikhs tour Pakistan today ('Security is tight, in case of bad elements'). But the Pathan or Pashtun Sikhs – those born in the Frontier Province bordering Afghanistan – did not go to India at Partition. Again and again I am told that "the Muslims protected us." "They held *jirgas*," 'says Pathan Sahab, and the tribal elders decreed that we should stay'.

This triumph over sectarianism has not endeared the Pashtun Sikhs to their Indian guests. Despite their shared religion, the Sikhs of Pakistan and the Sikhs of India do not embrace each other as brothers. "We are Pashto-speaking, they speak Punjabi," explains Pathan Sahab adding, apologetically, "We were rustic village people when we came here from the Frontier. Our women did *purdah*, we were uneducated." The Indian pilgrims tend to agree. "There are language problems," says a young teacher from Jalandhar; "Pakistan is small, its cities are small," adds a businessman from Chandigarh; "This country has got behind educationally", says a salesman of electronic goods. They seem to regard the Pashtun Sikhs as eccentric, un-*pukka*, slightly embarrassing imitations of themselves. "They are *sahajdhari*," someone whispers: "uninitiated".

The Pashtun Sikhs are probably a legacy of Ranjit Singh's huge nineteenth-century empire, which in the Maharaja's own words, extended 'to the limits of the Afghans'. It is possible that they are descendants of converts made by the sixteenth-century Sikh missionary, Bhai Gurdas, who travelled to Kabul. They may even be offspring of those Pashtuns whom Nanak met on his voyages west of the Indus. But a month later, in the Afghan town of Ghazni, I meet a small Sikh community of cloth traders, and they tell me that "We Sikhs came here from India with Sultan Mahmud." This is unlikely, for the iconoclast sultan died 439 years before Guru Nanak was

born (he did, though have an Indian contingent in his army). But the comment, inaccurate though it is, reflects once again the interleaved histories of the Indus valley. Everybody's story jostles with everybody else's and the image of the five rivers, winding like the fingers of a hand through the Punjab, illustrates the alternate convergence and division of the state's tangled history.

For a religion that grew up in the land of five rivers, it is natural that Sikhism should have water at the heart of its rituals. There are many legends about Nanak's water experiences in rivers, lakes and oceans – he made the dry wells of Mecca brim with water, converted the Muslim river saint Khwaja Khizr, and was led to God through a pool of water. Every Sikh pilgrimage involved imbibing, bathing in, or giving thanks for the cold river water that fills the gurdwara's tanks. Sikhs in the Indian Punjab are forever undressing and submerging their bodies in these cool dark 'pools of nectar'.

At Baisakhi, the spring festival, they decorate cauldrons of water with flowers in gratitude for the annual mountain snow-melt. The tanks of the Golden Temple in Amritsar 'lies in the heart of this great [Indus] river system', say the Sikh authorities. It symbolises the 'future confluence of world-cultures into a universal culture' and represents a five-thousand year-old continuity with the communal city baths of the Indus Valley Civilisation.

"But we cannot bathe at Guru Nanak's birthplace," the Indian Sikhs at Nankana Sahib complain. The holy bathing tank is dry. "*Pani ka masla* [water problems]," says Pathan Sahab. Brittle brown leaves blow across the tank's concrete base and no pilgrim deigns to go near it. The lack of water is a symbol of the Sikhs' own absence.

But Pakistan does possess some holy Sikh water. Panja Sahib is the second most important Sikh site in the country, commemorating a spring that Guru Nanak created for his followers. When a local Muslim *pir* refused to let Nanak drink from a hilltop fountain, and rolled a rock down to squash him, the Guru put out his hand to stop it and water gushed out. The place is still sacred to both faiths. Muslims climb the hill to the shrine of the implacable saint, and Sikhs perambulate around the fish-filled sacred pool at the bottom. The water here is so delicious that Emperor Akbar cried '*Wah wah !*' on tasting it (the name of nearby Wah Cantonment immortalises that moment). I even meet a canny Muslim businessman who is developing a bottling plant at Panja Sahib to export vials of holy water to the Canadian Sikh diaspora.

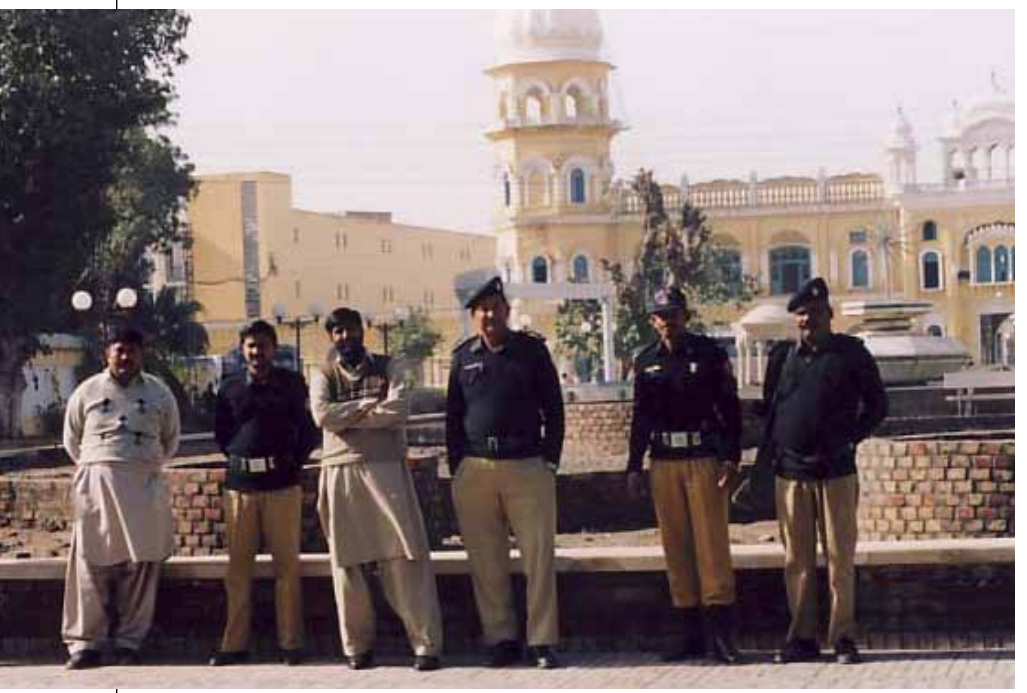
Panja Sahib, which stands on the lip of the frontier with Afghanistan, is "proof", says Pathan Sahab, "that Guru Nanak visited my native place, that we Pashtuns are original Sikhs too" – although, if his many biographies are to be believed, there was barely

Sarovar at Rohree Sahib.

anywhere that Guru Nanak did not travel to. After he emerged from the river in 1499, he lived a peripatetic life for the next two decades. In sixteenth century India, one way to search for life's meaning was to run away and join the *faqirs*. Nanak took with him his best friend, a low-caste Muslim musician called Mardana and like Sufi *qalandars* or Hindu *yogis*, wanderers in search of the Truth, they roamed all over India and beyond, together.

According to Sikh tradition, Nanak and Mardana made four major journeys, following the points of

the compass as far as they could go in each direction. They went east, to the Hindu holy places at Mathura, Benares and Prayag (Allahabad), south, to the Buddhist headquarters of Sri Lanka; and north through the Himalayas to the hallowed mountain of Kailash in Tibet where the Indus rises. Finally, they disguised themselves as Muslim *hajjis* – pilgrims – in leather sandals, blue pyjamas and bone necklaces and took a boat west – to Mecca, Medina and Baghdad. 'Proof' of this journey, too, exists at Nankana Sahib, where a gold-plated gazebo inside an enormous, incongruously polished and expensive glass case encloses a cloak embroidered with Qur'anic verses, the Caliph's farewell gift.



Security at Nankana Sahib: hundreds of security men are provided to visiting Sikh Jathas fromall over the world.

Nanak is also one of the few who has journeyed along the Indus both near its source in Tibet, and south through the Punjab and Sindh to the sea. What did such restless itinerancy denote? Later, with the benefit of hindsight, Nanak would sing of how

Religion lieth not in visiting tombs
Nor in visiting places where they burn the dead
Nor in sitting entranced in contemplation
Not in wandering in the countryside or in foreign lands
Nor in bathing at places of pilgrimage.
If thou must the path of true religion see,
Among the world's impurities, be of impurities free.

If it did anything, travelling cured Nanak of attachment to religious frippery. He had visited all the important pilgrimage places of Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam, and rejected them all. Henceforth, the geographical centre of his spiritual life was the Guru himself. He returned to the Punjab, bought some land on the banks of the River Ravi, 'donned worldly clothes', and articulated what it was he believed in.

Guru Nanak had become a purist. When pressed, it became clear that there was not much in other religious systems that he endorsed. He did not believe in asceticism – his disciples were supposed to participate fully in the world, while leaving time in the early morning and evening for meditation and prayers. He did not believe in re-incarnation, *avatars* or caste – as a child he famously refused to wear the Brahmin sacred thread that his father tried to force upon him. He also lost caste – deliberately, presumably – by crossing the *kalapani*, the 'black water', or the sea, during his voyage to Mecca.

He criticised the decadent ruling powers. Today, Nankana Sahib is a dry and dusty place. Within years of the British taking over the Punjab, woods and animals disappeared to make way for huge wheat and rice fields. British irrigation projects officially eliminated the lions and tigers, Pakistan's pesticide-fed, dam-led, intensive agriculture projects have exterminated all the rest. Of all the lands along the Indus, the Punjab has changed most in the past two hundred years.

Deforestation has obvious short-term gains–with mechanised agriculture, the bigger the fields, the bigger the return. But trees keep the land supple and moist and deforestation can create deserts. Downriver from Nankana Sahib are the desiccated remains of Harappa, a city from the third millennium BC, which despite its extraordinary sophistication, collapsed and perished probably because its citizens over-exploited forest and water supplies – a stark provocation to sustainable resource use, though one blithely ignored by modern Pakistan landlords.

And thus at Guru Nanak's birthplace, where Sikh pilgrims are

unable to bathe in the *sarovar*, it is dust which they take home with them to India as a sacred souvenir. In the hallway of the central gurdwara, I pass a woman crouched on the floor, pulling back the mats that have been laid there and squirreling away the dust in a twist of paper. 'What is she doing?' I ask a man in a sunshine-yellow turban. He bends down and scoops up some dust in his fingers: "We regard the dust of Nankana Sahib as holy," he says, and drops it on to his tongue like *sherbet*.

That evening I return to Lahore, and pay a last visit to the Dera Sahib Gurdwara. Here, standing on the edge of the red-light district, between Emperor Aurangzeb's sublime sandstone mosque and the royal fort, encircled to the north by the waterless River Ravi, is the shrine of Maharaja Ranjit Singh.

Sitting in a tiny office near the Maharaja's tomb, sipping sweet milky tea, is a Sikh who had fled from Pakistani Punjab to India at Partition, and fled back again in the 1980s. Manmohan Singh Khalsa shares a name with the Indian Prime Minister, but he dismisses his namesake as a 'puppet'. A member of the guerrilla army that led a 'terrorist' campaign for Khalistan, an independent Sikh state, Manmohan Singh claimed asylum in Britain in the 1980s after the Indian Army stormed the Golden Temple. Declared a wanted man by the Indian government, Lahore is the nearest he has been to Amritsar since then.

"*Khalistan Zindabad* ['Long Live Khalistan']," Manmohan Singh says, and laughs: "In India they would put me in jail for saying that." (The Pakistan Government, by contrast, welcomed – perhaps even armed – Khalistan fighters). He is unrepentant about losing his Indian homeland. "I could not live in Occupied Punjab," he says. "In Pakistan Sikhs have more freedom. Sikhism was born here. Maharaja Ranjit Singh ruled from Lahore. Muslim and Sikh culture is the same." In London, he has founded the World Muslim-Sikh Foundation to celebrate "our common language, customs and tribal background".

"What about Partition?" I ask. He frowns. "That *nafrat* was caused by Brahminism, the black spot on Asia".

"If Sikhs are so happy in Pakistan," I say finally, "why are there no Sikhs in the army?" I am thinking the ultimate irony: that the Pakistan Army, which has its roots in Sikh martial traditions, has never conscripted a single Sikh. But Manmohan Singh has a triumphant answer. "General Pervez," he says, "is very good to Sikhs." He tells me how he talked with Musharraf for "three and a half hours" after the General became Dictator. I said, "Take Sikhs in the army". He said, "Ok". And now there is a Sikh, the first in Pakistan's history. He joined two months ago. A young boy from Nankana Sahib'.

Manmohan Singh sits back and drains his cup of tea. It is dark outside, and the last prayer of the day is being called from the Badshahi Masjid. We sit and listen in silence, for the mosque is famous not only

'This land is mine': father and son at a Gurdwara sarover in Pakistan.

for the vastness and perfection of its red sandstone courtyard but also for the beauty of its *muezzin's* voice. "The first Sikh officer in the Pakistan Army …" says Manmohan Singh, and I add: "From the village where Guru Nanak was born …" As we sit in the dark, listening to the *azan*, I wonder when the converging rivers will divide.

Special Review

Hari Singh Nalwa, Champion of the Khalsaji

The book **Hari Singh Nalwa, Champion of the Khalsaji** chronicles the spectacular achievements of Hari Singh Nalwa, whose expertise as an administrator and military commander in the troubled North West Frontier Province remains unparalleled. This is clearly evident from the fact that even after two centuries, the British, Pakistani, Russian, NATO and American administrators have been unable to restore law and order in the area.

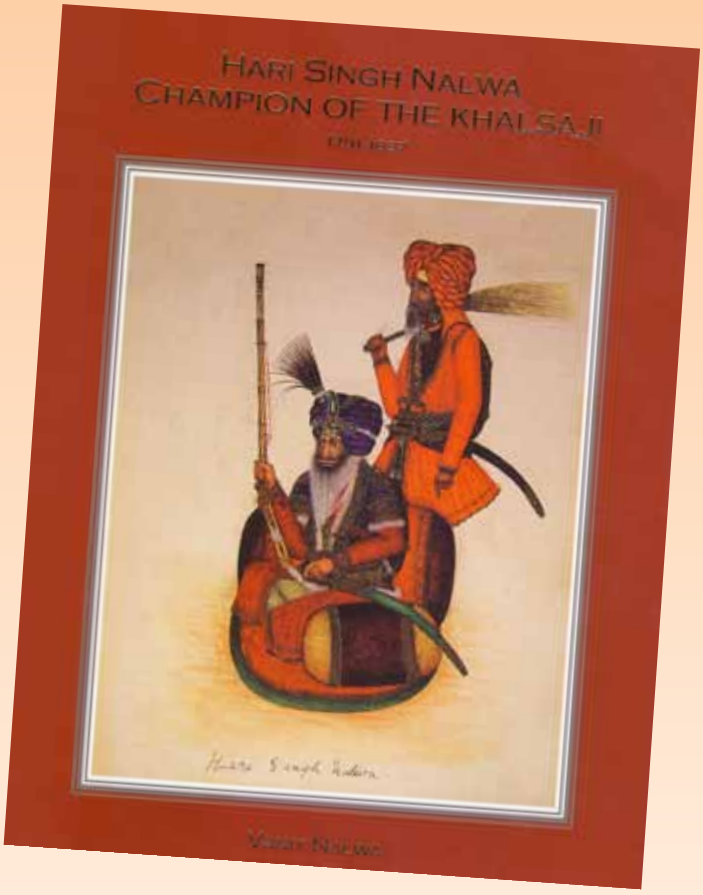
As the Commander-in Chief of the North West Frontier Province of Ranjit Singh's kingdom, he successfully spread the frontier of the Sarkar Khalsaji to the mouth of the Khyber Pass. Infiltrators had been carrying on with their relentless loot, rape, destruction and forced conversions to the Islamic religion for almost eight centuries and it was Nalwa's strong presence which proved to be a foil for all the ferocious tribes of the region. His life is an inspiration for the youth to emulate in any part of the world as he upheld the traditions exemplified by Guru Gobind Singh.

Tracing the life and times of a great hero of Indian history in the late eighteenth century, the book dwells on interesting aspects of Sikhism holistically and offers resplendent accounts of their values, systems, ideologies and beliefs as well as offers insights into the beginnings of the British invasion of the Punjab. The author, Vanit Nalwa, creates a vivid picture of the socio-economic, cultural, political and religious environment of this remarkable era and enables the reader to get a glimpse into the lives of the common people of those days.

The conquest of Peshawar by the Sikhs took them one step closer to the strongest bastion of the Afghans, namely Kabul. As the Afghan invasions into Punjab over decades had left indelible scars on the psyche of Sikhs, their ultimate aspiration was the subjugation of Kabul, which was virtually impossible without Hari Singh Nalwa's intervention.

"Ranjit Singh's dilemma relating to Peshawar is evident from the fact that he took possession of the territory at least three times, but chose each time not to hold on to it. From 1818 onwards, the conquest of Peshawar was often on the Maharaja's mind and it presented the strongest approach-avoidance conflict of his career…the only thing that had held Ranjit Singh back from taking Peshawar was a distrust of his ability to preserve this acquisition. "

"In January 1834, Hari Singh Nalwa accompanied by Ventura and Ram Lal was asked to encamp near Akora, 36 miles from Peshawar.



According to the established practice, the Sardar was required to take fifty horses from the *Nazim* of Peshawar and send them to the Sarkar. In February, the Maharaja informed Hari Singh Nalwa that he proposed to send Kanwar Nau Nihal Singh towards Peshawar. He advised the Sardar that the horses, etc., be taken from the *Nazims* and sent to him before the arrival of the Kanwar. The Maharaja's grandson left for Peshawar with instructions to conduct the affairs of the place in consultation with Sardar Hari Singh.

In March, Hari Singh was asked to withdraw Jawahir Singh, his son, from the fort of Kailaskhad and to garrison it strongly. Just then, information was received from Hari Singh Nalwa of an

insurrection around Attock. Hari Singh departed towards the Yusafzai territory of Panjtar and Ventura moved in that direction from Nala Buddha. A letter was sent to Sultan Mohammed Khan from the Court of Lahore warning that as he had delayed the sending of swift-footed horses, Sardar Hari Singh had been appointed to "ravage and plunder" his district. He could, however, still prevent this if by the time of the Sardar's arrival the stipulated horses were sent.

Kanwar Nau Nihal Singh was instructed to cross the Indus and encamp there. Hari Singh Nalwa was required to report the grandson's activities to the Maharaja. Sultan Mohammed Khan's son, until recently hostage in Lahore, was now in the custody of a corps of Prince Kharak Singh. He was to be handed over to Hari Singh as soon as Kharak Singh's men crossed the Indus at Attock. The Shehzada's men had been specifically directed to hand over the son of the Peshawar Barakzai to Sardar Hari Singh and none other, taking a receipt from him. A fresh set of instructions were received by Hari Singh. He was now required to demand fifty-five horses from Sultan Mohammed Khan, instead of the fifty stipulated earlier. He was also required to exchange the hostage for another. Ranjit Singh warned him not to rely on the word of the Afghans".

Ballad speaks …

Alaf *— Aafreen jammana kahen saare, Hari Singh doolo Sardar taayin,*
Jamadar Beli Raje Sahib kolon, kad ucha buland Sardar taayin,
Dhani teg da mard naseeb wala, saaya os da kul sansar taayin,
Kadaryar pahaadan nu sodhyo su, Kabal kambaya khauf Kandhaar taayin. [1]
(Qadir Bakhsh *urf* Kadaryar, 1840: 136)

"Alaf — It was universally agreed that the birth of Sardar Hari Singh was a blessing indeed. His stature was colossal and superior to that of Jamadar Khushal Singh, Misr Beli Ram and Raja Dhian Singh. The brave Sardar, a highly skilled swordsman, was blessed with good fortune; his renown spread in the world. He conquered mountainous terrains and hill-tribes, said Kadaryar; Kabul trembled and his fear was felt in Kandahar".

Reproduced here are additional **excerpts** from the book, which enable us to gauge the mood and flavour of Indian history during the life and times of the great warrior Hari Singh Nalwa.

This part talks about the spirit of Sikhism and the process of initiatiation and practice of the religion: "The practice of initiation into the Khalsa laid the foundation for the enduring martial spirit of the Sikhs. Anyone who followed the general guidelines laid down by the first nine Gurus was a Sikh (also 'Seik', 'Seikh', 'Sik' or 'Sicque'). Those who also underwent the rite of *Pahul*, as prescribed by Guru Gobind Singh, became the 'Singhs'. They constituted the Khalsa Panth — Commonwealth of the Khalsa.

The continuing tradition of the Khalsa resulted in the Sikhs becoming the most remarkable population of the Indian sub-continent. Their religious beliefs distinguished them from the Hindustanis, a nation of whom it was said, "one Englishman is enough to drive millions of these men". The Sikhs were perceived as a sect empowered to the extent of being perceived as 'haughty'. An employee of the East India Company who travelled into the Punjab observed, "The Khalsah Sicques, even of the lowest order, are turbulent people, and possess a haughtiness of deportment, which, in the common occurrences of life, peculiarly marks their character". He went on to describe an incident in support of this observation:

"Our party was joined by a Sicque horseman, and being desirous of procuring his acquaintance, I studiously offered him the various attentions which men observe to those they court. But the Sicque received my advances with a fixed reserve and disdain, giving me, however, no individual cause of offence; for his deportment to the other passengers was not less contemptuous. His answer, when I asked him the name of his chief, was wholly conformable to the observations I had made of his nation. He told me (in a tone of voice, and with an expression of countenance, which seemed to revolt at the idea of servitude) that he disdained an earthly superior, and acknowledged no other master than his prophet!'

A small fraction from amongst the Khalsa Sikhs were called the Akalis, the military priests of Sikhism. They served to protect Sikh temples and the community. By the nineteenth century, there had emerged two classes of Akalis — the reckless and the orderly. The first were confined chiefly to Amritsar; the latter were in attendance at numerous Sikh shrines that were scattered all over the Punjab. They drew special notice because of their exaggerated militant stance and picturesque appearance. Their knee-length blue shirts, high-peaked turbans embellished with quoits (steel rings with razor-thin edges) drew immediate attention".

Shedding light on the cultural achievements and the secular mindset of the Sikh community is this engaging excerpt:

"The success of the Sikhs emanated from their open-mindedness — using what was useful and empowering. Sikh contributions to world culture include their beautiful and well-maintained shrines that borrowed elements from Mughal architecture. In the Guru Granth Sahib, alongside the hymns composed by the Sikh Gurus were included the works of leading saints belonging to other religions. This lent the work a truly national and secular character. The Sikh hymns presented an exceptional blend of devotional poetry and Indian classical music.

Each hymn was set to one of the 31 traditional *ragas* (Indian musical measures). Each *raga* within the Hindustani system encapsulated a mood, the time of day and the season. Thus the *raga* to which a hymn had been set, pre-determined when it was usually to be recited.

The Sikh religion encourages its followers to contribute a part of their earnings for the upkeep of their shrines, funding the *langar* (free community kitchen) and for the support of other humanitarian causes. The concept of *kar sewa*, or selfless free community service, is rather unique and central to Sikhism. The spotlessly clean Sikh shrines, from where free kitchens are run, are perhaps the best example of this. People of all nations and communities are welcome to partake of Sikh hospitality. Devotees vie with each other for an opportunity to cook, wash dishes, perform chores relating to the upkeep of the shrine, and facilitate the services. The clergy do not need to prompt the devotees to either visit the shrine or make donations. Long queues are seen at the doorstep of the abode of the Guru from the early hours of the morning, especially on Sundays and holidays. Donations in cash and kind keep pouring in.

Sikh first names are perhaps an outstanding example of gender-neutrality. Thus, the unisex 'Amarjit' signifies the eternal winner; 'Paramjit' is both the first and complete winner; 'Kuldip' denotes the beacon of the tribe. The second name, 'Singh' or 'Kaur', distinguishes the Sikh male from the female. 'Singh' denotes a lion (male) and 'Kaur' means princess (female). Both these words were bestowed by Guru Gobind Singh. They signify valour and grandeur of the highest order.

At the more earthy level, Sikh cuisine (Punjabi food), folk songs, and dance (*Bhangra*) have gained tremendous popularity worldwide. The spirit that the Sikhs induce into the subcontinent is epitomised in transformation of the staid *Balle,* which in Persian simply means "hello", to the vivacious *Balle Balle!* The latter is a joyous exclamation, celebrating life. The Sikh male continues to be the only resident of the vast Indian subcontinent readily recognised anywhere in the world. His distinctive turban (in a myriad of colours) and his uncut though carefully groomed beard, distinguish him".

The following lines capture the spectacular valour, courage and adventures of Nalwa:

"The event that gave Hari Singh the cognomen 'Nalwa' was brought before the English-speaking world in 1834 by H.T. Prinsep, the Persian Secretary to the British Governor-General. Hari Singh became 'Nalua' after the Sardar "had killed a tiger single-handed on horseback, with the sacrifice, however, of his horse". The event was personally confirmed by Hari Singh to a German, who visited him in 1836.

Ballad speaks …

By the age of fifteen, fully armed, he wrestled a tiger to its death. He was extremely good-looking and his aura sparkled. So formidable was the reputation he had gained since childhood that the mere mention of his name was enough to make the enemy forsake food and water. By the age of sixteen, said Sitarama, Sardar Hari Singh had gained a great reputation.

Killing a tiger in one-to-one combat without the use of firearms was universally seen as the ultimate feat of valour. How Hari Singh acquired the cognomen 'Nalwa' was not disputed, but why the appellation 'Nalwa' was given to him for killing a tiger remained inadequately answered. *Sher* was the title bestowed on those who accomplished such a feat. The word 'Nalwa' (variously spelt in the literature as 'Nalooa', 'Nalua', 'Nulowa', 'Nalwah', 'Nulwuh', 'Neelwa', 'Nellowah', 'Narua', etc.) does not mean tiger-killer.

Bele vichon bhukha sher kudd ke jiyon baahar aave, phurti ivein kar jhatt aanvda Lahore jee,

Sundar sajeel jadon wadyaa bazaar ander, dekh ke charhat udde duniya de bhaur jee,

Koi kahe Rabb jaane hoya eh jawan kithe, koi kahe haiga kisey Badshah da Kaur jee,

Sitarama hundee sifat saare shehar vich, tutt jaande maan dekh soorme da taur jee.

"He (Hari Singh) leapt forth like a hungry tiger from his lair and speedily made his way to Lahore. When this dashing handsome youth entered the city, he left the onlookers spellbound. While some conjectured where he came from, others were convinced that he could be none other than the son of a king. The city was abuzz with his praise, said Sitarama, and the pride of many a valiant was humbled".

A very interesting commentary on the traits, customs and mannerisms of the Sikhs and the Afghans by Vanit Nalwa reveals the finer nuances of their similarities and the resemblance is almost uncanny:

"Hari Singh Nalwa knew the Afghans primarily as antagonists, whom he met on the battlefield with his sword drawn with indomitable courage and in hostility. The Sikhs and the Afghans, however, appeared to possess many similar features of character. The only feature that clearly distinguished the two was the religious bigotry of the Afghans. For the rest, they were alike in physical build, mental attitude and natural tendencies. Both were unsophisticated, rough and vigorous "beating the ploughshare into a sword when the occasion demanded

it". Both called their leaders 'Sardar'. Their names were identical Fateh Singh (Sikh), Fateh Khan (Afghan), Sher Singh and Sher Khan, etc. Even in the twenty first century, one continues to be mistaken for the other.

There was no Afghan or Sikh Kingdom before the eighteenth century. Ahmed Shah Durrani founded the Afghan kingdom in 1747 and Ranjit Singh established the Sikh Kingdom in 1799. Ganda Singh, a Sikh, wrote the first well-researched book on the father of modern Afghanistan. No one admired Hari Singh Nalwa more than the Afghans themselves did, for he had the qualities that they valued most highly — personal valour and fearlessness".

Since the great warrior was also known for his abilities as a reformist and as a soldier dedicated towards the improvement of the quality of life of the masses, this excerpt elucidates on his vision and foresight as an able administrator:

"Hari Singh Nalwa invested in a water supply system for Haripur, popularly known as the Rangila Canal. This was a model water-distribution system of its time. The water from the Dor River fell into a large tank and from there a novel system distributed it to the town and adjoining villages. Water fell into the tank by a single channel and emerged from it through a series of apertures. The width of the outlet was proportional to the customary share enjoyed by the village, or villages, with which each connected. Within the villages themselves, the distribution of the water was nearly always *lariwar* or *bariwar*. Each cultivator in turn took what he wanted, beginning with the man nearest to the head of the watercourse and ending with the man farthest from it. Many water ducts traversed the town of Haripur to meet the irrigation and sanitation needs of the inhabitants and to create a green cover for the town. This system remained one of the most outstanding examples of water resource management in this region — reflecting Hari Singh's ingenuity and far-sightedness".

Hari Singh Nalwa, Champion of the Khalsaji is indeed a must read for the general reader, an avid researcher or scholar. Rich and layered in terms of content, comprising both of statistics and data intertwined with an exciting biographical account of Hari Singh Nalwa, this work is an enriching document.

The rare collection of spectacular paintings, drawings, sketches, illustrations and maps are verily the real treasures of this work. They amply complement the content and historical facts as the story progresses and the excellent production quality further enhance their impact. Not only this, but also an accurate semblance of the actual conditions prevalent in the nooks and crannies, by-lanes, mofussil towns and villages in 19th Century Punjab has been vividly captured. Information about the currency, food, agriculture, clothes, weights and measures, water management, trade routes, land reforms, education, hygiene, shrines and so on establishes the relevance and importance of this impeccably researched and spectacularly compiled book for the contemporary reader. Ballads, legends, poetic excerpts and quotations, further enhance the rich warp and weft of this dynamic piece of work and impart an element of story-telling to the saga.

A descendant of the great Hari Singh Nalwa, the author Vanit Nalwa has used her experience as an enrichment trainer to resolve and explain the underlying nuances of the turbulent history of India as a template for today's generation to study and probably use these life wrenching lessons so as to not repeat the same mistakes and ensure on a peaceful and terrorist-free future.

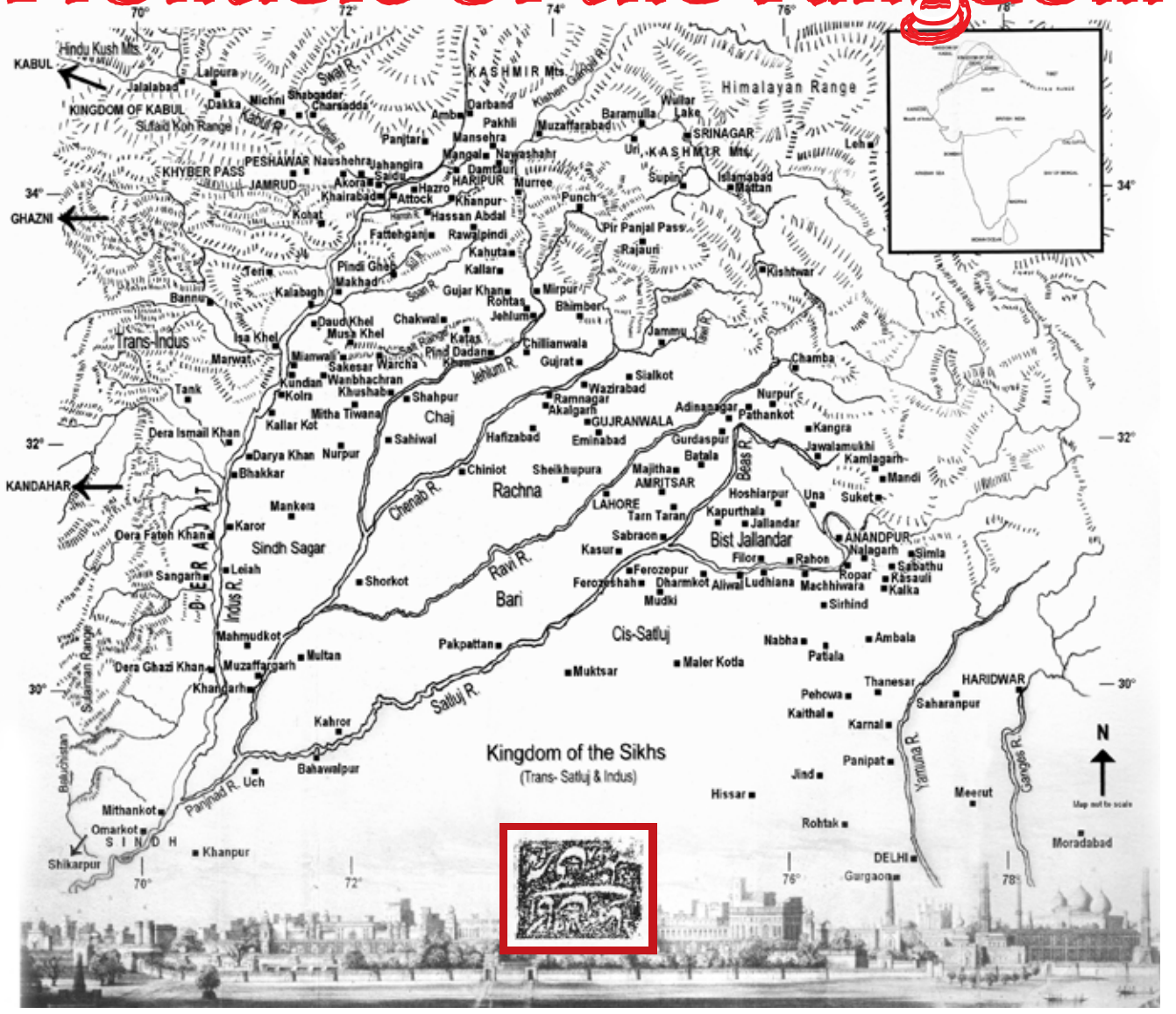
A work of this magnitude and dynamism is certainly worthy of savouring in great detail, page by page, in order to fully gauge the extent and wisdom of the larger than life persona of Hari Singh Nalwa, a man of myriad achievements and feats, carried with much grace and dignity on his able shoulders.

The author Vanit Nalwa is a Consultant Psychologist and Hypnotherapist and heads EmPower-Consulting Psychologists. She conducts personal enrichment programmes for individuals and companies. Vanit taught Psychology for over a decade at the University of Delhi, and at Assumption University, Thailand.

Vanit received a Ph.D. in Neuropsychology (1984) from the University of Delhi. She was a recipient of the Commonwealth Scholarship to do post-doctoral research at the University of Oxford, UK (1986). Vanit won a Fulbright Scholarship to train at the National Institutes of Mental Health, Maryland, Bethesda, USA (1991). Her research work has been published in Indian and International scientific journals. She has authored two books, besides numerous articles in the popular press.

Vanit's training and experience as a psychologist and researcher encouraged her to foray into history. 'Hari Singh Nalwa — Champion of the Khalsaji' is the result of eight years of intense research based on Archival records, Persian and Gurmukhi manuscripts, besides first-hand reports of nineteenth century travellers.

Frontiers of the Kingdom



Extracts from "Hari Singh Nalwa : Champion of the Khalsaji"

As an independent nation under the Khalsa of Guru Gobind Singh, the boundaries of the Sikh Kingdom extended well beyond 'Punjab—the land of the five rivers'. At the heart of the Kingdom of the Sikhs lay the Pothohar (Potwar) plateau. Its northern boundary stretched far beyond Attock to include Hazara-i-Karlugh, Pakhli, Damtaur and Gilgit. Its north eastern periphery was contiguous with Chinese Tibet and included Kashmir and Ladakh. Mandi, in the Kangra Hills, marked its eastern extent. In the early years of the formation of the kingdom, a treaty with the British had fixed its east-southeast limit along the course of the river Satluj. The southern extremity of the Sindh Sagar Doab of the Sikh Kingdom formed a boundary with the provinces of Sindh and Rajputana. To the west, it included the trans-Indus region of the Derajat and was bound by the Sulaiman Range. The north western boundary of the kingdom stretched beyond Peshawar to the Khyber Pass, at the very foothills of the Hindu Kush Mountains. The total surface area of the Sikh Kingdom roughly matched that of the British Isles.

In Ranjit Singh's lifetime, the frontier of the Sikh Kingdom began at Pakhli in the Himalayan zone along the left bank of the Indus and stretched down to Muzaffargarh less than 500 miles from the Arabian Sea. The Salt Range divided this vast landmass into two. Above it was the Pothohar plateau, comprising the fertile tracts of Attock, Rawalpindi and Jehlum. Below the Salt Range commenced the Sindh Sagar, one of the five famous *doabs*.

The Salt Range chain of hills commences at Kalabagh on the Indus and runs right across to the banks of the Jehlum, north of Khushab and south of Chakwal. The formation derives its name from extensive deposits of rock salt, a very valuable commodity. The main chain commences at Chail, formed by the convergence of three spurs emerging from the river Jehlum running towards Shahpur and Mianwali. The Salt Range was more than five miles in breadth and its vegetation was scanty. The bold and bare precipices — some of which arose at once from the plain — presented a frightful aspect of desolation.

The Sindh Sagar Doab, a wedge of a country between the rivers Indus and the Jehlum, had two distinct tracts. Along the left bank of the Indus lay a strip of riverain land locally called the Kachhi. This tract was often flooded by the river and was of great fertility. The outcome of the floods was sometimes capricious fields and hamlets being swept away in a few hours. About half this area was cultivated and the rest was covered with tall *Saccharum* grass and tamarisk shrub. The whole of the Kachhi was intersected with straggling branches of the Indus. The other tract was the vast barren inland known as the Little Desert or the *Thal*, a desolate waste of shifting sand hills on a level surface of hard clay surrounding Mankera. This region had once formed the bed of the Indus and a change in its course below Kalabagh had given rise to this wasteland.

The fort of Attock on the left bank of the river Indus, built by the Mughal Emperor Akbar, had served as the Afghan headquarters north of the Salt Range. It became a major replenishment point for all armies crossing the Indus. Afghan appointees of the Kingdom of Kabul held this fort, as they did most of the territory along this frontier. The Sindh Sagar Doab was chiefly controlled from Mankera and Mitha Tiwana. Nawab Hafiz Ahmed Khan, a relative of the Durranis, exerted considerable influence in this region. Besides Mankera, he commanded a vast area protected by 12 forts. With the weakening of Afghan rule in Kabul, the governors of Attock, Mankera, Mitha Tiwana and Khushab had declared their independence.

The 325 mile-long strip of land comprising Dera Ismail Khan, Dera Fateh Khan and Dera Ghazi Khan, was referred to as Derajat. This tract lay locked between the Indus and the Sulaiman Range that divided the Indian sub-continent from the Iranian Plateau. This region was a part of the Kingdom of Kabul.

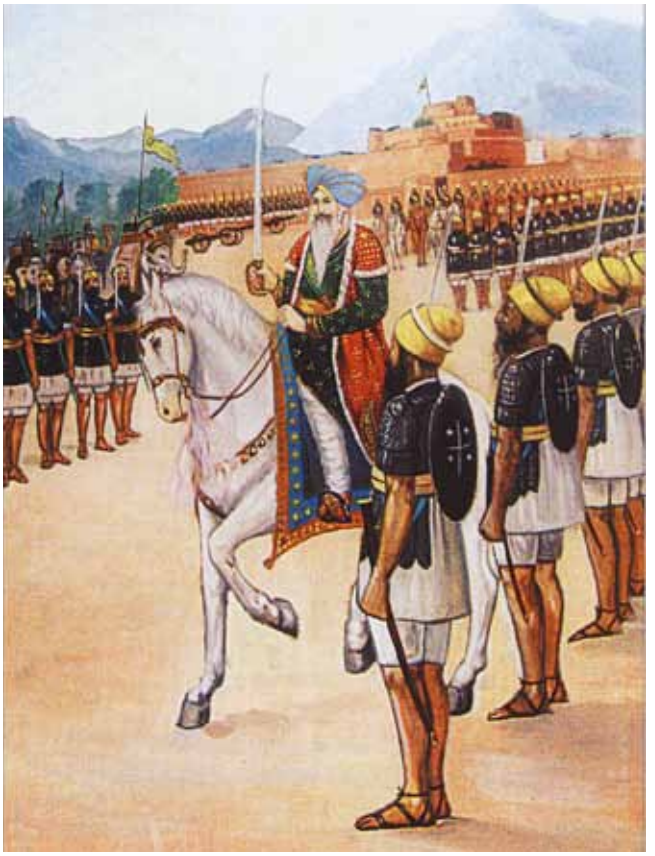
Hari Singh at the Indus Frontier

In June 1813, the Battle of Attock was fought and won by the Sikhs under the leadership of Diwan Mohkam Chand, the first victory of the Sikhs over the Durranis and the Barakzais. The Sikhs were victorious despite open rebellion in their ranks. At the height of action, Ghaus Khan, the *Daroga* (superintendent) of the artillery had stood inactive and refused to fire when commanded to do so. The *Daroga* of the cannons driven by horses, Mazhar Ali, was also summoned by Ranjit Singh after the battle and his men were imprisoned. The *Sipah Afghanan* (Afghan soldiers), an integral part of the Sikh Army, did not appear in the pay of the Sikhs after this battle. With this conquest, the fort of Attock became a Sikh stronghold along the western frontier of their kingdom. It was this victory that facilitated subjugation of the entire Indus frontier by the Sikhs.

For Hari Singh Nalwa, the victory at Attock was to mark the start of a lifetime's endeavour of guarding and extending the western boundary of the Sarkar Khalsaji. With the conquest of Attock, the adjoining regions of Hazara-i-Karlugh and Gandhgarh became tributary to the Sikhs. In November 1813, the Maharaja personally visited this territory to the northeast of Attock. The zamindars of Gandhgarh offered him horses as nominal tribute. Thereafter, no tribute was forthcoming.

In June 1815, the *kiladar* of the fort of Attock informed the Maharaja that Hari Singh Nalwa and his men had gone towards Kundagarh (Gandhgarh) with a "Ghari" for the collection of tribute. A "Ghari" or *Gaadi* was a covered

General Hari Singh Nalwa, Commander-in-Chief of the army along the Sikh Kingdom's most turbulent frontier with the Kingdom of Kabul. (Reproduced from John McQueen's manuscript).



Champion of the Khalsaji, Sardar Hari Singh Nalwa on horseback inspecting his troops; the fort of Fatehgarh (Jamrud) in the background.

vehicle used for transportation and for carrying valuables. Sherbaaz Khan challenged him and many lives were lost on both sides, but eventually the Khan fled on being defeated. Hari Singh carried the valuables to safety. It did not take the Sikhs long to discover the insecurity of this region. Thieving and robbery was the means of livelihood for the inhabitants of this place.

The following year Hari Singh was sent to Mankera, south of the Salt Range. The Nawab of Mankera's influence was widespread in the *Thal* region of the Sindh Sagar Doab and it extended into the trans-Indus region. His territory began ten miles west of Multan and stretched as far as Deraband, at the foot of the Sulaiman Range. In the south, it began from Mahmudkot and ran up to the hills of Kalabagh, 50 miles north of Dera Ismail Khan. The Nawab's strongly held forts provided good protection to his territory.

Ranjit Singh decided to approach Mankera from its southern extremity. After the Baisakhi of 1816, Misr Dewan Chand, Illahi Bakhsh, Fateh Singh Ahluwalia, Nihal Singh Attariwala and Hari Singh Nalwa accompanied by seven *paltans* and the *topkhana* went towards Mahmudkot. When news of its conquest arrived, it left the Maharaja so elated at the success of Sikh arms that he celebrated this victory with the firing of cannons.

Kabul Kingdom seeks Khalsaji's help

Towards the end of 1812 Fateh Khan Barakzai, *vazir* of Shah Mahmud, appeared at the doorstep of the Sikhs with a request for a joint expedition to Kashmir. Its purpose was to reclaim Kashmir from the errant Afghan Governor. The offer was necessitated because the passage to Kashmir now lay through territory tributary to the Sikhs. The estimation in which the Afghans in Kabul already held the Sikhs was evident from the fact that they actually sought their co-operation rather than risk confrontation. The Sikhs readily lent their assent to the proposal. The joint venture would not only give them first-hand knowledge of the passage into Kashmir, but a rich haul of booty was also promised to them. Most importantly Waffa Begum, Shah Shuja's wife, at this time a refugee in the Punjab, had pledged to give Ranjit Singh the Kohinoor diamond for his assistance in securing her husband's release.

The Sikhs and Afghans agreed to jointly march across the Pir Panjal Mountains, occupy Kashmir and share the spoils in an agreed fashion. The joint Sikh-Afghan venture was successful. While still in Kashmir, Vazir Fateh Khan, however, made it clear that he did not intend to honour his commitment. Fateh Khan then appointed his brother, Azim Khan, the Governor of Kashmir and prepared to return to Kabul.

On hearing of the success of Vazir Fateh Khan, the *kiladar* (caretaker) of the fort of Attock fearing for his life immediately opened negotiations with Maharaja Ranjit Singh. Jahandad Khan offered to surrender the fort to the Sikhs in return for a *jagir* of Rs 25,000, to which Ranjit Singh agreed. With this fort under their direct control, the Sikhs could successfully block the passage of invaders from the west. When Fateh Khan heard of this, he was chagrined beyond measure. The glory of his victory in Kashmir was clouded by the loss of Attock. Though Fateh Khan had urgent business in Kabul he could not return home without reclaiming the fort, for its loss would subject him to derision. He therefore tried to embark on a new negotiation, which Ranjit Singh firmly refused.

By Holi, there was a celebratory mood at the Court of Lahore and the Sardars were offering Ranjit Singh congratulations and *nazars*. The envoys of the Sikhs, Fakir Aziz-ud-din and Dal Singh, had easily taken possession of the Attock fort, but the Afghans lost no time in blockading access to it. Ranjit Singh then directed Hari Singh Nalwa, Fateh Singh Ahluwalia, Hukam Singh Attariwala and Bahma Singh Malliawala towards Attock. The Sardars were asked to strengthen the fort. They were asked to get a supply of provisions and ammunition into it, failing which they were directed to distribute the supplies amongst the Sikh troops already stationed in that vicinity. On completion of the task they were asked to join forces with Khalsa Kharak Singh. The Prince was instructed by his father to remain stationed at Batoss, until Fateh Singh joined him.

Sikhs conquer Kashmir

The Sikhs took possession of the valley of Kashmir in 1819, one-and-a-half centuries following the martyrdom of Guru Teg Bahadur and once again in response to a request for help from Kashmiri Pandits. Azim Khan's revenue minister, Birbal Dhar, travelled to Lahore to beseech Ranjit Singh's assistance for the release of Kashmir from oppression of the Afghans.

In April 1819, the Sikh Army marched towards Kashmir. The news that the Sikhs were coming induced the panic-struck Afghan Governor to implore the British Government to take Kashmir under their protection. On this occasion, Hari Singh Nalwa was nominated together with Misr Dewan Chand to lead a select and strong division for offensive operations. A second division, under the command of Kanwar Kharak Singh, brought up the rear for the support of the leading troops. The third division, under the personal command of Ranjit Singh, expedited supplies and conveyed these to the advance troops.

By early June, the Sikhs had conquered Rajauri, Punch and all the territory south of the Pir Panjal Mountains. They entered the Valley through the pass of Tosa Maidan with their 12,000 strong force and took position at Sarai Ali, on the road to Supin (Shupiyan). Sardar Jabbar Khan, the interim governor in Azim Khan's absence, arrived with 5,000 Afghans on the plains of Supin and the battle commenced soon thereafter.

On the morning of 5 July 1819, Sikh columns advanced to the sound of bugles. A severe engagement took place between the two armies. Instead of waiting for the Sikhs to attack, Jabbar Khan crossed the rivulet that separated the two armies and ascended the heights beyond it to meet them. Consequently, his cavalry could not charge and the Afghans were driven back by the Sikhs. The Afghans defended their position bravely. After a short struggle, however, they gave way to the superior numbers and fled precipitately — some to Shergarh and others across the mountains towards the Indus, thus leaving the Valley open to the Sikhs.

Great rejoicing followed in the Sikh camp and the cities of Lahore and Amritsar were illuminated for three successive nights. Money was offered in alms to every place of Hindu and Muslim worship in Lahore. Financially, Kashmir was one of the most important conquests for the Sikhs. Its loss inflicted the most significant blow to the Kingdom of Kabul. With it gone, Kabul lost its financial backbone. As British spy Alexander Burnes was to note, "It has been said with some truth that Kabul could never have existed as a kingdom without the possession of Kashmir."

Peshawar

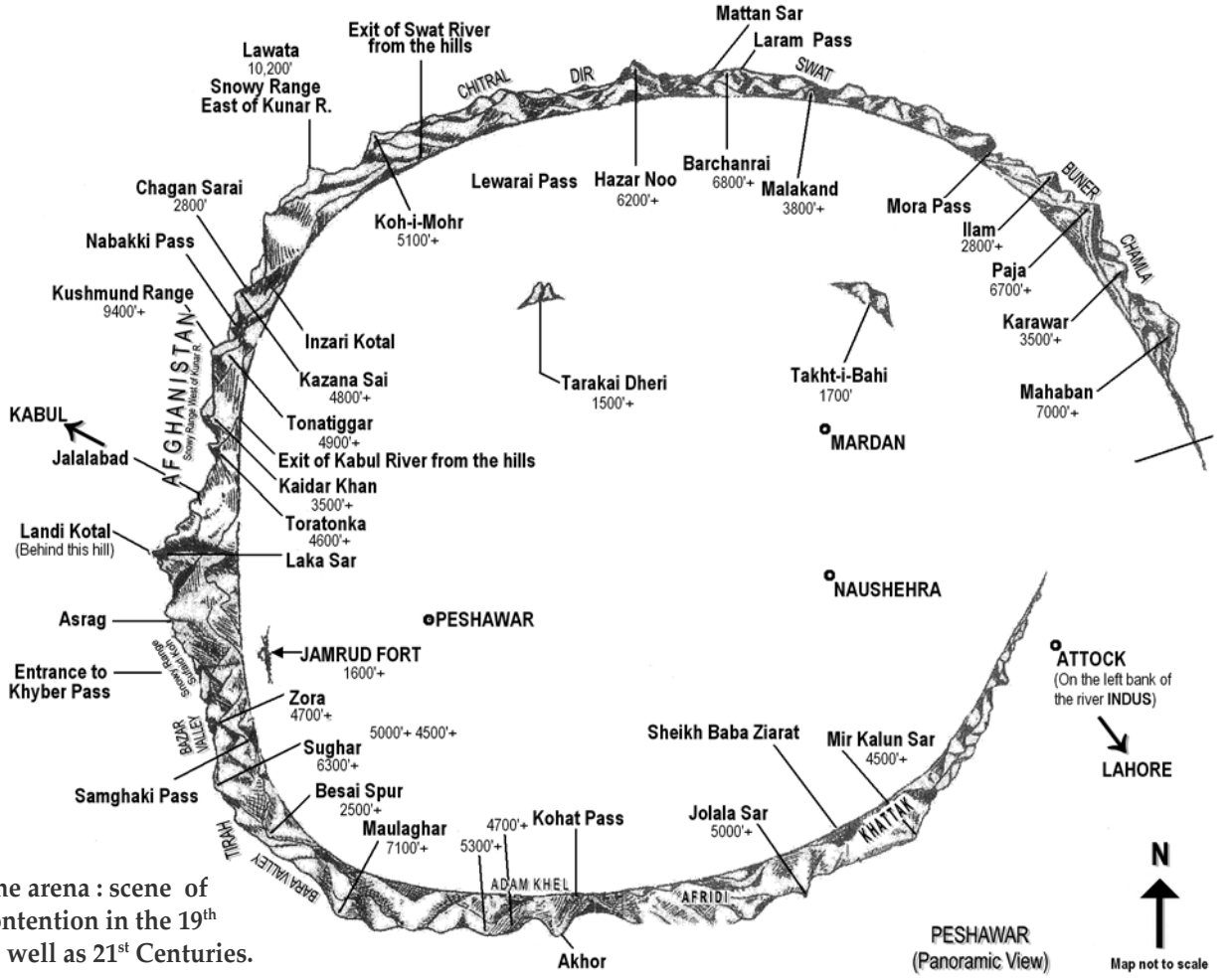
Ranjit Singh's dilemma relating to Peshawar is evident from the fact that he took possession of the territory at least three times, but chose each time not to hold on to it. From 1818 onwards, the conquest of Peshawar was often on the Maharaja's mind and it presented the strongest approach-avoidance conflict of his career.

Peshawar was very fertile and a good revenue earner. Most importantly, its conquest took the Sikhs one-step closer to the strongest bastion of the Afghans : Kabul. The Afghan invasions into the Punjab over decades had left a deep scar on the psyche of the Sikhs. The conquest of Kabul was their ultimate dream. They euphemistically expressed this aspiration as hopes of tasting the grapes of Kabul. The only thing that had held Ranjit Singh back from taking Peshawar was a distrust of his ability to preserve this acquisition. He knew that capturing Peshawar was one thing, but being able to hold on to a territory surrounded by a hostile and antagonistic population was quite another. He feared that it would continually expose his troops to a harassing state of warfare with a people whose fearless bravery and independence of spirit the Sikhs had frequently experienced

The *'Lahore Akhbar'* of May 1822 reports the conversation of the Maharaja with his newly appointed European officers, Allard and Ventura. Ranjit Singh told them that he first wished to take Peshawar and then Kabul after the monsoon. They assured him that the way to Kabul was open and flattered his vanity by assuring him that no Afghan could stand against the army of the Maharaja, guaranteeing him that in fact the country would fall without a battle. It was another twelve years before the Sikhs became complete masters of the Peshawar Valley; these two played no significant role in its ultimate occupation.

In December 1822, Hakim Aziz-ud-din was sent to Peshawar to bring back gifts from Yar Mohammed. Rather than have the Sikhs visit his territory, the Peshawar Governor thought it prudent to send a few horses to the Maharaja of Punjab. When Azim Khan, the Barakzai in Kabul, heard that his half-brother in Peshawar had paid tribute to Ranjit Singh, he marched down in indignation at the head of a large force. The Battle of Naushehra was the result. Though it ended with the most disastrous results for the Afghans, yet no permanent Sikh occupation of the Peshawar Valley was attempted. Ranjit Singh decided to divide the territory amongst the four Peshawar Barakzai brothers. On the arrival of Dost Mohammed Khan from Kabul for his share, a re-distribution was effected. Peshawar was equally divided between the Kabul and Peshawar Barakzais. The annual tribute was fixed at fifteen horses of superior breed, ten *kharwars* of Bara rice and two Persian swords, all of which the brothers agreed amongst themselves to be responsible for.

The *deras* of the irregular cavalry of the Sikhs grew from 54 to 88 consequent to the Battle of Naushehra. This sharp rise in the total number of men enrolled in the Sikh Army left



The arena : scene of contention in the 19th as well as 21st Centuries.

Ranjit Singh well equipped to contemplate the occupation of Peshawar. Following the Dussehra of 1824, Ranjit Singh set off in the direction of Peshawar; *en route* he received a call for help from Hari Singh. An insurrection raised by the Gandhgarhis in Sirikot, Hazara, was of such a serious nature that the Maharaja temporarily postponed his advance to Peshawar and went to Hari Singh's assistance.

Once Sirikot was subdued, Ranjit Singh forded the Indus and marched towards Peshawar. Nothing of significance came of his expedition. Yar Mohammed waited upon him and renewed his "protestations of homage". Ranjit returned home disappointed. He had spent large sums on this expedition, lost several of his best men — many while fording the Indus and others at the hands of the *Ghazis*. For the next ten years, he contented himself with annually sending an army towards Peshawar, both to receive the tribute of horses and to keep up the terror of his name. Hari Singh was largely responsible for execution of this task.

In March 1831, a secret treaty was signed between Shah Shuja, the deposed King of Afghanistan, and Ranjit Singh. The Afghan nominally transferred on the Sikh Maharaja, his heirs and successors, not just the sovereignty of Peshawar, but also that of the whole of the Punjab. He also transferred the territories that immediately bound the river Indus, on either side, after its leaving Little Tibet to the confluence of its tributaries at Mithankot.

Nalwa occupies Peshawar

The occupation of Peshawar by the Sikhs was accomplished in the most unexpected manner. In mid-April, Kanwar Nau Nihal Singh informed Ranjit Singh that subsequent to the arrival of the Sikh troops, the inhabitants of the country around Peshawar had fled. He requested permission to station a military post in Peshawar to instil calm. On receiving his application' the Maharaja observed to his attendants that his grandson appeared to be more intelligent and active than his father, Kharak Singh. The actual capture of the great city of Peshawar and its ruinous fort, the Bala Hissar, by the Sikhs was quite an anti-climax. It was a reflection of Sardar Hari Singh Nalwa's formidable reputation in 'Pashtunistan'. Masson arrived in Peshawar just in time to see the Sikhs take control of the city.

Masson concludes his narrative with the observation that this state of affairs had resulted from the fact that over time, the spirit of the Mohammedans had become dejected by both repeated defeats and treachery within the Afghan camps and councils. The occupation of Peshawar by the Sikhs was the

reversal of over eight centuries of foreign rule at that place. With this, the Sikhs took the boundary of their kingdom deep into the trans-Indus region. The extent of their kingdom now almost matched that of Gandharva-desa of antiquity.

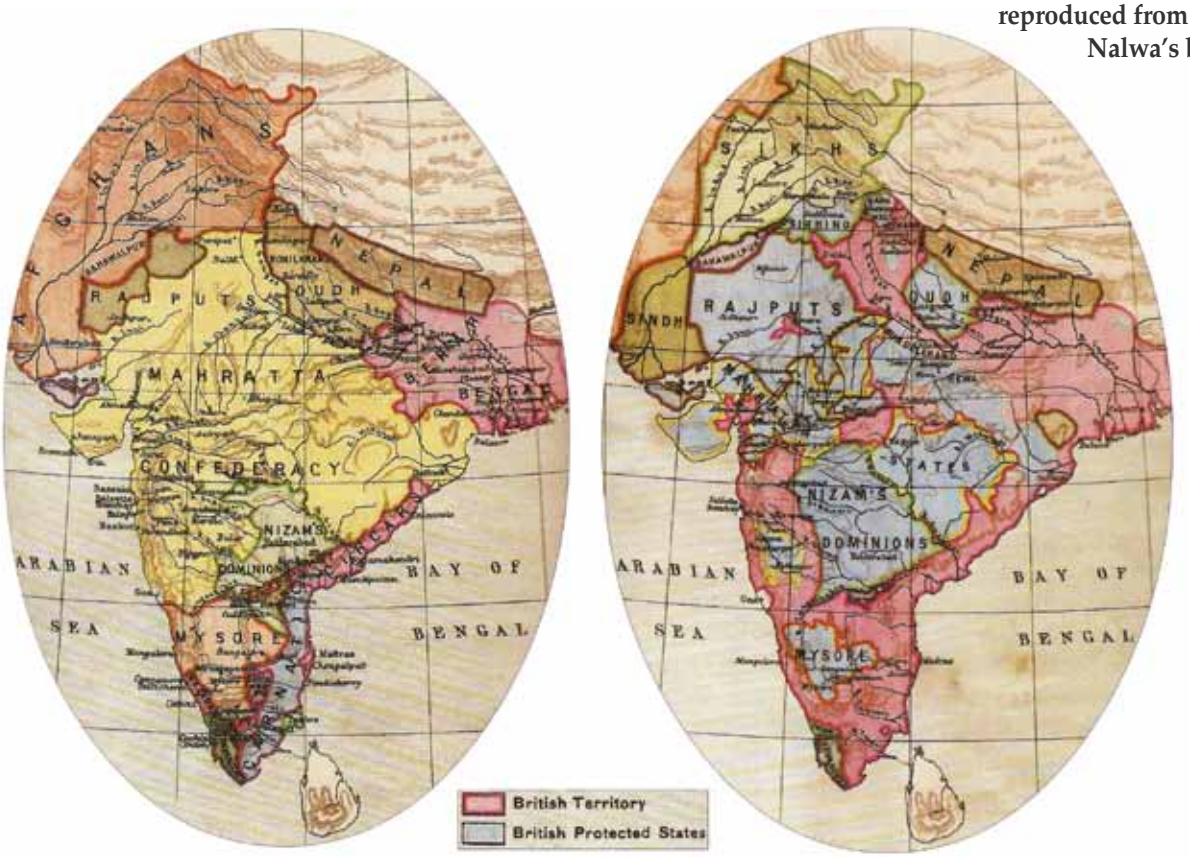
On taking the fort of Bala Hissar, Kanwar Nau Nihal Singh dashed off a *perwana* (letter) to his grandfather: "I entered the city of Peshawr accompanied by all the Sirdars on the 6th of May. The next day I together with Sirdar Heree Singh, Ram Lal, and M. Court, etc., moved towards Sultan Mohammad Khan's encampment when an action ensued between us and the *mulkyahs* in which one hundred of them fell and 25 were wounded while the loss on our part was 25 both killed and wounded. At length the *mulkyahs* finding themselves unable to maintain the contest fled towards the Khyber Pass…"

The contents of this letter left Ranjit Singh highly delighted. He gave a pair of gold bangles and a pair of shawls to Sook Lal, the harbinger of the good tidings. A similar gift was conferred on Mool Singh, the *Vakil* of Sirdar Hari Singh; Rs 100 in money and a shawl was given to Lal Chund, the *Vakil* of Kour Nau Nihal Singh. A discharge of artillery was ordered in honour of the victory. In the evening there was an illumination in the city, which was hailed by both the Hindus and Mohammedans of the country as a forerunner of their deliverance from the hands of their tyrants.

Maharaja Ranjit Singh announced to the world : "By the grace of God at the present auspicious moment I have been delighted by the arrival of the following happy tidings. The Barakzai Sardars destitute of foresight having engaged themselves at the dawn of day about 12,000 horse and foot in hostility against my troops, Kour Nau Nihal Singh took a spear in his hand and prepared to oppose them with great presence of mind in concert with Sardar Hari Singh Nalwa and Mr Court when a discharge of artillery and musketry commenced. At length the Barakzai...sought safety in flight; and being dispersed on all sides Peshawar fell into the hands of the officers of my Government who extended their protection to the inhabitants of the place and their property."

Kabul was at a distance of 466 miles from Lahore. With the occupation of Peshawar, the Sikhs were barely 190 miles away from the Afghan capital. The Maharaja was very proud of all his victories over the Afghans and these were the most popular topic of conversation with him. The acquisition of Peshawar came to signify the ultimate of these, when the "Paris of the Pathans" became a Sikh possession. Amarnath wrote his panegyric the *Fathenama*, a part of his *Zafarnama Ranjit Singh*, to commemorate this famous Sikh victory.

[All illustrations and maps reproduced from Vanit Nalwa's book].

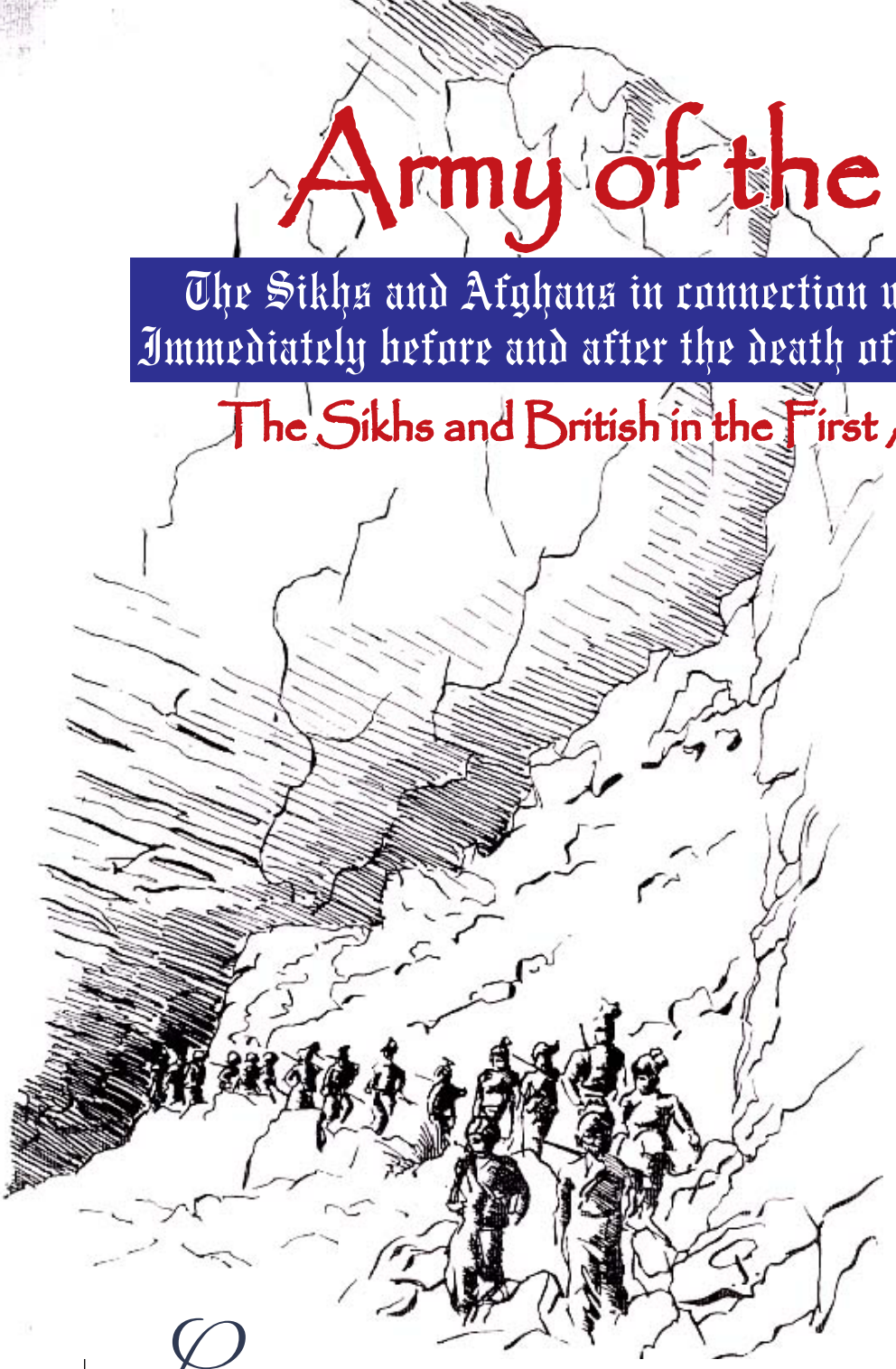


The Sikhs were to wrest a large part of the Afghan Empire to establish their kingdom in the neighbourhood of British India; the Indian subcontinent seen as (left) E1795, (right) E1823.

Army of the Indus

The Sikhs and Afghans in connection with India and Persia. Immediately before and after the death of Maharaja Ranjit Singh.

The Sikhs and British in the First Afghan War, 1839



Life, philosophically speaking, moves in a circle. The beginning leads to an end which becomes the beginning again. This thought pulsates in the mind as one reads heart-rending accounts of innumerable Sikh families – old men and women, young men and women and children – being driven out of Swat in the North Western region of Pakistan, contiguous to Afghanistan, by Talibans intent upon ruling with *Sharia* and imposing *Jazia* upon non-believers, *Kafirs*, or those not professing Islam.

These families are descendants of the Sikh troops that in the reign of Maharaja Ranjit Singh fought Afghans in the region, crossed the Khyber Pass and held their sway right upto Kabul. That was in the mid-19th century and nearly two centuries later, we have the same *dramatis personae* enacting a tragic drama with a different script.

An immensely romantic account of the expedition to Kabul under the command of a British Officer, Captain (later Colonel) Sir CM Wade, records for posterity their indomitable spirit and bravery. The account is contained in the journal written by Shahmat Ali, well-versed in Persian and English, who accompanied Colonel Wade during the 'military expedition to conduct Shah Zada Taimur, the eldest son of Shah Shuja-ul-Mulk with the Sikh auxiliary force by the Khyber Pass to Kabul in 1839'.

Besides, the journal provides glimpses of the great personality of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, especially in the year before his demise. On 12 January 1839, author of the journal noted that the Maharaja's health was declining; he had almost entirely lost the faculty of speech and could hardly stammer some words.

The British military expedition across the Indus to Kabul, approved and facilitated by Maharaja Ranjit Singh from his capital at Lahore, was conducted within a year by November 1839. The British Governor General acknowledged the services rendered by Colonel Wade,

From the Journal of an Expedition to Kabul, through the Punjab and Khyber Pass. Shahmat Ali was Persian Secreatary with the mission of Lt. Col. Sir CM Wade to Peshawar in 1839 and later Mir Munshi to the Political Resident in Malwa. (First published in 1847 by John Murray, Albermarle Street, London).

employed on the Peshawar frontier, gallantly supported by the officers and men of all ranks under him and 'seconded by the cordial aid of Sikh government' leading to opening of the Khyber Pass, defeating the opposing Afghans.

Here is a glimpse of the Maharaja's army: "The men composing the army are almost entirely Sikhs with whom the regular service of the Maharaja is popular. In enduring fatigue, absence from the prejudice of caste and patience of discipline, the Sikh is not easily surpassed. He only requires the skill of European officers and instructors to make him an even more excellent soldier".

Leaving Lahore on 12 January 1839, the expedition crossed the river Ravi, the smallest and narrowest river of the Punjab. On the route to Khyber Pass, at progressive stages of the martial journey, were passed Nangal, Nanake, Gujranwala ('the native place of Ranjit Singh and seat of his ancestors'), Vazirabad (where General Avitabile, an Italian and Governor of the district resided) with the Salt Range and the Pir Panjal visible; Gujarat ('an old town with 8,000 houses, inhabited generally by Khatris and Gujars, the latter notorious thieves'), Sarae of Khawaspure, Kharian, the Jhelum river near Pind Dadan Khan, Rohtas (with a fort built by Sher Shah), Bakrala, Dhamuk, Jhirar, Rawat-ki-Sarae, Rawalpindee (Rawalpindi, now Islamabad, described then as a small town with about 500 shops), Jani ka Sang (with 12 houses of Khatris and 12 houses of Mussalmans), Kala Sare, Hasan Abdal (Panja Sahib), nearby a Nala celebrated for the battle fought between Diwan Mokham Chand, the famous Sikh general and Vazir Fateh Khan, in which the latter was defeated.

From that time on, Sikhs were constantly victorious over the Afghans, either having taken their territory or invaded their tributaries; Attock ('the scene of several bloody battles between the Afghans and Sikhs'); Akora ('the venue of the famous battles between the Afghans and Sikhs'), into Khatak territory, crossing the Kabul river, Naoshera (today Pakistan Army's Armoured Corps Centre) Pabhi (a small village), Chamkani; Machni (a thriving town), Shah Dand (within half a mile east of Peshawar), Takal; Kuddum, Ali Masjid, Sir-i-Chusma, Landi Khana; the Khyber Pass itself, Dhaka ('on the bank of the Kabul river, opposite Lalpura'); Ghazni; Hazarno, Alibagan, Jalalabad, Gandamak, Barikab, Khurd Kabul and thence to Kabul. On completion of the mission, the expedition returned to Lodianah (Ludhiana) via Lahore.

But even as the mission proceeded towards the Khyber Pass on 27 June 1839, Maharaja Ranjit Singh passed away, bequeathing his kingdom to his eldest son Kharak Singh and the Kohinoor diamond to the temple of Juggeranth, besides distributing about 40 lakhs of rupees in charity a few days before his death… 'no less than four of his wives and five or seven of his slave-girls voluntarily sacrificed themselves on his funeral pyre.'

This mission of the Army of the Indus, supported by the Sikhs, defeated a number of chieftains and established British suzerainty in the region, but the Pathans have never been vanquished. It seems they are born to fight and die, generation after generation. Since those times, when Sikhs under Maharaja Ranjit Singh held their tentative sway over these rugged and death-defying tribes, first the British, and then the Russians failed to subjugate and rule them and in their new *avatars* as Al Queda and Taliban, the inhabitants of this region are giving a tough fight to the Americans and NATO forces even as Pakistan has much to answer for.

Panja Sahib at Hasan Abdal

Hasan Abdal is a small town, overlooked by the hills, especially by one which was the residence of the pious Faqir Hyat-ul-Mir, held in great reverence by Jahangir. There is a clear little stream running between

the village and hills. Close to the stream is the tomb of the Faqir, ornamented with two large cypresses.

"Hasan Abdal has a fine bazaar where plenty of supplies can be procured. Water is good".

Eastward of the place is a large spring situated in a grove of shady trees. Just above the spring is the impression of a hand which is that of Baba Nanak, their first Guru, and hence Hasan Abdal is called Panja Saheb by the Sikhs.

They say that Nanak, when proceeding about the country, being wearied one day, asked the Faqir on the hill to give him a cup of water and some food. The Faqir was surly and an altercation ensued between

them, when the Faqir told him that if Nanak was a man of any miracles, he would supply his wants without any assistance, and could even move the hills. As a rock came hurtling down, Nanak put out his hand where the impression was put on the rock, and the mark still remains; in commemoration Sardar Hari Singh built a small gurdwara there, named Panja Saheb.

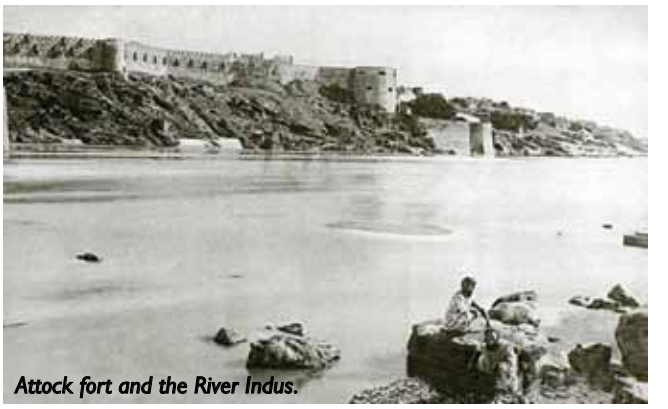
Two years later, after the traumatic slaughter of the British in Kabul and the Khyber Pass, no less than 10,000 regular Sikh troops were rushed to occupy the heights between Ali Masjid and Jamrud, a distance of only 5 miles, to keep the Pass open during the advance of Sir G Pollock in 1842.

The Fort of Attock

Four or five *kos* above Attock, the river Indus receives the waters of the Kabul river, is then divided into three or four branches and is full of islands and dry banks (later a bridge of boats). Ranjit Singh forded the Indus twice or thrice at the same point. The Indus, after leaving its rocky channel below Attock and entering the plains of Derajet becomes very calm and gentle.

The road to Attock is narrow, passes over a hard polished rock to the town and then descends to the bridge of boats.

Within the walls of the Attock Fort is contained the town, built on a spur of the hill which rises behind it and slopes towards the river and is commanded from one or two eminences on the left bank; a self constructed fortification for the time in which it was made when the use of artillery was little known. Its western side is formed by the outline of the rock which is washed by the river. There were ravines on two sides and the river on the third. There are no walls inside the Attock Fort but water is supplied from the river through a passage called 'Abduzd', which links with the river through a bastion about 50 feet high from the surface of the river. There was once a *baraderi* (pavilion) close to the 'Abduzd', but was later pulled down.



Attock fort and the River Indus.

The stream of the Indus is very rapid, deep and narrow below the fort. The bridge of boats lasts from 7-8 months, violence of the torrent in the rainy months frequently breaking it, rebuilt during the cold weather months then removed to a spot rather later down till the turbulence gets too much.

The fort of Khairabad, situated opposite Attock, is constructed of mud, is a quarter mile in circumference, with 3 watch towers, which entirely command the Fort of Attock. Taken by Ranjit Singh from Jahandad Khan, the Afghan Governor of Attock in 1839, the Thanedar or Commandant was Ganda Singh.

The neighbourhood of Attock has been the scene of several bloody battles between the Afghans and Sikhs before the latter took firm possession of Peshawar.

The plains of Jahangira and Akera

Going in north-westerly direction, passing through 'Gidargalli' or Jackal's Path, a narrow defile through a low rocky range of hills and nearly 2 miles in length, with stockades (*burj*) erected at a height for protection of the road formerly infested by Khataks (later on good terms with the Sikhs), leading to Akera. "The celebrated battle between Sayad Ahmed and the Sikhs was fought on the plains of Jahangira and Akera, the former totally defeated and retired to the Eusafzai country. The Sikhs also lost a great many men including General Budh Singh, one of the first Sirdars of the Sindhanwalia family…".

"Khatak territory begins at Khairabad and ends at the village of Zorah, near Naoshera, as far as Haran on the Eusafzai frontier. The south is bounded by Lachi and Dhrerian, the frontier of Dour Banoo. Major battles were fought here, the ground covered with graves, thousands of tombs…and an uneasy peace reigned in 1839. The Khataks pay an annual revenue to the Sikhs…".

The battle of Naoshera

At a 9 *kos* distance, the town is situated on the left bank of the Lundi or Kabul river. Near this spot was fought the great battle which took place between Ranjit Singh and Sirdar Mahomed Azim Khan, Barakzai. The

main army of the Sikhs was situated on the left and the Afghan chief with his troops on the right bank, the brunt of the action sustained by Eusafzai and other neighbouring tribes plus the peasantry of the country who came down in masses to oppose the Sikhs and attacked them with such boldness – but Ranjit Singh rallied his troops and sent General Ventura with a large party of infantry to their support which led to the Afghans being defeated with great slaughter.

One hillock in particular was subject to severe fighting, three times the Sikhs gained its vantage ground and three times they were driven back. The Maharaja at length advanced in person at the head of his guards and drove the Afghans from their position; the day was then his own.

The city of Peshawar

The valley of Peshawar has natural boundaries on every side: on the west it is bound by the Khyber range and the east by the Indus river; in the north by the highlands of Kashghar and on the south by Bangish. It is a very fertile, productive territory and has been called by historians the *Sheher-i-Sabz* or the green city. Before the Sikhs established their government in it, the territory of Peshawar was possessed by Sultan Mahomed Khan and brothers Pir Mahomed Khan and Sayed Mahomed Khan. On arrival of the Sikhs, and after a short skirmish, the Sidars retired to Jalalabad and Kabul where they were supported by Dost Mahomed Khan, their half brother.

Thereafter, Dost Mahomed appeared on the field to drive the Sikhs from Peshawar. He was soon met by Ranjit Singh, who hastened from Lahore to give him battle at the head of his army. But before the two armies came to blows, Dost Mahomed Khan, feeling his utter inability to contend successfully with the Sikhs, was obliged to hasten his retreat as quickly as he had advanced.

The palace of Shah Shuja, situated within the Bala Hissar, was destroyed but the Sikhs rebuilt the citadel on taking possession of Peshawar and called it Sumeirgarh.

This was enlarged and much strengthened by General Avitabile and contained the arsenal. Amongst other troops were Squadrons of Sikh Dragoons stationed within the fort, which was

superior to any in the vicinity. Troops were stationed at various tiers, accommodated in very comfortable corridors with wells to supply the Garrison with water during any siege. On the top compartment are buildings for magazines and store rooms including a vast number of 10-inch shells and a complete hill of bullets...clearly a warm reception could be given to an attacking party. Peshawar is not celebrated for any particular manufacturing, nor is it a great trade mart; but being situated on the highway to Kabul, the shawl merchants from Kashmir and fruit dealers to India pass through it.

Through the Khyber to Kabul

The British 'Army of the Indus' was reinforced by select contingents of the Sikh Army at Peshawar for the campaign to oust the then ruling family of Kabul and replace it by Shah Shuja. In May 1839, there were rumours of a Persian force with Russians advancing to

Heart, but did not come to pass. On 7 May, Shah Shuja assisted by the Army of the Indus, occupied Candahar followed by great celebrations at Peshawar by Nao Nihal Singh.

Ranjit Singh had directed Nao Nihal Singh and General Ventura to assemble forces from Naoshera and Hazara, primarily 5,000 Mahomedan troops drafted from various Sikh corps with artillery and Ghorcharas in support, all commanded by Sikh officers in conjunction with those of the Army of the Indus. "From the 14 Sikh regiments encamped on the Indus we were led to expect that there would be about 2,000 Mohamedans and being well disciplined, were considered of much more value than double the number of irregulars. Besides, the Sikh Army in the territory included three regiments of cavalry and about 50 pieces of artillery. The personal troops

of Kour Nao Nihal Singh and Sirdar Attar Singh Sindhanwala were estimated at about 10,000 men, viz. 5 battalions of infantry, 5,000 irregular horse with about 25 pieces of artillery.

The Sikh Mahomedan Contingent was selected from the French legion amounting to six companies and formed a separate battalion besides a selection of about 1,500 men made from the army of reserve encamped on the left bank of the Indus under General Tej Singh.

For hill warfare, a party of matchlockmen was provided by Sirdar Lehna Singh Majithia and some Kohistanis were sent in addition from Lahore. Including two battalions of Najibs, one of Goorkhas and one of Ramgol, the Sikh Government's contribution to the Army on the Indus was : 5,208 infantry, 1,067 cavalry, 100 artillery, totalling 6,227 men, the senior Mahomedan officer being Sheikh Bassowan, a Colonel in the French legion.

Moving to the Khyber, the combined forces marched past the Sikh fortress of Fatehgarh (Jamrud) with its white citadels, which marked the entrance to the celebrated pass frontier of the Sikh Kingdom.

Colonel Wade's force, which was to effect the passage of the Khyber consisted of some 9-10,000 men, 6,000 of whom were the Sikh contingent and all Mussalmans.

Foes were the Khaibars in general and the Afridis in particular, the most bloodthirsty and the most numerous of the three tribes that inhabited the country around the Pass. When 'united', these lawless marauders (Afridis, Shinwais, Orakzais) can bring from 20-25,000 men into the field.

Also with the Sikh party was Lieutenant Rattray, with captain Ferris commanding the regiment of irregulars and Capt Framer, the Ghorcharas led by Kharak Singh.

The Fort of Ali Masjid commanded the Khyber Pass in the West and was much desired for capture.

Storming of the heights on 25 July was by English troops and a large body of Sikh troops under Sheikh Bussowan...Dowson's levies and Farmer's Khalsas gallantly drivin before them a party of Khaibars who retreated forthwith to the summit of a lofty and precipitous hill on which they had enacted a sangar, an impregnable stronghold: soon, from all sides, "the roar of musketry momentarily drowned by the louder reports of a zumboor, a mortar or a howitzer, re-echoed from the narrow chasms of the Pass.

Then the force was through the notorious Khyber Pass and capture of the fort of Ali Masjid on the road to Kabul, encamped at Dhaka, a small village on the right bank of the Kabul river, opposite the town of Lalpura. Meanwhile, to preserve safe communication through the pass, (garrisoning Camp Dhaka at Ali Masjid), picquets along the Khyber and Fort of Lalpura were the two disciplined infantry battalions of Mahomedans, commanded by Zoravar Singh, guns of the Sikh artillery and a party of Ghorcharas.

On 7 August, Shah Shuja arrived at Kila Qazi, about 5 *kos* from Kabul, with the British Army, while Dost Mahomed Khan sought safety in flight to Bamian

and thence to Bokhara, leaving the guns and camp equipage behind.

During their brief stay at Kabul, the new King of Afghanistan inspected the Sikh Mahomedan troops under Sheikh Bussowan and was most pleased with their discipline and exercise, presenting them cash awards for the able manner in which they had conducted operations.

Roots of today's Pakistan Army

In the army that Maharaja Ranjit Singh created, some regiments were trained by the French and other European officers-of-fortune. The majority infantry were Sikhs, while some special battalions were recruited from the Gurkhas settled in Hazara (hence the title 'Hazara Gurkhas') who later were numbered as the famous 5th Royal Gurkha Rifles (Frontier Force).

The artillery were manned by both Sikhs and Muslims and the cavalry almost entirely by Sikhs. Post-Ranjit Singh, the brigades led by Rajas Suchet Singh, Heera Singh and Gulab Singh, were almost entirely Dogras but they did not 'co-operate' with the Sikh forces during the Anglo-Sikh Wars.

Subedar Major Sher Singh, IDSM & Bar of the Frontier Force Regiment, at London in 1946 for the Victory celebrations. Just a year later, he had to leave his beloved Regiment on the transfer of power.

Following the laying down of arms after the Second Anglo-Sikh War in 1849, the British initially disbanded the Sikh soldiery but soon enough, realising the difficulties in administrating and policing the turbulent North West Frontier with Afghanistan, re-recruited the Sikh soldiers and formed them initially as 'irregular' forces which in fact became the basis for establishment of the famous 'Frontier Force Regiment' and 'Frontier Force Rifles'. In fact, the former were designated as the 51st, 52nd, 53rd and 54th Sikhs (Frontier Force) and remained thus till the 1922 reorganisation of the British-Indian Army.

Thereafter, composition of these FF Regiments and six Punjab Regiments followed the pattern Sikh/Punjabi Mussalman/ Dogra/ Pathan but the original designations were kept for military tradition reasons. On partition in 1947, the Sikh and Dogra elements were merged with the Sikh and Dogra Regiments of the Indian Army, while the PM and Pathans joined the new army of Pakistan.

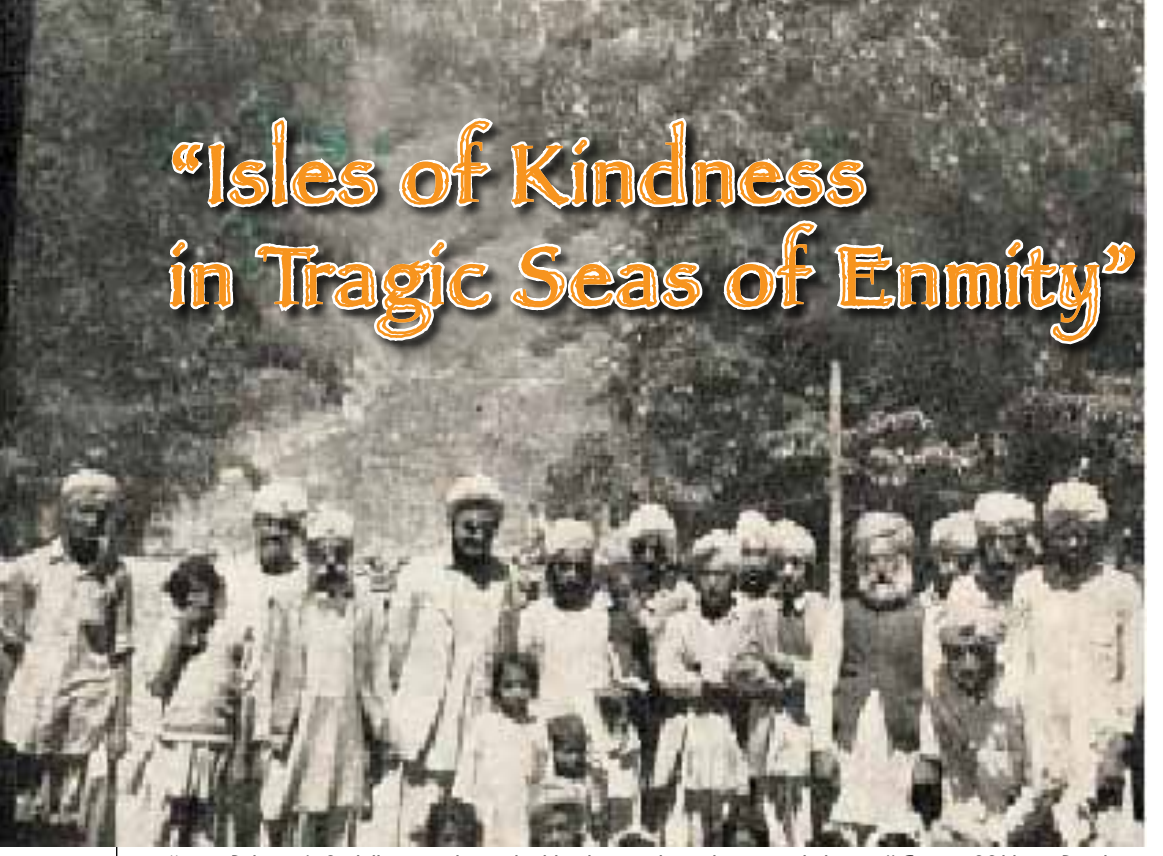
The four Mountain Batteries (Frontier Force), which also owe their origins to Ranjit Singh's army, were divided between the two armies : 'Derajat' and 'Hazara' remaining with India and 'Kohat' and 'Peshawar' joining the new army of Pakistan.

Traditions have however been maintained – almost jealously. As late as in the 1990s, Pakistan Army officers of the Frontier Force Regiment called themselves (of course, unofficially) as being the from 51st Sikhs etc. The Sikh cantonments at Naoshera and Risalpur and many other places are today headquarters of the Pakistan Army's Armoured Corps, Regiment of Artillery and the Pakistan Air Force Flying Academy, respectively. The Fort at Attock is headquarters of the Special Service Group (commandos), while Hari Singh Nalwa's impregnable fort at Jamrud is an advanced headquarters for Pakistan Army's Frontier Corps.

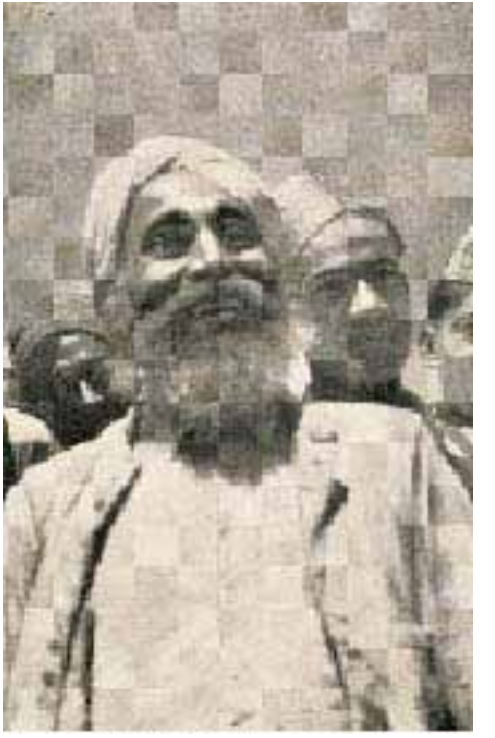
Most of the air bases of Pakistan's Air Force today were originally built by the well known Sikh construction company of Rawalpindi, M/s Uttam Singh Dugal & Co. These include Chaklala (in 2 phases), Peshawar, Risalpur, Kohat, Walton, Lahore Cantt., and Karachi (Mauripur). The Firm also had a major share in the construction of Chaklala Cantt. and that at Wah.

Interestingly, the head of Pakistan's Army has traditionally resided at 'Army House' in Rawalpindi, which (before 1947) was the residence of Sardar Bahadur Sohan Singh. For several decades, even as the Army ruled Pakistan, this house was de-facto the President's house !

"Isles of Kindness in Tragic Seas of Enmity"



"… in Pakistan's far hills, scarcely reached by the new hatreds surging below, …" Group of Sikhs in Drosh, Chitral State, in June 1948.



"Most remarkable of all were the Sikhs of Pir Baba…" Leading Sikh of that village, in Buner Province, Swat State, is seen with friendly Pathan fellow-villagers, May 1948.

Partition tore asunder the Punjab, a land which has been one for aeons. While most of the rest of India celebrated their 'independence' (apart from Bengal, which too lost a half), the land of the Five Rivers struggled to cope with what was an unprecedented tragedy, hardly of its making.

Only five months after 15 August 1947, the highly respected (and 'neutral') British-editor of The Statesman, Ian Stephens, toured both sides of the divide and recorded his first hand experiences thus:

Since the tragedies of the 1947 partition, Sikh-Muslim estrangement throughout that region has seemed almost total. People of those two faiths, even if close friends from childhood, have hardly been able to meet except under military or diplomatic safeguard. A visitor still finds segregation along the two sides of the new frontier most remarkable, a dismally conspicuous practical exhibition of the two-nations theory.

Between Hindus and Muslims there was never any similarly complete sundering. Some Hindus, during all but the very worst times, have lived and moved with fair contentment and security in the modern parts of Pakistan's bigger cities. I met several as long as last February 1948 in Lahore, Peshawar and Karachi. The converse was true of Muslims in Indian cities.

But so intense was public feeling that the mere notion of an unescorted Sikh unharmed in north-west Pakistan seemed fantastic.

The Sikhs' young guest

Reciprocally complete antagonism towards Muslims in the dominantly Sikh area of East Punjab was assumed. But last April, staying at a Sikh village in Tarn Taran *tehsil* in Amritsar district, I discovered exceptions. Three Muslim men – and, according to report, several more, with womenfolk – were in that small area alone, remote from any official aid, yet so far as I could ascertain being confident, happy and well liked by their neighbours.

I wrote about this, thinking that publicity for it might help to recreate kindly feeling between the communities. I mentioned a young Muslim wrestler; also an intelligent, humourous greybeard; and recounted in full the pleasant tale of the handsome lad in today's first illustration, with a Sikh friend's forearm amicably draping his shoulder…a former resident, he had left for Pakistan with his parents during the preceding autumn's turmoil; but young Sikh fellow-villagers, remembering his good company, had asked him back for his holidays. On his acceptance they brought him by road from the frontier. And there he was, a Muslim enjoying a stay with old Sikh friends.

Incredulity

Perhaps I had commented too strongly. But it seemed wrong, indeed an international disgrace, that whereas to my knowledge at least some Muslims could dwell unharmed among remote Sikh villagers in East Punjab, not one unescorted Sikh, according to general belief, would be safe anywhere throughout West Punjab, even in the towns.

A Muslim contributor…writing from Rawalpindi suggested that I had been duped at the Tarn Taran village. Safety for Muslims among Sikhs throughout East Punjab was to his mind unimaginable. "I belong to Amritsar district and know what happened there".

Under Pathan Protection

Meanwhile, wandering in remoter Pakistan, ignorant of controversy, I had made further unexpected and heartwarming discoveries – this time of Sikhs. The ugly general proposition that none existed in the plains of the West Punjab or NWFP was evidently valid. But in Pakistan's far hills, scarcely reached by the new hatreds surging below, small groups of Sikhs remained. Of course they had no alternative; movement eastwards to India over such distances, except in military convoy, would have been suicide. But the notable thing was their confident, well-protected air where they were. I found such groups at Saidu Sharif, capital of Swat; at Pir Baba village, in Buner, easternmost province of Swat; at Drosh, in Chitral… in Drosh and Pir Baba I went to the gurdwaras and found all well.

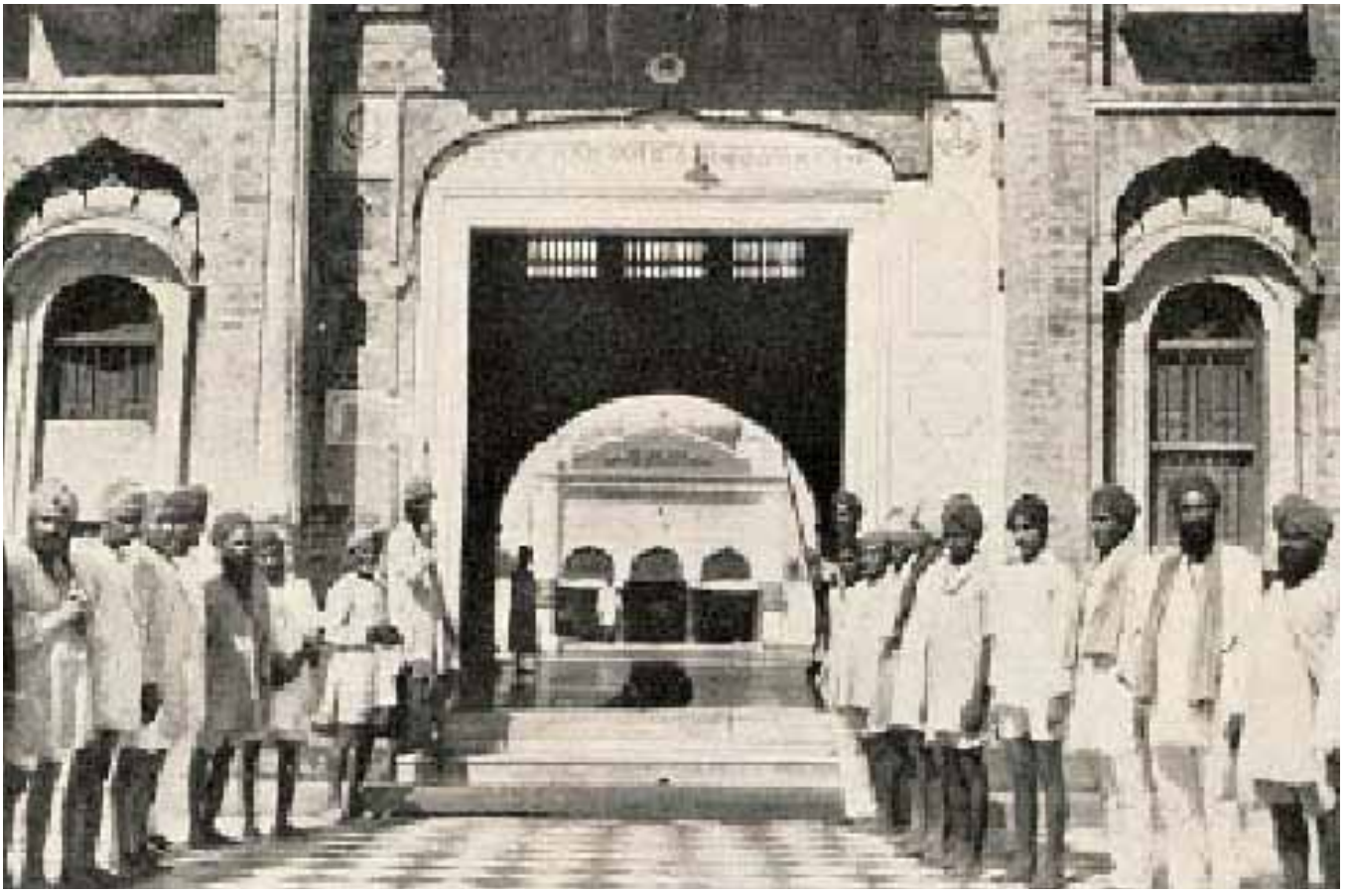
"… new and ampler evidence of Sikh's kindness to Muslims…"
A cheerful Muslim group at Kang, Amritsar District, December 1948.

"… and confident women." Muslim village folk at Kang, December 1948.

There were even a few Sikhs living among Afridis in the upper Khyber. These I was urged not to call on, lest that draw attention to them from unpredictable Muslim strangers travelling to or from Afghanistan. With the local Afridis, I was reliably told, they were safe. Many more, as is widely known, live on in the Afridi and Orakzai fastnessnes of Tirah – from which such as I are debarred for supposedly still dangerous British imperialism. With Afridi friends, I strove to exploit this paradox, urging that where they allowed Sikhs, they might now allow me – but to no avail.

Some of these little remote Sikh communities, for instance the Chitral one, had I believe since moved. Departure by Government convoy was under discussion during my stay. They were plainly unhappy at the thought of it; but business had flagged, and to revive it seemed impossible without supplies from their agents on the plains, the Sikh or Hindu traders of Peshawar, Rawalpindi or Lahore, all had vanished eastwards long ago, to India.

Other groups stayed on. Most remarkable of all were the Sikhs of Pir Baba, a famous holy place in Swat which Muslim devotees, some doubtless fanatical, visit from all over northwestern Pakistan. Yet about 40 Sikhs lived placidly almost within a stone's throw of the shrine, worshipping regularly at their gurdwara. That was certainly proof of Swat State being well administered.



April 1948: Sikh custodians of Sikhism's holiest shrine – Nankana Sahib.

Fresh Finds at Tarn Taran

Revisiting that same pleasant Tarn Taran area in December, I got new and ampler evidence of Sikhs' kindness to Muslims. The smiling sturdy faces of boys, the genial elders and confident women, selected for photographing among the many Muslims I met that day, should suffice as proof. They were at Kang village. The leading local personality there, Bhai Narayan Singh, glows with pride in describing his fellow-villagers' staunch safeguarding of a helpless minority throughout the troubled times. And I am told that other villages in that *tehsil*, notably the one from which the eminent leader Jathadar Udham Singh Nagoke takes his name, have also a fine record.

The Mutawali in pious contemplation at Rauza Sharif, Sirhind. [Note similarities of dome design of both Muslim and Sikh abodes of worship].

Reconciliation through Pilgrimage

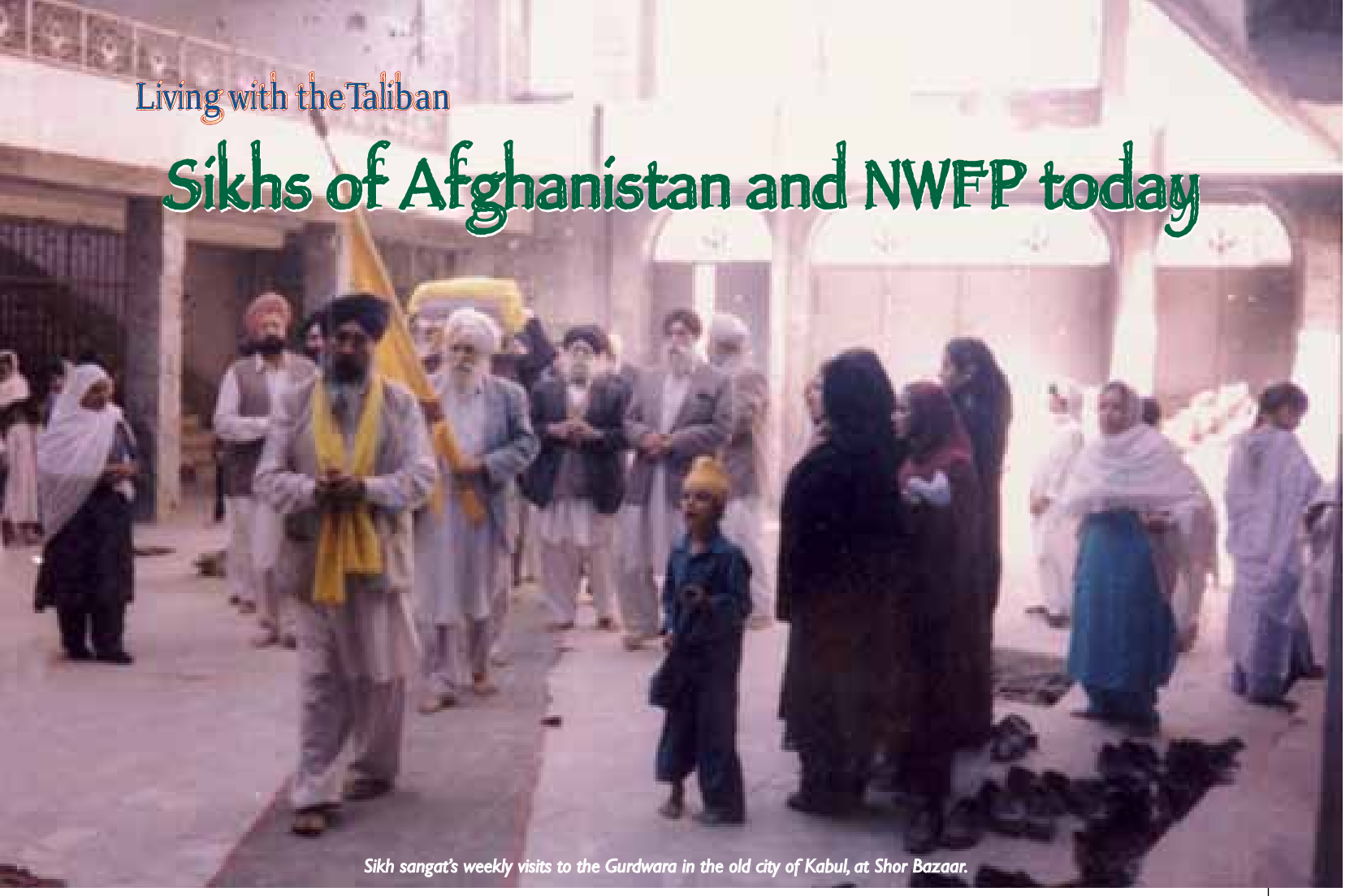
Pakistan, since the spring of 1948 when rough words were written, has made pleasant gestures of reconciliation to the Sikhs. In June a *jatha* of escorted pilgrims from Amritsar was specially invited to the deserted shrine at Dera Saheb, in Lahore, for the annual celebration. That initiative on their part was deeply appreciated. The even more important pilgrimage to the holiest Sikh shrine of all, Nankana Saheb, followed in November and spread happy ripples of goodwill through both the Dominions.

Some Sikhs believed that Muslim sentiment towards them has so bettered that they could now move unharmed in West Punjab freely, like other travellers. All that is needed, they say, is a beginning; matters would then proceed smoothly. That seems the view of Sardar Sampuran Singh, lately India's popular Deputy High Commissioner in Lahore. He recounts a pleasant episode of Muslim villagers' hospitality to him when, alone on one of his journeys as diplomat, his car broke down in a remote rural part of the Province.

He may be right. Nevertheless, were I travelling with any Sikh friend in West Punjab or the vale of Peshawar, I must admit that, remembering what I learned of Muslim ideas about Sikhs there last year, I would feel distressed were he to wander off alone.

Ian Stephens
(reprinted from The Statesman of 8-9 January 1949)

Sikhs of Afghanistan and NWFP today



Sikh sangat's weekly visits to the Gurdwara in the old city of Kabul, at Shor Bazaar.

On March 2009, the Taliban purportedly issued an ultimatum to Sikh families in Orkazai agency, near the Afghan border to convert to Islam and join the *Jihad* or pay Rs 5 billion (roughly $62 million) for "protection". An elder of the community was also taken away by the Taliban to ensure compliance.

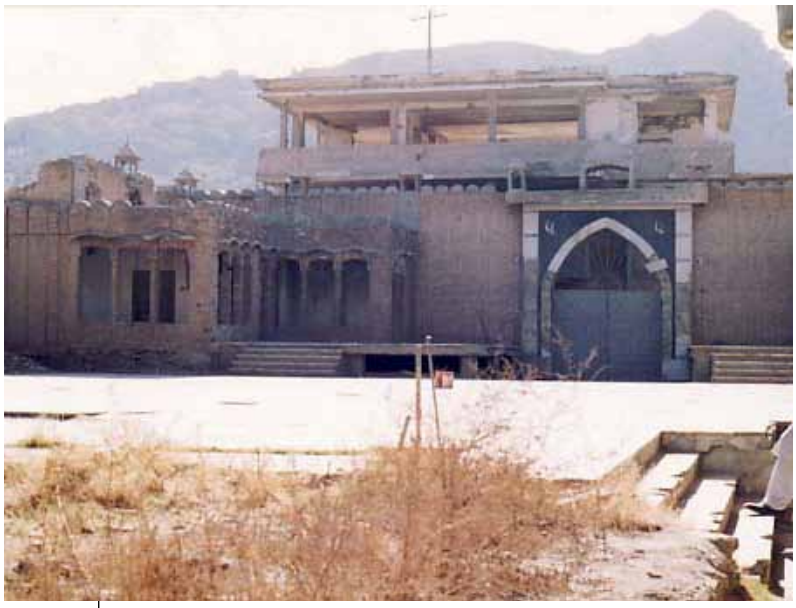
The Sikhs who have been living in the area for centuries are primarily farmers with meagre incomes hence not able to pay the tax; actually it was seen as extortion money in the name of *Jazia* (a tax imposed on non-Muslims for their protection during the Mughal despotic rule).

On 28 March, villagers persuaded Taliban to reduce the amount to Rs 12 million ($150000) still a princely amount for the Sikh community but they raised the money somehow to get their elder released. The payment was made on the same day and Taliban leaders promised to protect them anywhere in Pakistan but at 10 pm that night, the Taliban warned the Sikh elders that there would be an attack by 2 am. The Sikh families got into trucks and more than 150 families drove to Peshawar, capital of the NWFP.

Sikhs from Afghanistan with Dr. Hamid Ansari, Vice President of India and an Arabian diplomat, at New Delhi.

Peshawar has a relatively large Sikh population; among them those who had migrated from Afghanistan and taken shelter in the historic Gurdwara of Bhai Joga Singh.

There are around 10,000 Sikhs in the Swat valley and in the surrounding area in North West Pakistan and some 3,500 have taken shelter in Punja Sahib. Additionally around



One of several Gurdwaras in Kabul, damaged during the fighting.

20,000 Sikhs are living in Pakistan according to the US Department of State and 2,000 in Swat according to the Islamabad-based Quaid-i-Azam University.

Since centuries, Sikhs have been living in what is now North West Pakistan in Swat, Bunar, Orakzai, Peshawar and surrounding areas. They were given stout protection in 1947 by tribal leaders, fulfilling their promise of protecting the Sikhs and their families till rise of the Taliban. Upto now they were living peacefully, with dignity and religious freedom with a lifestyle that was akin to the Pathans.

Most of them even look like the Pathans, in dress and language. Women are also covered in *chaders*. Many of the Sikhs are *Sahjdaris*, with faith in the *Guru Granth Sahib* and they speak Pashtu. Restrictions on women are part of the tribal culture. My friend Dilbagh Singh, who travelled 15 years ago from Afghanistan to settle in Swat, noticed that there were hardly any women in the streets of Swat. Thus *sangat* programmes in Gurdwaras had to finish before 7 am, so women could go home safely. Dilbagh Singh found that he could not live like a Sikh in Swat and so later migrated to India.

Owing to such activities of the Mujahideen and Taliban, virtually all Sikhs of Afghanistan have migrated to different parts of the world and only 5 percent remain behind.

Before 1992 there were more than fifty thousand Sikhs in Afghanistan. For centuries they have been living in Afghanistan with dignity and freedom of religion, efficient in business and were said to be the backbone of Afghanistan's economy.

Afghanistan has been the only Muslim country to give full citizen rights, freedom of religion and the right to hold office in parliament and provincial government. Afghan, Sikh and Hindu doctors have been working side by side in almost every big hospital.

Gurdwaras and mandirs made magnificent landmarks in the city. Sikhism started with Guru Nanak Dev Ji's fourth journey while returning from Mecca and Medina to Baghdad. Guruji came back to India via Afghanistan. There are about 12 locations commemorating his visit where every year *Joor Mela* was organised by Sikhs, Hindus, Afghan and Pathans with great respect for Baba Nanak. They have never thought of leaving Afghanistan, with its pleasant climatic conditions and delicious fruits.

The late King of Afghanistan with Sikh Afghans in New Delhi (S. Khajinder Singh is second from the left.)

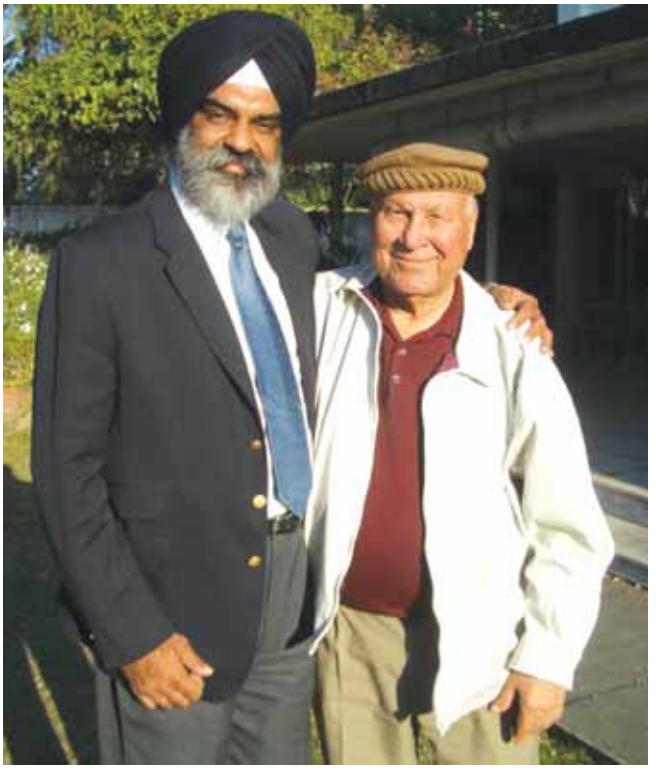
The Taliban took control of Afghanistan in 1996, and soon began the exodus, with only 5,000 Sikhs now left in Afghanistan. After the fall of Dr. Najib's Government in 1992, Mujahideen took over control, with vicious fighting and great damage inflicted on the city of Kabul.

The situation became worse and a virtual civil war began. Hindus and Sikhs, being religious minorities but also successful business people were especially targeted, some brutally murdered, with their houses and business shops destroyed. Most of the Gurdwaras were damaged during the fighting. Life and faith were both in danger. More Hindus and Sikhs then decided to leave Afghanistan; about 90 percent migrated from Afghanistan and only 10 percent now remain in this country.

Khajinder Singh
(from Kabul)

Swat : sanctuary for the Sikhs

Shahzada Aurangzeb of Swat in 1948.



Miangul Aurangzeb today, with Prithipal Singh Dugal at the Wali of Swat's residence in Islamabad.

The following is gist of an open letter written a few months ago by Miangul Aurangzeb, the present Wali of Swat, to the Taliban when the Talibans were preaching and enforcing strict dress and conduct codes for the women in the areas that fell under their control. It went something like this:

"At the outset I want to record that you all must love me very much as you have decided not to take over my properties in Swat unlike those you have taken over of other landed families. I am therefore emboldened to believe that I have the privilege of sharing some historical facts for you to know about and I urge you to absorb the same before you continue your campaign of moral policing, especially when it comes to the manner of dressing and code of conduct for women.

The Sikh Army of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, under the leadership of Hari Singh Nalwa came to the Frontier in 1820s and swiftly conquered our ancestors. It is the only time in recorded history that our people were ruled over by foreigners. The locals were so utterly terrified of the Sikh Army that they used to hide every time the Sikhs came into view. Those that decided to resist were met with ruthlessness. During this time, the word was spread around that the Sikhs did not harm elderly people, women and children and that the local men who did not wish to earn wrath of the Sikhs, should wear the garb of Punjabi women, which was the *Salwar-Kameez.* At that time in our history, both men and women alike, wore only a single robe-like garment (similar to that worn by the Arabs) and the Sikhs would not harm any man either when wearing the *Salwar-Kameez*.

So you see, our men happily adopted the garb of Punjabi women since they were too terrified to stand up and they have adopted the garb as being theirs' ever since. I am very intrigued to see that you are following in the footsteps of your ancestors by wearing the adopted Punjabi women's garb as your own, but now go around preaching and coercing our women as to how they should be living their lives! I suggest that take a deep look inside yourselves, given this historical perspective."

Sincerely,

Aurangzeb

Sikhs in Swat Valley Crossfire

It is a memory that lingers from my childhood years in the 1960s—of my Pashtoon father, who was the first Muslim commander of the Armoured Corps Centre at Nowshera, talking wistfully of his Sikh friends, who chose to migrate to India at the time of Partition. One gifted a lock that only a set of two keys could open, symbolising the inseparable bond they shared, a refrigerator kept for decades at home because another friend of my father had left it in his custody before leaving Pakistan; those sepia photos of 'different-looking' men in turbans who were my father's mates at the Prince of Wales Royal Indian Military College, Dehra Dun, and later became comrades-in-arms during the World War II in Burma. My father said they were his best friends. "The uniform I wear forbids me to be in touch with my friends across the border," he would say in a doleful voice.

These images surface as I stand, on a hot May day, before Gurdwara Sri Panja Sahib in Hasan Abdal, only an hour's drive from Rawalpindi. I am surprised to see such a large collection of Sikhs who, according to the Evacuee Property Trust Board, number just 35,000 countrywide. Revered for the impression of Guru Nanak's palm on a sacred rock, Panja Sahib has now become the temporary abode of 400 Sikh refugees who have fled the fierce battle between the Pakistan army and Taliban in Buner and the Swat Valley. They were not expelled from their homes; their fate is not that of those from their community on whom *jazia* or religious tax was imposed in Orakzai Agency. They are frightened, distraught children of the insurgency, as much marked as their Muslim brethren among whom they lived only weeks ago.

As I walk into the gurdwara, I see men wearing *salwar-kameez*, sitting on *charpoys*. They are conversing in perfect Pashto, an eloquent testimony to how deeply rooted they are in the NWFP (now named Pakhtoonkhawa), where 99 per cent of the Sikhs in Pakistan reside. Soon Dr Suran Singh, who sports a flowing beard and a red turban joins us and says, "What's this propaganda that we have been forced to flee because of Taliban's oppression? Please, the media has to distinguish between what happened to the Sikhs in Orakzai and why we have come here." Even as we speak, groups of Sikhs continue to trickle in from Buner and Swat, the elders clutching small bundles, and children running to greet others of their age among the fresh batch of refugees.

As many voices rise to second him, I begin to get a sense of what happened to Pir Baba village. Apparently, the Taliban has been around in the area for nearly three years now, but refrained from establishing direct control or Islamising the people. Weeks ago, however they swept into the village and stopped their vehicles in the bazaar. And though the district authorities had either fled or become ineffectual, the heavily armed Taliban did not display their firepower as is their wont. Says Suran, "Look I am sitting inside a gurdwara where I bow my head to the ground in prayers. Could I lie at such a holy site? We greeted the Taliban and offered them cold drinks. They said they would pay but we insisted they should not. They have been around for quite some time now, but left us alone. After all, we are not a threat to anyone."

Fear, however, began to seep into Pir Baba on 28 April, when the Pakistan army initiated military operations, and the Taliban dug in their heels for a bloody battle. Pir Baba had become a veritable battle zone. Jaswant Kaur, a middle-aged mother of four, recalls the sudden decision to evacuate the area. "I was preparing breakfast and getting the children ready for school when a vehicle drove in. We were told to leave. No one cared to ask why. Not a woman or child has stayed back in Pir Baba." Some Sikh men, including Jaswant's husband, did stay hoping to protect and secure their property. As Suran says, "The fierce fighting would have blown us into smithereens. We are not armed. Our ancestors have lived in Buner for hundreds of years and it was the fear of the 'uncertainty' that made us flee."

Uncertainly looms over these Sikh refugees—about those still in Pir Baba, about disrupted studies and dreams. Jaswant's daughter Roma, who speaks impeccable English, says pensively, "We cannot call our father because the communication system has been snapped. But surprisingly, I got a call from my father early this morning. He is alive." At the time of evacuation, Roma and other girls were taking school and college examinations. Amrika Kaur laments, "I was taking my second year exams. What will happen now ? Please beg the government to allow us to take the Swat board exams wherever we are. Some were sitting for their improvement exams. This is their only chance to improve their grades. What will happen to them now ?"

Impressed by their zeal, as also their smart dresses, I quiz these girls about the Taliban and their dress code, their opposition to education. Astonishment is palpable on their faces. They say the Taliban, in the three years of their presence in the area, never ordered them to stop studying; they only asked them to observe *purdah*. A girl cheekily says, "When we step out for school, we borrow the *burqas* from our neighbours." Adds Jaswant , "We are Pathans living in a village and *purdah* is our custom, our culture. So what, if the Taliban stressed more on covering up, we women really don't mind."

Surely, they must feel apprehensive about the Taliban who have imposed *jazia* on the Sikhs of Orakzai Agency ? Dr Suran, who has assumed the spokesperson's role, says "God only knows whether the ones in Orakzai, who are victimising the Sikhs, are Taliban or not. They could be someone else in the guise of the Taliban." It is possible they fear retribution, consequently choosing not to get sucked into the volatile politics of the region. Suran is opposed to the Sikhs in India protesting against the imposition of *jazia* in Orakzai Agency. "They compromise our position as Pakistanis," he says. "Pakistan is Mecca for Sikhs because this is where Guru Nanak was born. This soil is holy for us. In Pakistan our religion alone is our protection."

Indeed unlike the Sikhs, displaced Swatis have been living in miserable condition in Rawalpindi; Afghan refugees continue to languish; and when a batch of Bosnian refugees were brought here, many girls attempted suicide because they couldn't fit in to the alien culture. Wary of poor publicity, Islamabad has endeavoured to ameliorate the plight of the Sikhs. Harindar Singh, the gurdwara's head *granthi,* says he had just received Rs 50,000 from Evacuee Trust Property Board, Lahore. "They told me over the phone that once this amount is exhausted, I only have to call them to receive fresh funds." Adds Dr Manoj Kumar, a Pir Baba resident who returned from the UK to serve his community."The state of Pakistan treats us like a *gul* (flower). For example, many wanted to get a bridge built at Pir Baba but could not. Then I pursued the matter, I succeeded."

I say my farewell. They invite me to their village. A confident voice mutters, "Don't worry, this too will pass." As I drive to Rawalpindi, I realise I have new memories to cling to and some old myths to re-examine.

Mariana Baabar
(From Islamabad)

Afghanistan's Person of the Year : Anarkally Kaur

In the land of Pathans and the Taliban where women and religious minorities were denied basic rights, Sikh Social Activist Anarkally Kaur was declared **Person of the year of Afghanistan**. This not only surprised the World but Sikhs as well. Salutes to her for showing courage, spirit and faith in Sikhism.

For centuries in Afghanistan, especially in tribal areas, women have been denied basic human rights either by tribal heads, religious bodies or official government decree or by their own husband, father and even brothers. During the rule of the Taliban (1996-2001), the plight of women was worse than in any other time or by any other society. They were forbidden to work or to leave the house without a male escort and not allowed to seek medical help from a male doctor along with being forced to cover themselves from head to toe (they were even supposed to cover their eyes). Women, who were doctors and teachers, were suddenly forced to drop their work and sit at home. In the meantime religious minorities were also denied some basic rights by the Taliban. They imposed *Jazia,* a kind of tax for the protection of minorities as per the Taliban's version. In some parts of Pakistan controlled by the Taliban, Sikhs and Hindu minorities who were living in Swat and surrounding areas for centuries were asked to pay *Jaziya*. Huge amounts of rupees were demanded. Since they were not able to pay, they were forced to leave their homes and belongings. Even their houses were bombarded and were totally destroyed by the order of Taliban. They had no choice but to take shelter in some Gurdwaras in Pakistan.

Since the fall of the Taliban in late 2001, many would agree that the political and cultural position of Afghan women has improved substantially. The recently adopted Afghan constitution states that "the citizens of Afghanistan – whether man or woman – have equal rights and duties before the law". So far, women have been allowed to return back to work, and the government no longer forces them to wear the all-covering *burqa*. They have even been appointed to prominent positions in the government. Despite all these changes many challenges still remain. The repression of women is still prevalent in rural areas,

where many families restrict their own mothers, daughters, wives and sisters from participation in public life. They are still forced into marriages; they are denied basic education. Numerous schools for girls have been burned down and little girls have even been poisoned to death for daring to go to school.

Taking advantage of the Afghan Government policies, Anarkally Kaur Honaryar, a dentist by profession and social activist by choice, is working for the International Council for Human Rights (ICHR). She talks of maintaining her Sikh identity and help other minorities to preserve their values and traditions. *"Sat Sri Akal Ji. Tussan da ki hall hai?"* the enthusiastic

'More Power to Women'!

Rangina Hamidi returned to her homeland in Afghanistan in 2003, after 22 years of exile in Pakistan and the US. She initiated the *Kandahar Treasure*, a development initiative to bring dignity and visibility to Afghan women. In her words, "The idea from its inception was to make the project a self-sustaining profitable business venture by women for women ... When we women gather to speak our minds about our daily insecurities and injustices, we collectively come up with ideas and solutions to our daily problems and the problems of society...we often sit and talk about what if 'we had the power...'. Although we work, our women – out of fear of the unknown – do not publicly state where they work. They come to work in fear. We constantly face threats so much that we fear we may become 'collateral' damage in a suicide attack or otherwise. This insecurity is our biggest fear and threat...Many people say "no matter who comes to power, things will not change for us!"

voice chirps on the phone from Kabul. And for good occasions she adds, *"Ram Ram Ji, te Assalam Waleikum."* Although her name doesn't immediately reveal her Sikh heritage but her Punjabi and Hindi speaking friends cherish the name of Anarkally in Kabul. This gusty girl was recently named 'Afghanistan's Person of the Year' for 2009 by Radio Free Afghanistan, for her struggle to uphold the rights of women and religious minorities, and at the age of 25. The daughter of an engineer, Kishan Singh Honaryar and homemaker, Sharan Kaur, Anarkally is one of four siblings who grew up in the Baghlan province of Afghanistan. "There are five Gurdwaras in Kabul. I try to go to one every Friday… the Mandir is open on Tuesdays, and it's nice we're able to keep these traditions alive." She has travelled to India once for a human rights conference, but short stayed in Delhi at that time. "I have been to Germany, Italy, Sri Lanka, Qatar and India for conferences, but it's my heartfelt wish to visit the Golden Temple one day," she says. "My mother and brothers have already been there. I don't have any family in Punjab, but do have four *massis* (aunts) in Delhi." Anarkally describes her early years as difficult, maybe an understatement given the state of social and political upheaval in Afghanistan. But with God's grace the Taliban never took over their province. "I'm lucky I continued to go to school at a time when most girls weren't even allowed out of their houses," she says. Amazingly, she finished high school at the age of 12 and moved to Kabul to study at the university. But she quickly accepted she would never realise her childhood dream of becoming an airline pilot in the conservative country and so set her sights elsewhere. "I decided to become a doctor and along the way, I began helping other women around me. Women face so many problems in our country – domestic violence, forced marriage, abuse…I try to mediate in many cases and help resolve issues within the family, especially if children are involved. But if there is no hope of reconciliation, then we help women with legal representation."

Anarkally frequently appears on TV and radio, advocating for women's rights. Ask her of any marriage plans and she laughs, "I deal with so many problems that married women face, *tauba*, I don't think I ever want to get married!" Anarkally also campaigns for the rights of religious minorities. "Sadly, there are only 3,000 Hindu and Sikh families left in entire Afghanistan today," she says. "The security situation here isn't great, but we just don't feel like leaving this beautiful country; we call it our home". Not only Sikhs but certainly Hindu and social activists from all communities are inspired by this dedicated young Sikh lady.

Khajinder Singh

Afghanistan gets Indian MRI Centre

In the war ravaged zone of Kabul, where wounded are in the thousands and medical facilities negligible, an MRI Centre has proven to be a sophisticated tool for doctors as previously Afghans had to travel to India, Iran or Pakistan for an MRI Scan. An initiative of the Delhi-based Dr Pawandeep Singh Kohli, the centre is a joint venture amongst Hyderabad's Kims Hospital, Kabul based orthopaedic surgeon Dr Moosa Wardak and Dr Kohli, who was the honorary radiologist to the former Indian President RK Narayan; it is very aptly named as the **Kims Wardak Diagnostic Centre.**

Wadhawan, Sanjay Gupta, Dr Pawandeep Singh Kohli and CS Sethi.

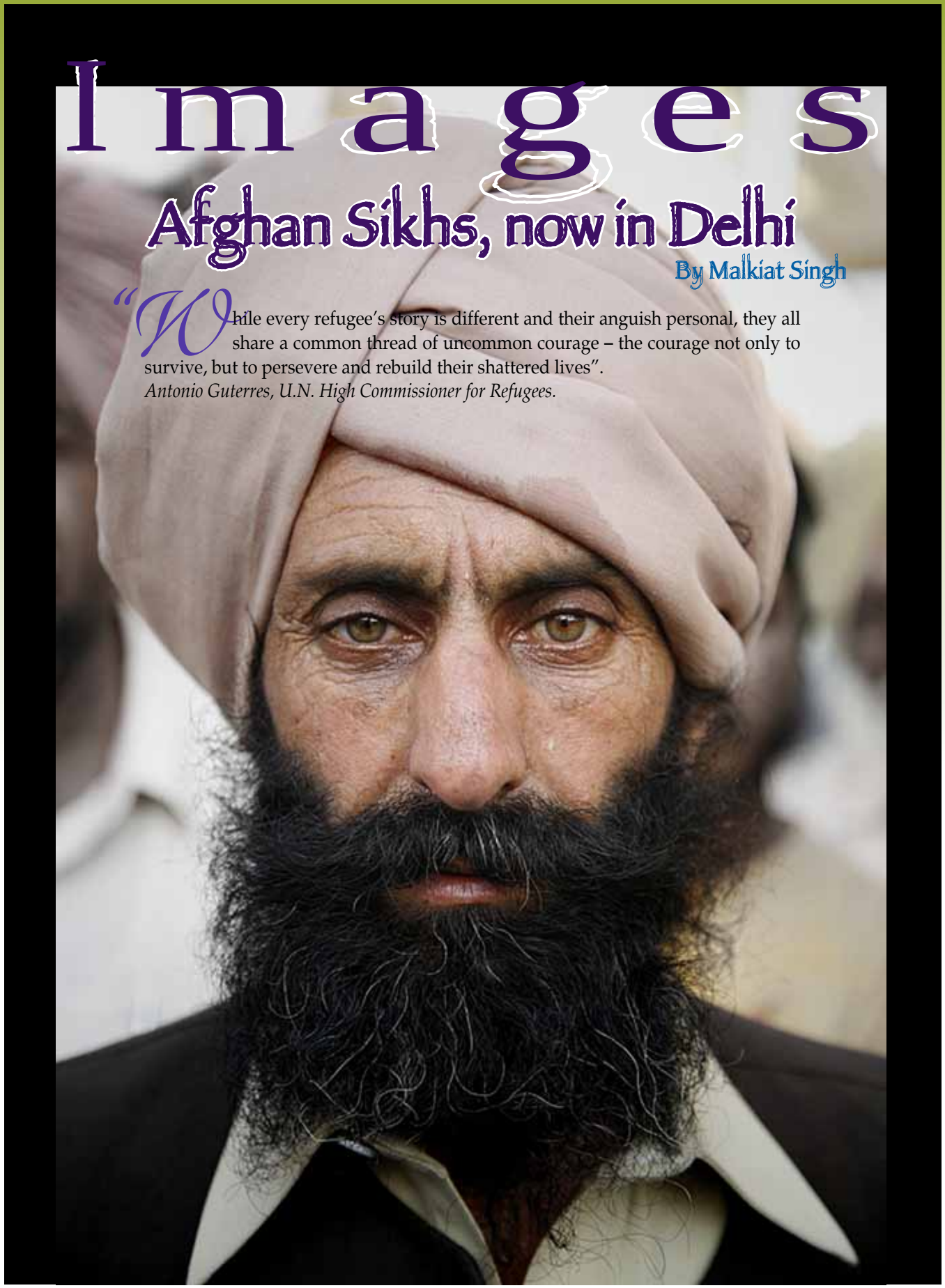
Dr Pawandeep Singh Kohli, with CS Sethi and Sanjay Gupta.

Images

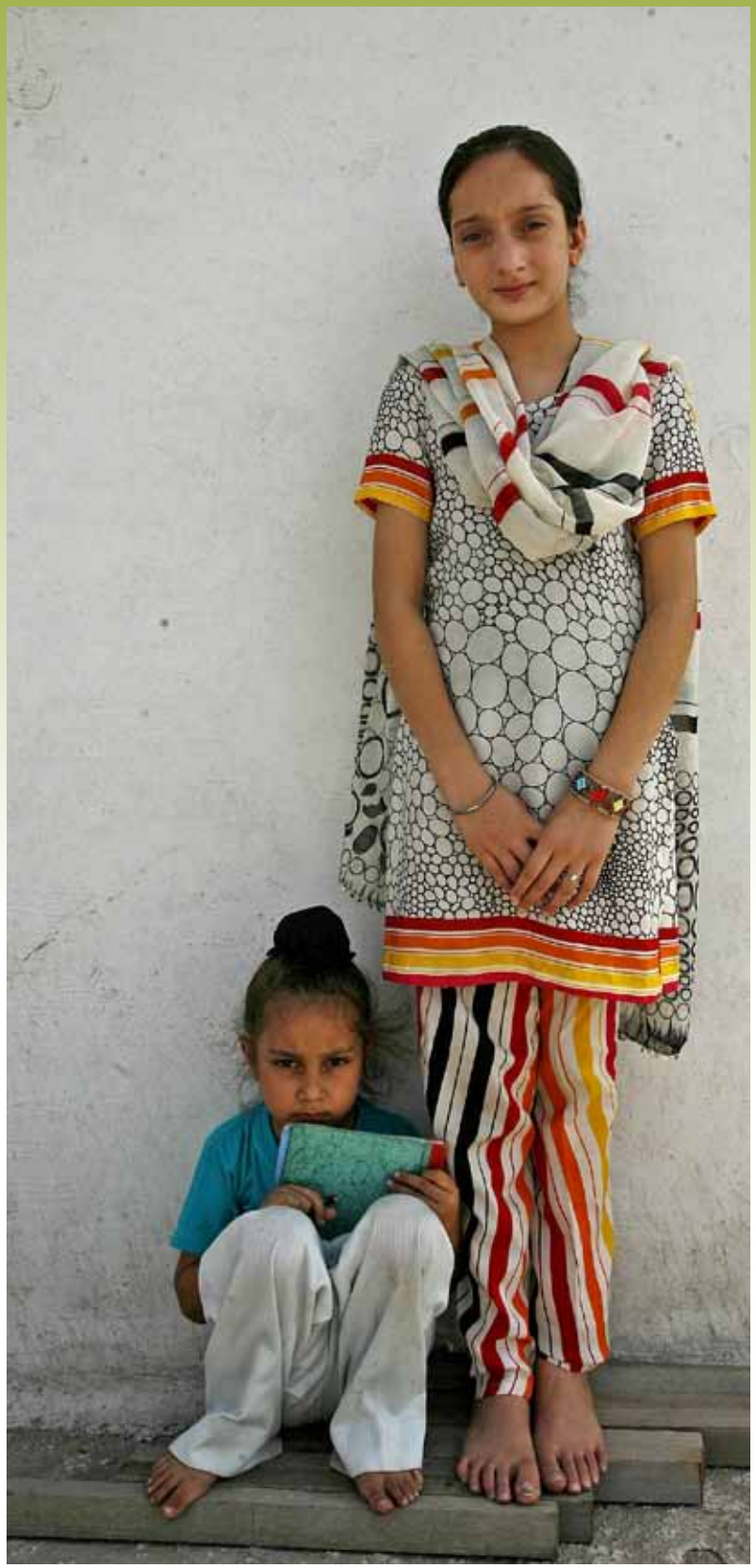
Afghan Sikhs, now in Delhi

By Malkiat Singh

"While every refugee's story is different and their anguish personal, they all share a common thread of uncommon courage – the courage not only to survive, but to persevere and rebuild their shattered lives".
Antonio Guterres, U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees.



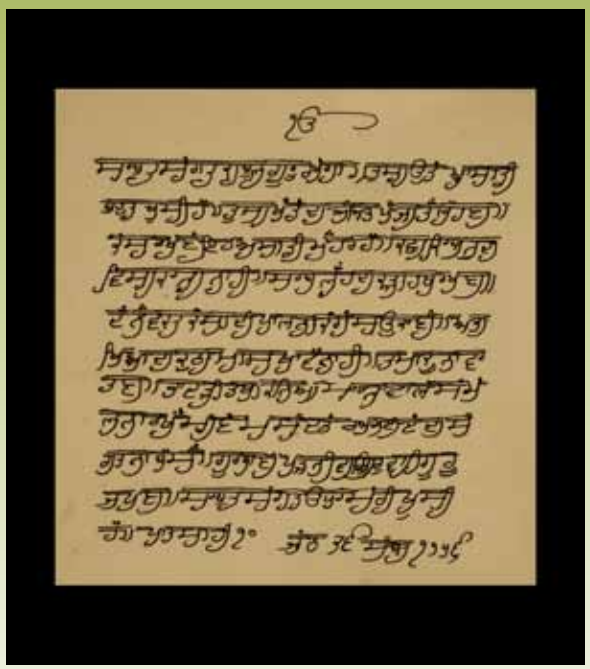
Sikh from Kabul in his Afghani-style turban. His melancholic eyes seem to narrate their own tale of the angst and turbulence faced by refugees anywhere in the world.



A brother-sister duo from Kabul, who have recently shifted to Delhi. There are hardly any formal schools in their former country and they now study at the *Guru Nanak Dharmak Sikh* School in Delhi.

Sikh children studying at the school run by the *Khalsa Diwan Welfare Society* at Tilak Nagar in New Delhi.

An elderly Sikh hailing from one of the tribal areas of Afghanistan, offering '*ardaas*'. He is sporting a traditional styled *paghari* (turban).



Sepia-tinted photograph of the handwritten *Hukamnama* of Guru Gobind Singh for *Kabul-di-sangat.*

At the Gurudwara Guru Nanak Darbar, Manohar Nagar, carrying the *Guru Granth Sahib*. Amongst the devotees are two *sahajdhari* Sikhs wearing traditional *Pathani* turban and *lungi*, similar to those worn in Afghanistan and Pakistan. In the Pathan dominated areas, Hindus and Sikhs dress just like Pathans and speak in Pashtu.

A group photograph of the Afghanistan *Khalsa Diwan* members. (Courtesy S. Khajinder Singh)

Resplendent in red, this little *sardarni* is impeccably clad in the traditional *salwar-kameez*.

Chardhi Kalah! Young Afghan Sikh boy.

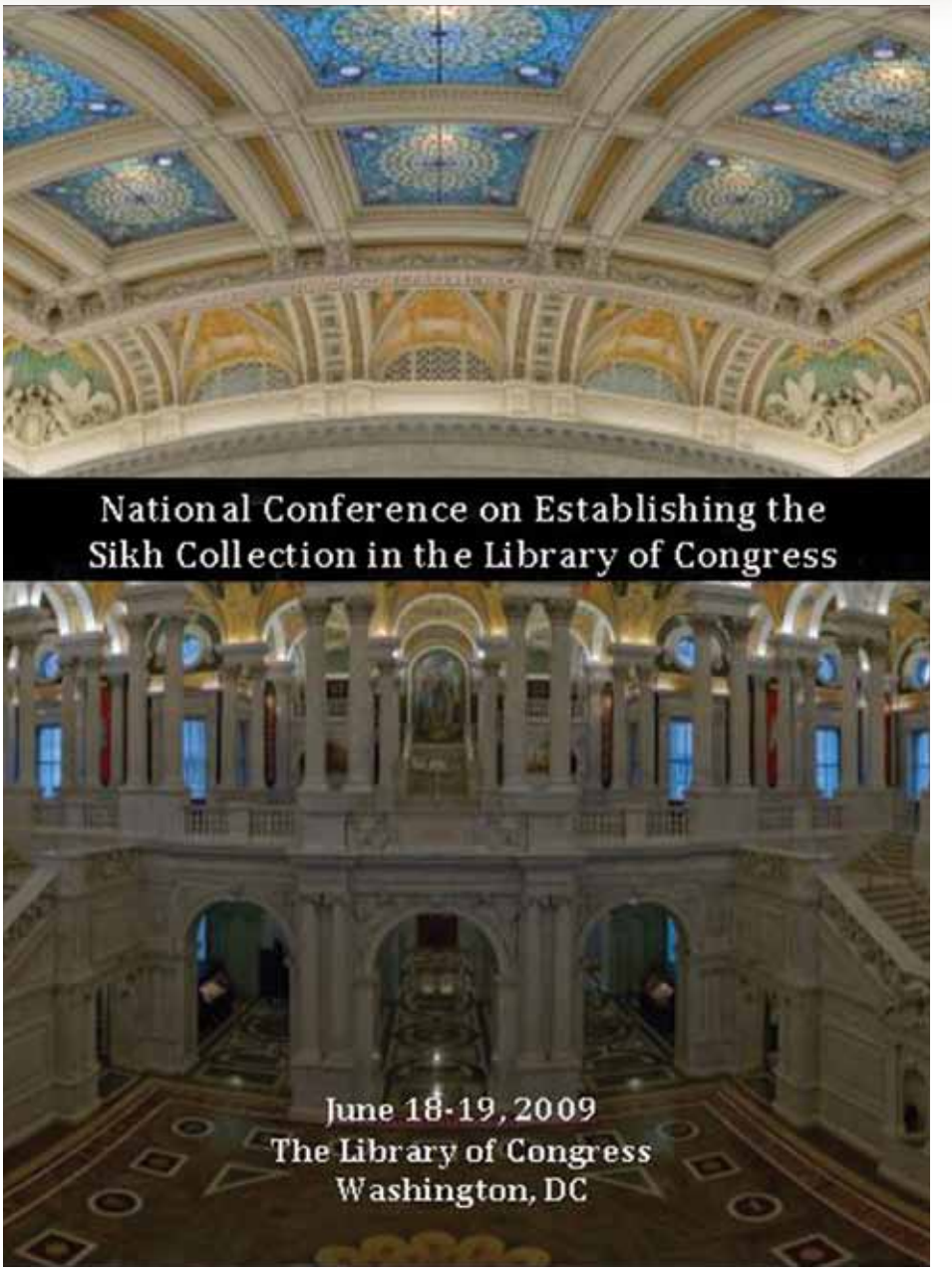
Keshadhari and *Sahajdhari Sikhs*, wearing the traditional *Pathani* turbans, which are longer than usual and tied in special manner.

Young girls at the *Khalsa Diwan* learning the *kirtan*, reading from the *Gurbani* and singing with the harmonium. Afghani Sikhs relentlessly pursue their desire of educating their young ones in traditional Punjabi and the recitation of *Gurbani*.

The path taken by the procession during 'Nagar Kirtan' is swept clean by a women devotee.

'Celebration of Sikh Heritage' at Washington D.C.

The magnificent and ornate Jefferson Building and James Madison Memorial Building near the US Capitol was venue for the two-day National Sikh Conference, sponsored by the Kaur Foundation of Washington DC in collaboration with the US Library of Congress Asian Division and the Asian Division Friends Society. A shining example of the Sikh-American community coming of age, many attendees came away with the distinct feeling of appreciation and confidence that the Sikhs in the diaspora are at an exciting new crossroads.



The Conference with its timely theme of "Taking Heritage into the 21st Century" accomplished much beyond a "Celebration of Sikh Traditions, Heritage, and Arts." It included the Sikh Collection Initiative: a permanent installation of over 87 books on Sikh history, literature and the arts, scriptures and classics in English and Punjabi in the Library of Congress. The powerful presentations and panel discussions inspired new imaginative and creative thoughts as to how we can preserve and present the Sikh heritage to America and the world; secure a rightful place and advance our talents, dreams and legitimate concerns as Americans; and develop networking and collaborations for our shared interests. Successful men and women of exemplary discipline and passion, contributing and excelling in various fields and international endeavours who are serving humanity in unique and significant ways were introduced in panel discussions.

The Kaur Foundation of Washington DC defines its Mission

The Kaur Foundation headed by Ms Mirin Kaur Phool and Ms Inni Kaur Dhingra, a dedicated Board and an army of volunteers have often presented platforms for ideas and achievers that are inspirational, professional, informative and instructive in advancing the cause and concern of Sikh Americans. Their mission can thus be stated in the following words: "To facilitate the creation of inclusive environments and to empower coming generations of Sikh Americans; believing that cultural acceptance is fundamental to developing an integrated society."

Mirin Kaur Phool, President of the Kaur Foundation with Congressman Mike Honda at the Library of Congress.

Navtej Sarna, Indian Ambassador to Israel and author with Christy Campbell, author and journalist, discussing 'The Last Maharaja, life and times of Duleep Singh'.

The multi-generational gathering of over 300 community leaders, pioneers and interested individuals actively participated in discussions and made their contribution to the letter and spirit of the Conference. Outstanding achievements, glorious heritage and painful testimonies of Sikh history, heritage and great leaders were proudly recounted. There was a recurring message of networking and mainstreaming the energy, strengths and experiences; preserving, celebrating and interfacing our beautiful culture, heritage and spirit into the tapestries and traditions of the lands and communities where we live. A unifying message which kept reverberating was that it is important to build, span and reinforce bridges of friendship that enhance our collective peace and prosperity; dispel unfounded stereotype about religiously-mandated Sikh identity and sacred articles of faith that are leading to workplace harassment and incidents of unprovoked violence. The Kaur Foundation's motto and commitment: "Being the change...Building our legacy with measured steps" was at work.

Ravi Singh Dhingra, Christy Campbell and Inni Kaur, Board of Directors – Kaur Foundation, at the Library of Congress, in Washington DC.

Messages, Inspirations and Images

The Conference was a classroom of culture, a forum to elaborate on Sikh history and heritage, an introduction of achievers and entrepreneurs and their outstanding successes in many fields of human endeavours; it was a place to listen to distinguished leaders and their experiences and assurances and to take home some lasting memories of past glory and future challenges. There was time for networking, interludes of films, music and dance, and a delicious Punjabi feast in the exquisite setting of the beautiful Atrium of the Thomas Jefferson Building of the Library of Congress.

The following words and images from the multi-faceted presentations and testimonials have left a lasting echo and inspirations for all participants to reflect upon and creatively engage as we return to our communities and advance the message and

Congressman Christopher Van Hollen.

substance of the Conference:

"Important initiative with great promise".

"Sikh Collection Initiative: our aim is to introduce this project through a presentation of lectures, manuscripts, books and art; all very valuable materials in studying and understanding historical events, periods and movements of any community" – The Kaur Foundation.

"Sikh-Americans have significantly contributed to every field of human endeavour, from technology, commerce, health, science, agriculture, to the arts, further enriching the cultural fabric of this land of immigrants" : Mirin Kaur, Founder and President Kaur Foundation.

"Partnering with this oldest federal, cultural institution in the nation's capital, the Kaur Foundation has taken a significant step toward building and preserving the Sikh legacy in their new homeland" : Congressman Mike Honda (D-California).

"Researchers coming to the library could not see (until now) what Gurumukhi looks like… (What) if some wanted to research on the language of religion?" : Inni Kaur, founding member Kaur Foundation, who helped to coordinate the collection.

The National Sikh Conference took place at a memorable venue. "The Library of Congress is a vast trove of human knowledge and a centre of intercultural awareness and understanding. With over 142 million items in more than 470 languages, the Library is a central repository of all types of publications…Sikhism is the world's fifth largest religion and Sikh culture is synonymous with 'the Punjab,' that area of India known as the melting pot of South Asia. The Punjab reflects the confluence of Islamic, Sufi, and Hindu traditions and the Library is proud to add materials to its collections reflecting the art and culture of the Sikhs and this area of the world.": James H. Billington, the Librarian of Congress.

"For some of you, today's Conference is a chance to celebrate the wonderful multi-faceted Sikh contributions to American society. For others, today represents a chance to learn more about the Sikh heritage, history, and traditions. For all of us, however, this Conference is an opportunity to share, to learn, and to celebrate…this conference, for me, is personally meaningful and an opportunity to learn more about the extraordinary contributions of Sikh Americans to the diverse nature of our multi-cultural community": Peter R. Young, Chief, Asian Division, the Library of Congress.

Navtej Sarna, India's Ambassador to Israel and author of the book, *The Exile of Duleep Singh, the last Maharaja of Punjab,* affirmed the importance of "original documents and manuscripts from Sikh history to form a distinct collection at the Library of Congress."


Satjiv Singh Chahal with Congressman Mike Honda.

Special Honours and Sound Bytes by Distinguished Leaders

"This event is to promote and recognise the contributions of Sikh Americans by establishing a Sikh Collection Initiative at the Library of Congress." : Adrian M Fenty, Mayor, District of Columbia.

The Council of the District of Columbia passed a special resolution declaring June 15-21, 2009 as Sikh Heritage Week in the District that includes the national capital, Washington DC.

"Ending hate crimes (against any individual or group because of their ethnicity, faith or life style) in America should be a national priority. Tolerance is not good enough; we must develop a culture of

respect. When anyone is diminished, it diminishes our entire community; stand up for what is right," said Senator Ben Cardin (D-Maryland).

"Throughout the United States, some of the roughly one million Sikh Americans are excelling in innumerable professional, academic, entrepreneurial and artistic fields of endeavour. The reputation of Sikhs for service to their neighbours, community and country is well-deserved...I appreciate especially the awareness and activism of the Sikh community in the national issues of the day. In my experience, faith-based communities have become increasingly sophisticated in their understanding of the political process...The admirable stance of Sikhs who responded with patient efforts at education and calls for greater understanding set an example of resilience and courage that all Americans should appreciate and emulate" stated Senator Richard G Lugar (R- Indiana; ranking member U.S. Foreign Relations Committee).

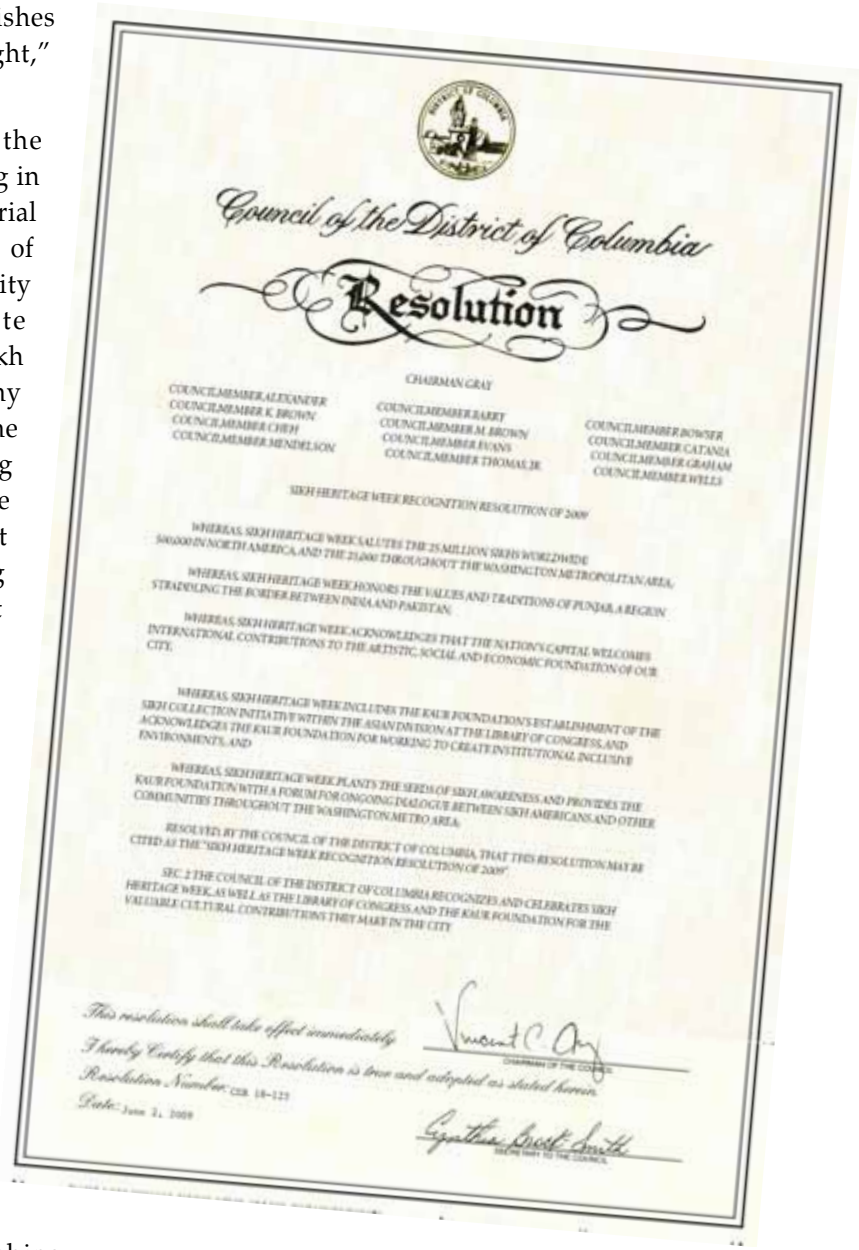
"Do not hesitate to call us...Help us make a greater nation" : Congressman Mike Honda.

Born in what is now Pakistan and having spent three years in India, Congressman Chris Van Hollen (D-Maryland) expressed deep solidarity with the Sikh concerns and promised to address these.

Calling attention to Heritage, Achievements and Concerns

Pushpindar Singh, Executive Editor of the *Nishaan* Journal and Dr Kenneth Robbins, Asian Division Friends Society, brought home the incomparable "Portraits of Courage" of the Sikh people and followers in defence of righteous causes. Pushpindar added, "Sikh faith was conceived in the crucible of adversity" and "offers us incredible testimony of courage, sacrifices and service to humanity."

Dr. Kenneth Robbins reminded the gathering of Sikh faith in tradition of righteous values: "Guru Nanak's Sword of Knowledge, Sword of Humility, Sword of Seva and Guru Gobind Singh's Sword of Saint-Soldier. Sikhs see no stranger as commanded by their faith; Sikhs have sought out other people; Sikhs have championed values of equality, justice and



Council of the District of Columbia

Resolution

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COUNCILMEMBER BOWSER
COUNCILMEMBER CATANIA
COUNCILMEMBER GRAHAM
COUNCILMEMBER WILDS

SIKH HERITAGE WEEK RECOGNITION RESOLUTION OF 2009

WHEREAS, SIKH HERITAGE WEEK SALUTES THE 25 MILLION SIKHS WORLDWIDE 500,000 IN NORTH AMERICA AND THE 25,000 THROUGHOUT THE WASHINGTON METROPOLITAN AREA;

WHEREAS, SIKH HERITAGE WEEK HONORS THE VALUES AND TRADITIONS OF PUNJAB, A REGION STRADDLING THE BORDER BETWEEN INDIA AND PAKISTAN;

WHEREAS, SIKH HERITAGE WEEK ACKNOWLEDGES THAT THE NATION'S CAPITAL WELCOMES INTERNATIONAL CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE ARTISTIC, SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC FOUNDATION OF OUR CITY;

WHEREAS, SIKH HERITAGE WEEK INCLUDES THE KAUR FOUNDATION'S ESTABLISHMENT OF THE SIKH COLLECTION INITIATIVE WITHIN THE ASIAN DIVISION AT THE LIBRARY OF CONGRESS, AND ACKNOWLEDGES THE KAUR FOUNDATION FOR WORKING TO CREATE INSTITUTIONAL INCLUSIVE ENVIRONMENTS; AND

WHEREAS, SIKH HERITAGE WEEK PLANTS THE SEEDS OF SIKH AWARENESS AND PROVIDES THE KAUR FOUNDATION WITH A FORUM FOR ONGOING DIALOGUE BETWEEN SIKH AMERICANS AND OTHER COMMUNITIES THROUGHOUT THE WASHINGTON METRO AREA;

RESOLVED, BY THE COUNCIL OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA, THAT THIS RESOLUTION MAY BE CITED AS THE "SIKH HERITAGE WEEK RECOGNITION RESOLUTION OF 2009".

SEC. 2 THE COUNCIL OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA RECOGNIZES AND CELEBRATES SIKH HERITAGE WEEK, AS WELL AS THE LIBRARY OF CONGRESS AND THE KAUR FOUNDATION FOR THE VALUABLE CULTURAL CONTRIBUTIONS THEY MAKE IN THE CITY

This resolution shall take effect immediately

I hereby Certify that this Resolution is true and adopted as stated herein.

Resolution Number: CER 18-123

Date: June 2, 2009

human dignity, consistent with American values." These are timeless lessons and a proud legacy.

"Let us go beyond the glories of heroes in the time of Guru Nanak...How hard it must have been to go against the caste system currents" stated Dr. Ajeet Cour, celebrated author and Padam Shri Award Recipient.

"Maharaja Ranjit Singh's consummate humanity was unique among empire-builders... Inspired by the principles of peaceful co-existence, uniquely articulated by the Sikh Gurus and firm in upholding the rights of others, he was unabashed in exercising his own" : Patwant Singh and Jyoti Rai in *The Empire of the Sikhs*. This book was

At the photo exhibition : Jagdeep Singh, CEO Infinera, Satjiv Singh Chahal, Congressman Mike Honda, Kanwarjit Singh, Ranjit Singh, and Daya Singh Khalsa.

launched at the National Sikh Conference and the authors were present to sign it.

Internationally renowned and celebrated Sikh artists – Arpana Kaur and the Singh twins, Rabindra and Amrit – led us through the creative processes in their paintings that capture people, events and iconic images in their unique styles. The Singh twins' work reflects pride in heritage, the Indian and Sikh identity, universal outlook of Sikhism as they focus on cultural identity that unites, not divides. In their choice of images and details, they get intimately and intricately involved with the world around them. Arpana Kaur's artwork is inspired by the Indian miniatures, folk-art, murals and wall paintings; her artwork and inspirations are anchored in her Sikh faith. Arpana Kaur's series of paintings, inspired by her being an eyewitness, on the genocide of innocent Sikhs in New Delhi in November 1984 was especially moving and brought home the inhumanity and horrific events of the time. The Singh twins' artworks inspired by the Moghul-miniature style of paintings reveal their creative genius and interpretive skills in colourful presentations full of pleasant surprises, and elements of Indian motif and their cultural roots. Their masterpiece on the Indian army's assault at the Golden Temple, the holiest shrine of Sikh faith, in June 1984 that was featured in *The Sikh Heritage Gallery: The Legacy of the Punjab* at the Smithsonian, leaves the onlooker with a lasting sense of anguish and prayer that such sad events must never intrude the human spirit.

There were reminders of respectful conduct towards all fellow Americans; our individual and collective responsibility and moral accountability to the Republic; a sense of shared humanity and intertwined destiny as one nation was enshrined and anchored in the emblazened American Motto: "Out of many One."

"Desire to contribute, give back… any life wherever it is lived is of equal value": Dr Kanwarjit Singh, Gates Foundation.

Dr GS Mann (Chair Sikh Studies UCSB) highlighted the nature and scope of Sikh Studies at UCSB and Dr Paul Taylor (Smithsonian Institution) discussed the importance of introducing Sikh heritage, faith, and the arts through exhibits and presentations at educational and cultural institutions as an urgent step toward greater understanding of Sikh spirit and contributions.

To underscore her milestone achievement, Arpinder Kaur, a Sikh turbaned female First Officer of American Airline Eagle, said that it is all about "Creating a positive image,

Fakir Syed Aijazuddin from Lahore with Susan Stronge (V&A, London) and Christy Campbell (behind, centre).

A beaming Captain Arpinder Kaur.

creating confidence and comfort." Arpinder added that only 2 percent of commercial airline pilots in the US (7 percent in India) are women; with a firm resolve and pursuit of our goal, "everything is possible."

"I do not beat them (others that I work with or at the construction sites) on their heads about my (Sikh) identity;" I strive, "finding the universals that drive us", said Jasmeet Singh Rangr, Architect.

Valarie Kaur, a third generation Sikh American, a writer and filmmaker who created the documentary, "Divided We Fall," reminded the audience about maintaining the Sikh identity, image of pride; learning from the Jewish community; seeing our endeavours as seva: film making, story-telling, fighting stereotypes, overcoming generational divides, breaking the glass ceiling, glass walls...Give us the trust and we will fly." Valarie added, "Fearlessness, the Sikh traditions of saint and soldier, stories of faith, culture and community; of our ancestors and pioneers need to be told."

Our Spirit, our Future and our Challenges

Mirin Kaur and Inni Kaur's tireless spirit and sheer hard work along with their scores of friends, benefactors and volunteers produced an exciting, informative, inspiring and memorable National Sikh Conference. They deserve deep gratitude and congratulations on behalf of the entire community. Participants from many countries, distinguished guests, brilliant scholars and especially the staff and leadership of the US Library of Congress immeasurably contributed to the success of this landmark event. Ideas for future collaborations have inspired many.

Our history and heritage: the arts, architectural landmarks, priceless cultural and spiritual legacy are important elements of our humanity. They offer reflections of the human soul, creativity and imagination. The cultural and literary treasures, rare artefacts, surviving priceless records and heritage are our connection to the past generations and highlight significant markers of the human journey and creativity of a community through the ages. The artefacts of the Sikh heritage take on additional importance and an aura of 'sanctity' when they are associated with persons, events and innovations that transformed human history and our civilisation. This heritage is not just brick, mortar, papers and texts; it enshrines the inspiration, wisdom, energy and foundations of who Sikhs are and where faith-inspired greatness may lead the Sikhs.

One of the primary goals must be to inspire pride within the Sikh American community. Sikhs must interface and enter in faith with other faiths and ethnic communities; build partnerships and network with local organisations and national institutions and engage

Holding placards are Ms. Ajeet Cour, writer and Padmashree, Dr GS Mann, Chair UCSB and Dr Paul Taylor of the Smithsonian Institution.

leadership at the highest level about our legitimate concerns. Sikhs must support and showcase talents and encourage the best and brightest, who bring honour to the immigrant communities and the nation.

Sikhs must recognise the new frontiers of time, technology, events and global interdependence. Also they should, in the spirit of gratitude, inspired by faith, commandments and lessons from a proud history, fairly and fiercely compete and excel in the unimagined *Hola Mohallas* of our times; make our Gurus and others who provide new opportunities, proud of our time and place in this journey.

To secure a rightful place for our sacred rights and culture, Sikhs must embrace American values, enrich the culture and spirit in imaginative ways and continue to affirm that Sikhs are proud of such involvements in the lands that are their new homes. While preserving and honouring our sacred traditions and values, Sikhs must exhibit openness to growth, step out of the ethnic and cultural box into the sunshine of "One Nation under God, Indivisible with Liberty and Justice for all."

Kanwal Prakash Singh greets Senator Richard Lugar.

Distinctive duo : Sikh visitor to the Library of Congress, with the Capitol in the background.

The Sikh Collection Initiative and Conference at the Library of Congress with the prospect of more future collaborations at the Library and elsewhere was a landmark moment for the Sikh American community. In time, this can and should lead to myriad possibilities for incorporating outstanding achievements and Sikh culture as an integral part of American heritage. Mirin Kaur, Inni Kaur, Peter Young, Pushpindar Singh, Senators Lugar and Cardin, Congressmen Honda and Van Hollen, Dr Paul Taylor, Bicky Singh, Valarie Kaur, the Singh twins, Sikh CEOs, educators, pioneer trailblazers, community activists and others have shown the way and now it is up to Sikhs and friends to take the message and inspiration to new levels.

Kanwal Prakash Singh

"Save the Planet"

EcoSikh's 'Green' Endeavours

The EcoSikh initiative aims to enable Sikh communities around the world to connect their efforts and work in solidarity for a better understanding of ecological problems and innovative ways to cope with them. The condition of our planet continues to deteriorate and unsustainable environmental practices are affecting every community worldwide. Punjab is among those areas being hit hardest by the indefensible practices and environmental exploitation, while at the same time hosting some of the best crafted and innovative responses to contemporary ecological crisis. EcoSikh endeavours to provide a plan that can be implemented over the next five years to cultivate best practices, inspire on the ground activism, address the issues that each of our communities face and celebrate the ways in which being Sikh is being green.

On 4 July 2009, representatives of the Sikh community, in conjuction with senior delegates from the United Nations and its own leaders, met at the EcoSikh Conclave, held at the India Habitat Centre in New Delhi to raise their voice against global warming. All attendees endorsed a five year 'greening plan', which includes a long term commitment to transform gurdwaras and schools into ecologically sound buildings in terms of energy and types of building materials used and incorporating environmental education into Sikh education curricula. EcoSikh, which has been crafted by the US-based Sikh Council on Religion and Education (SCORE), was organiser of the conference.

UN Assistant Secretary-General and UNDP's Director of Development Policy, Olav Kjorven and Victoria Finlay of UK-based Alliance of Religions and Conservation (ARC), joined in this Sikh environment summit. Mr. Kjorven said, "Throughout history, religions have helped people and civilisations interpret and understand events around them and to respond to new challenges in light of their spiritual heritage and moral compass". He further added, "Now when we are facing the challenge of securing a liveable planet for our children and safeguarding creation as we know it, the leadership of religions is indispensable".

Dr Rajwant Singh, Chairman of SCORE said, "This is perhaps the first time that so many Sikh leaders have gathered to declare their commitment to save the planet. Sikhism teaches us to be environmentally conscious and this conference with UN was an opportunity for Sikhs to demonstrate to the world that we are ready to translate our beliefs into action".

"The Sikhs have always been unique in their combination of deep spirituality and immensely practical action. The five-year plan embodies all that is best in those two strands that make Sikhism the powerful force that it is and will be for the future", said Martin Palmer, secretary general of ARC.

Among those who attended this EcoSikh conclave were Union Cabinet member Dr Manohar Singh Gill, Secretary of Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee SGPC Dilmegh Singh, President of Delhi

Olav Kjorven, Assistant Secretary General of UNDP planting a ceremonial tree at Gurdwara Bangla Sahib in Delhi. Flanking him are Dr. Rajwant Singh and Makhan Singh.

Sikh Gurdwara Management Committee DSGMC Paramjit Singh Sarna, Former Supreme Court Judge, Justice Kuldeep Singh, MP Tarlochan Singh, Manjit Singh, President of Shiromani Akali Dal (Badal) in Delhi, Major General MS Chadha, Sikh Forum Secretary RS Chatwal, Vikram Singh Sahney of World Punjabi Organisation, artist Arpana Caur, Makhan Singh, Dr Mohinder Singh and many other Sikh politicians, artists, grassroots leaders and business leaders from all over India and abroad. Harsimrat Kaur Badal, Baba Sewa Singh of Khadoor Sahib, Baba Balbir Singh Seechewal, former Jathedar Professor Manjit Singh and Punjab Secretary DS Jaspal were honoured for their environmental activism. Dr Farooq Beg from Pakistan, who has documented trees associated with Sikh Gurus, was also in attendance.

The EcoSikh Seed Plan focuses around five key areas: assets, education, media/advocacy, eco-twinning and last but not the least, *celebration*. Each key finds it roots in Sikh eco-theology and relies on it to enable its fruition. "By retaining strong roots in our own theology, we see the implementation of the EcoSikh Plan as a continuing expression of our faith."

L to R: Justice Kuldeep Singh, Olav Kjorven, Assistant Secretary General of UNDP, MS Gill, Union Youth Affairs & Sports Minister of India, Ms. Victoria Finlay, Alliance of Religions and Conservation, UK, Dr. Rajwant Singh, Chairman, SCORE.

"The *shabad* composed by Guru Nanak Dev ji at Jagannath Puri in Orissa embodies the principles that guide our education about the environment. Guru Nanak travelled there with Mardana and met many devotees who were using incense and flowers as a form of worship."

"The beautiful story of Guru Nanak Dev ji's encounter with Wali Qandhari at Hassan Abdal embodies the principles which guide us. As we seek to reach out far and wide and to form alliances that will enable us to better our ecological practices, we may occasionally be met by resistance, like that demonstrated then. Through persistence, patience and love, Guru Nanak was able to change the hearts of the incredulous – a perfect example for us to emulate."

The relationship between Guru Nanak Dev and Bhai Mardana embodies the principles that guide EcoSikh's eco-twinning programme. The strains of Bhai Mardana's *rabarb* helped Guru ji to enter a state of bliss with *Waheguru*, just as Guru ji's *bachans* nourished the soul of Bhai Mardana. Eco-twinning provides a way for Gurdwaras and organisations around the world to connect and support one another in their EcoSikh Plans.

The mesmerising tale of Guru Har Rai and the trampled rose expresses a profound call to ecological consciousness. Satguru Sri Har Gobind Sahib maintained an excellent garden with rare medicinal herbs planted in it. He also had a rare passion for collecting birds and animals that could be tamed and trained.

Baba Har Rai Sahib was strolling at dawn in his garden, one fine day and was reciting *Waheguru* with each breath he took. Guru Har Gobind Sahib was also walking in the garden, from the opposite direction. Seeing a beautiful flower on the ground, Guru Sahib bent and picked it up. He then asked, "Who plucked this lovely rose and left it to be trampled on the ground".

"It was my fault dear grandfather", said Baba Har Rai Sahib. "My robes got entangled in the plant and while loosening it, the flower

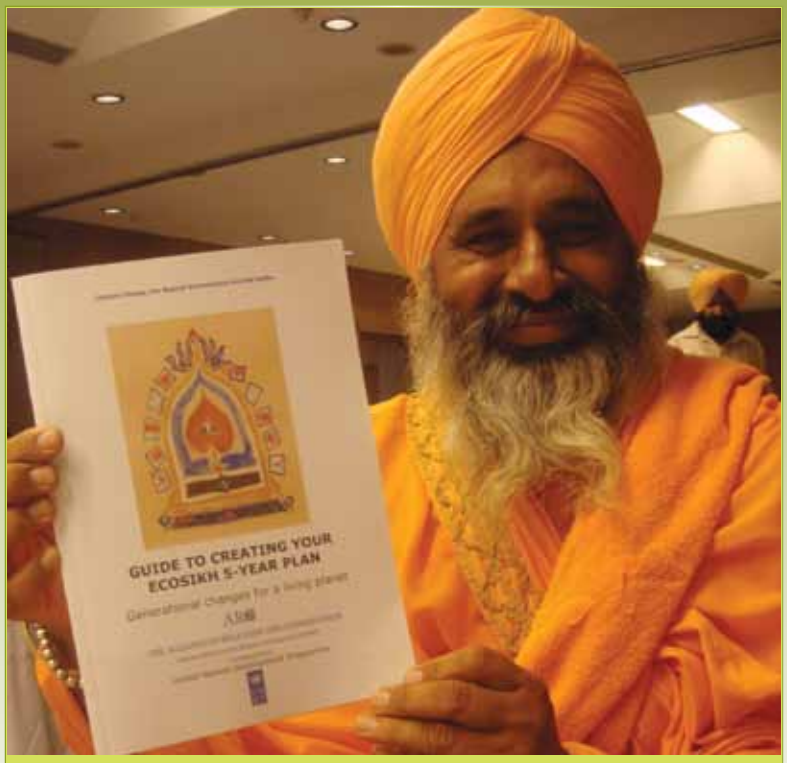
fell on the ground. I should have picked up the flower; I am really sorry grandfather".

"Today your robes have caused injury to this tender and beautiful plant out of carelessness and left it to be trampled under people's feet; someday your paraphernalia, if not kept under restraint and control, may cause injury to innocent people and in your heedlessness leave them to their fate. Yours are not the robes of coercive authority which can afford to disregard the feelings of others, particularly those who suffer and live silently. Yours are the robes of a dervish, a holy saint, who must shed light, love and compassion, not only on human beings, but even on animals and plants. The more tender or weak a creature of *Akaal Purakh*, the more love, sympathy and compassion he deserves".

Baba Har Rai Sahib fell at the feet of his beloved Guru and grandfather and sought his forgiveness. He promised that in the future, he would never show even the slightest heedlessness in his responsibilities towards humans, animals or plants. Restraint and self-control, boundless compassion and charity were reflected in all his actions and dealings with others throughout Baba Har Rai Sahib's life.

In this manner, Guru Har Gobind explains to Baba Har Rai that the Sikhs must come to the defence of all that is vulnerable and protect the well being of plants and animals. The beauty of this moment and the significance of these teachings inspire us to celebrate our relationship with the environment.

Since environmental activism is an expression of faith, the entire EcoSikh initiative can be perceived as a celebration. Like education, celebration finds its roots in the rich eco-theological tradition of Sikhism. For instance, celebration of Basant (spring) provides a powerful way for us to recognise the beauty of renewal and regeneration. A number of *shabads* extol the relationship between *Sikhi* and the environment and we can focus on their meaning during Basant, a celebration of spring, growth and rejuvenation.



"Eco Baba" Balbir Singh Seechewal holding the Guide to creating the EcoSikh Five Year Plan at New Delhi, 4 July 2009.

Noted environmentalist and member of the Punjab Pollution Control Board (PPCB), Sant Balbir Singh Seechewal, in his meeting with Senior Scientist, Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) Dr DD Basu, discussed measures to protect river waters against pollution in the Malwa and Rajasthan. Dr Basu was acquainted with the residential and toxic industrial waste flowing into the Phagwara drain which spills further into the Chitti Bein. Both Kala Sanghia Drain and Chitti Bein then carry this toxic waste to the Sutlej.

"The polluted drains, streams and rivers have contaminated the ground water down more than 300 feet". Furthermore, the Sutlej waters carry the toxic waste into Harike wetland and have polluted vast swathes of the lake, killing acquatic creatures and migratory birds. The same polluted water flows into Malwa and Rajasthan, rendering the groundwater as unfit to drink.

Districts such as Ferozepur, Faridkot, Muktsar and Bathinda in Malwa region of Punjab and Ganganagar, Hanumangarh, Bikaner and Jaisalmer in Rajasthan are witnessing an increased incidence of cancer, asthma, gastroenteritis, kidney disorders and skin ailments. Several animal species too are verging on the brink of extinction. Sant Seechewal has demanded medical relief for the ailing. "It is the constitutional duty of the pollution control boards to put a stop to this", states the green crusader.

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