

III/2010

NISHAAN

NAGAARA



Horses in Sikh Lore
The Saragarhi Challenge Cup
"The Real Ranjit Singh"

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[Photographs by Malkiat Singh].



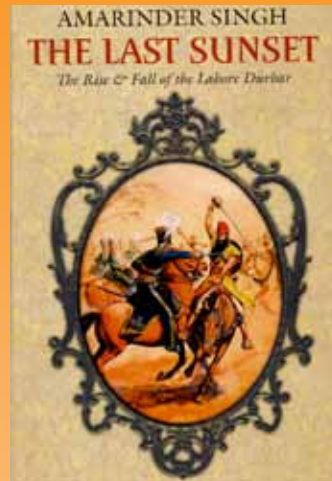
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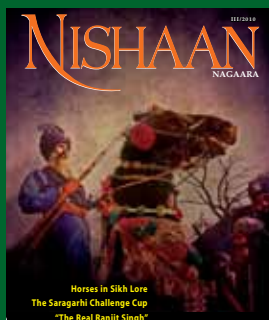
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Cover : Nihang on festooned horse at
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The Horse In Sikh Lore

Not so long ago, at the Sikh festival of Hola Mohala, an electrifying sight caught the eye. Nihangs – the traditional Sikh warriors - riding seemingly recklessly through the Punjabi countryside on their horses; a picture of breakneck speed and uncontrolled risk but, in fact, absolute breath-taking control. *Legendary legerdemain.*

A saga ranging from the blue steed of Guru Gobind Singh to today's overfed, obese, Sikhs spilling over their scooters, their glutei framing and overflowing the saddles. Mastering a spirited horse speaks of courage and valour that is decidedly not associated with gunning a scooter or a car.

A galloping horse has nobility and its rider automatically acquires an aura of it along with unquestionable elegance. It brings out the romantic in all. It speaks of adventure and imagination - new lands to see and conquer; a new life, a fresh start, hope and dreams.

A horse was for eons, and remains even today, the embodiment of strength, grace and speed. Here was a time in much of the world when a horse was the way to travel. We have since, as recently as the last century, replaced the horse with an automobile whose elegance is still measured by a mustang, its strength counted in horse-power. The cavalry has long been replaced by sturdier armoured tanks, but generals around the world still ride horses when they inspect their soldiers on parade.

Of all animals domesticated by man, the horse is probably the most aristocratic. It has had a most powerful impact on human society perhaps for as long as 4000 years. We are not quite sure where it was first domesticated but horse driven chariots and cavalry perhaps were the first great revolutionary advances in the technology of human warfare in India, Middle East and China, among others. The horse's impact on agriculture and industry cannot be underestimated. Beyond the battlefield, horsepower also afforded great advances in transport, agriculture, industry, and science. The horse was likely a most significant instrument in the rapidity of communication and transmission of new knowledge – languages and science – across the world.

Yet, today we might think of that period as laboriously slow.

In the post-Columbus period, peoples and cultures were often rated on how they used the horse in the society. The horse was likely a defining factor in the conquest by the Spanish of the horseless Americas. We refer interested readers to Pita Kelekna's wonderful 2009 book on *The Horse in Human History*.

There was a time in India when it was ruled by Islamic despots and the ordinary non-Muslim was forbidden to ride a horse. Quite expectedly, the Sikhs rebelled against such coercive edicts. They rode horses and raised an army during the time of the last five Gurus, from Guru Hargobind to Guru Gobind Singh. Understanding the needs of the times the Gurus even asked their followers to donate horses and arms. If Sikhs are today a nation, then horses had a pivotal role to play.

Sikh lore speaks of a heroic time when Sikhs lived their lives on horseback, traveled fast and furiously over risky terrain to take on superior armies and then as lightning disappear into the impenetrable jungles from which they had emerged. History tells us that this is how Sikhs liberated the many young women of India who were being abducted into slavery by the almost yearly invaders from beyond India's borders through the 18th century.

Dr Inder Jit Singh

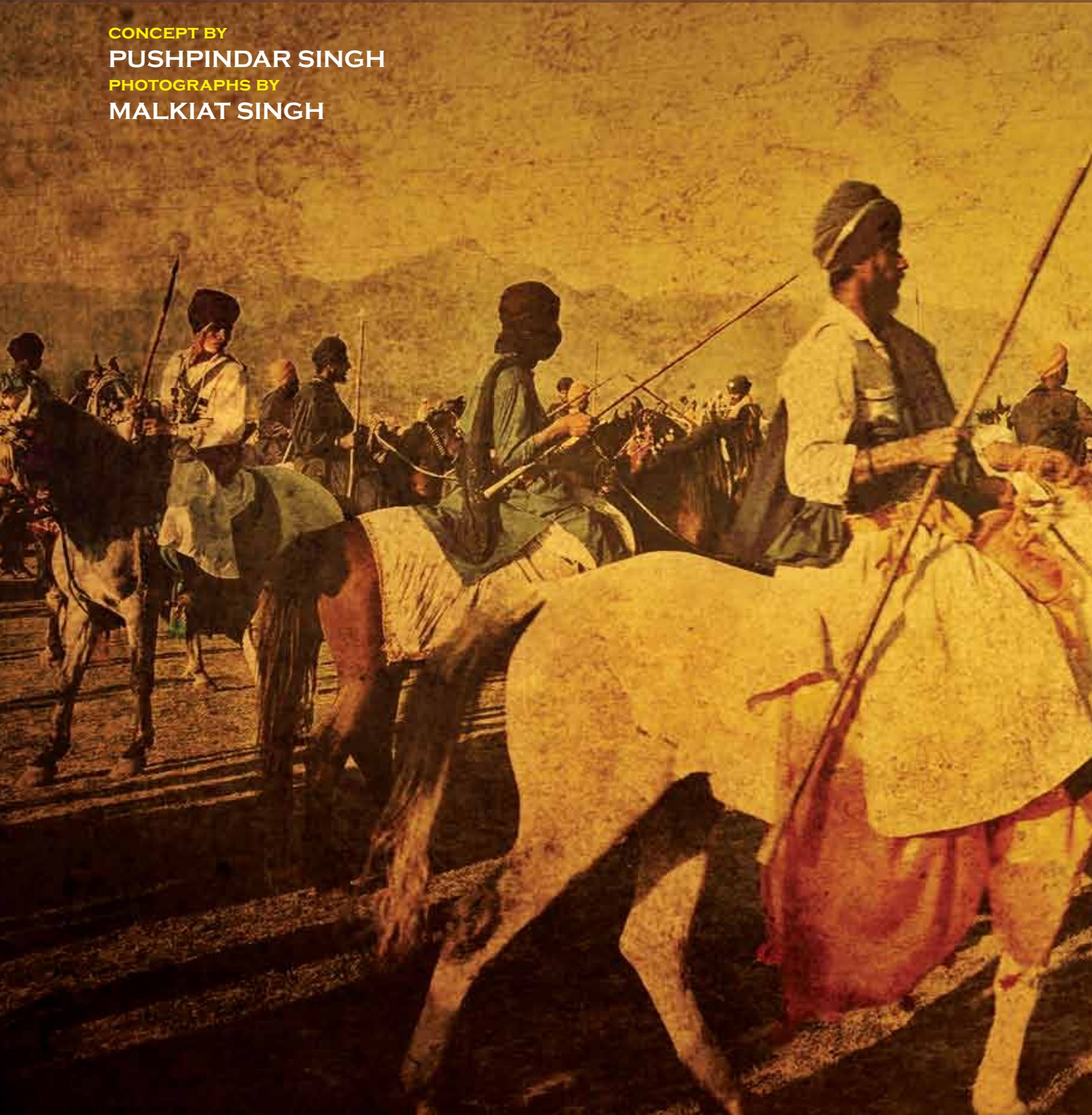




Photograph by Malkiat Singh.

HORSES IN

CONCEPT BY
PUSHPINDAR SINGH
PHOTOGRAPHS BY
MALKIAT SINGH



SIKH LORE

“THE NUMBER OF HORSEMEN WHICH THE SIKHS COULD MUSTER HAVE BEEN VARIOUSLY ESTIMATED FROM SEVENTY THOUSAND TO FOUR TIMES THAT AMOUNT”:

FORSTER IN 1783.



NIHANGS ON THEIR STEEDS AT ANANDPUR SAHIB.

HORSES IN SIKH LORE

STREET SCENE AT
ANANDPUR SAHIB DURING
HOLA MOHALLA.
[PUNJAB]



GURU GOBIND SINGH DEPICTED ON
HORSEBACK AND HOLDING A BAAZ,
WITH ATTENDANTS:
FOLIO OF ADI GRANTH AT
GURDWARA MAI BHAGO,
[NANDED].



“THE COLLECTED BODY OF THE SICQUE NATION, AMOUNTING TO SIXTY THOUSAND CAVALRY HAD FORMED A JUNCTION AT THE RUINS OF AMRITSAR FOR THE PURPOSE OF PERFORMING SOME APPOINTED CEREMONY AND WHERE THEY RESOLVED TO PLEDGE THEIR NATIONAL EXISTENCE IN THE EVENT OF A BATTLE. AHMED SHAH ABDALI ENCAMPED AT LAHORE, MARCHED WITH A STRONG FORCE TO AMRITSAR AND IMMEDIATELY ENGAGED THE SICQUES WHO ROUSED BY THE FURY OF A DESPERATE REVENGE, IN SIGHT ALSO OF THE GROUND SACRED TO THE FOUNDERS OF THEIR RELIGION, WHOSE MONUMENTS HAD BEEN DESTROYED BY THE ENEMY THEY WERE THEN TO COMBAT, DISPLAYED DURING A BLOODY CONTEST WHICH LASTED FROM THE MORNING UNTIL NIGHT, AN ENTHUSIASTIC AND FIERCE COURAGE WHICH ULTIMATELY FORCED ABDALI TO DRAW OFF HIS ARMY AND RETIRE WITH PRECIPITATION TO LAHORE”: G FORSTER, 1784

HORSES IN SIKH LORE



TEENAGED NIHANG LEADING HIS PONY.

SOMEWHERE IN TIME'S OWN SPACE
THERE MUST BE SOME SWEET PASTURED PLACE
WHERE CREEKS SING ON AND TALL TREES GROW
SOME PARADISE WHERE HORSES GO,
FOR BY THE LOVE THAT GUIDES MY PEN
I KNOW GREAT HORSES LIVE AGAIN.
STANLEY HARRISON

NIHANG MAGGAR SINGH RIDING TWO HORSES DURING HOLA MOHALLA AT ANANDPUR SAHIB.



“I SAW TWO SICQUE HORSEMEN, WHO HAD BEEN SENT FROM THEIR COUNTRY TO RECEIVE THE SIRINGNAGHUR TRIBUTE WHICH IS COLLECTED FROM THE REVENUES OF CERTAIN CUSTOM-HOUSES. FROM THE MANNER IN WHICH THESE MEN WERE TREATED, OR RATHER TREATED THEMSELVES, I FREQUENTLY WISHED FOR THE POWER OF MIGRATING INTO THE BODY OF A SICQUE FOR A FEW WEEKS — SO WELL DID THESE CAVALIERS FARE. NO SOONER HAD THEY ALIGHTED, THEN BEDS WERE PREPARED FOR THEIR REPOSE, AND THEIR HORSES WERE SUPPLIED WITH GREEN BARLEY PULLED OUT OF THE FIELD.”

G FORSTER, 1798.

HORSES IN SIKH LORE

BABA SANTA SINGH
LEADING THE PROCESSION
AT SHAHEDI BAGH,
ANANDPUR SAHIB.

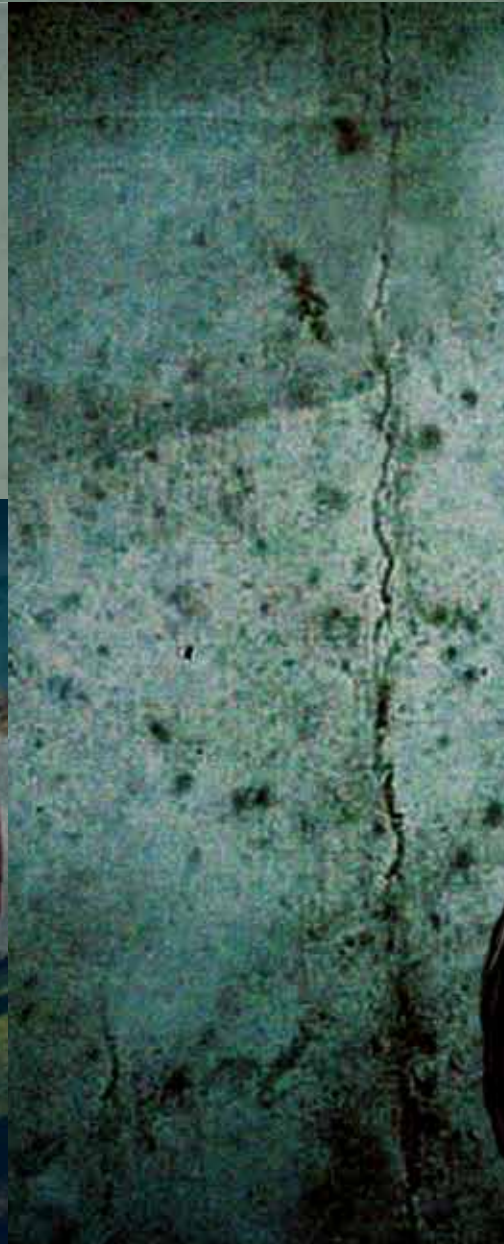


“THE MISLS WERE THAT FORMIDABLE ARISTOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF SIKH SOLDIERS THAT ARE INDEFATIGABLE, MOUNTED ON THE BEST HORSES THAT INDIA CAN AFFORD...FIFTY OF THEM ARE ENOUGH TO KEEP AT BAY A WHOLE BATTALION OF THE KING’S FORCES”: **ASIATIC ANNUAL REGISTER, 1800**



HORSES IN SIKH LORE

WHERE IN THIS WIDE WORLD
CAN MAN FIND NOBILITY WITHOUT PRIDE,
FRIENDSHIP WITHOUT ENVY,
OR BEAUTY WITHOUT VANITY?
HERE, WHERE GRACE IS SERVED WITH MUSCLE
AND STRENGTH BY GENTLENESS CONFINED
HE SERVES WITHOUT SERVILITY;
HE HAS FOUGHT WITHOUT ENMITY.
THERE IS NOTHING SO POWERFUL,
NOTHING LESS VIOLENT.
THERE IS NOTHING SO QUICK,
NOTHING MORE PATIENT.
~RONALD DUNCAN





ALL THE SIKHS WERE HORSEMEN AND AMONG PEOPLE DWELLING ON PLAINS OR IN ACTION WITH UNDISCIPLINED FORCES, CAVALRY MUST EVER BE THE MOST FORMIDABLE ARM. THE SIKHS SPEEDILY BECAME FAMOUS FOR THE EFFECTIVE USE OF MATCHLOCK WHEN MOUNTED AND THIS SKILL IS SAID TO HAVE DESCENDED TO THEM FROM THEIR ANCESTORS IN WHOSE HANDS THE BOW WAS A FATAL WEAPON. BESIDES THE REGULAR CONFEDERACIES, WITH THEIR MODERATE DEGREE OF SUBORDINATION, THERE WAS A BODY OF MEN WHO THREW OFF ALL SUBJECTION TO EARTHLY GOVERNORS, AND WHO PECULIARLY REPRESENTED THE RELIGIOUS ELEMENT OF SIKHISM. THESE WERE THE "AKALEES", THE IMMORTALS, OR RATHER THE SOLDIERS OF GOD, WHO, WITH THEIR BLUE DRESS AND BRACELETS OF STEEL, CLAIMED FOR THEMSELVES A DIRECT INSTITUTION BY GOOROO GOBIND SINGH.

JOSEPH DAVEY CUNNINGHAM, 1849.

HORSES IN SIKH LORE



**YOUNG NIHANG ['BHJANGI']
ON PONY BACK AT
MUKTSAR, 2006.**



WHAT DELIGHT TO BACK THE FLYING STEED,
THAT CHALLENGES THE WIND FOR SPEED!
- SEEMS NATIVE MORE OF AIR THAN EARTH!
- WHOSE BURDEN ONLY LENDS HIM FIRE! -
WHOSE SOUL, IN HIS TASK, TURNS LABOUR INTO SPORT;
WHO MAKES YOUR PASTIME HIS! I SIT HIM NOW!
HE TAKES AWAY MY BREATH! HE MAKES ME REEL!
I TOUCH NOT EARTH - I SEE NOT - HEAR NOT. ALL IS ECSTASY OF MOTION!
JAMES SHERIDAN KNOWLES

The President's Bodyguard



The President's Bodyguard (popularly, PBG), was raised in 1773 by the then Governor-General, Warren Hastings, with a strength of 50 picked troopers and horses. This nucleus of the Bodyguard was later augmented by another 50 bringing the overall strength of the Bodyguard upto 100 horses and men by the end of that year.

The establishment of the Regiment varied through the years, being augmented in times of war and it attained its maximum strength of 1929 all ranks, in the Army List of 1845, just prior to the First Sikh

War. The PBG continued to be select Cavalry unit, primarily for the personal and battlefield security of the Governor-General.

After Independence, in keeping with its high traditions, the PBG rendered yeoman service in 1947 and around the Capital in the upheaval during the aftermath of partition. The Regiment saw action in 1965, when it participated in the Western theatre. In 1988 and 1989, detachments of the Unit served with the Indian forces in Sri Lanka. The PBG has also served on the world's highest battlefield in Siachen,

“Let us remember how much of our good names we owe to our horses... make much of your horses!”

Commanding Officer at a mounted parade, on outbreak of World War II.



where it continues to do so till today, and with the Indian contingents forming part of the United Nations Force in Somalia, Sierra Leone and Angola.

The PBG today is a small body of men comprising of four officers, 14 JCOs and 161 Bodyguards-men backed up by administrative support personnel, an establishment which has not changed much in the last century. Equipped with armoured cars, its men are trained for operational duties, both as tankmen and airborne troops in addition to their ceremonial role.





Horses of the PBG are bay in colour, except that for the Regimental Trumpeter, who traditionally is always mounted on a Grey Charger, and the Colour Party. They are required to be of a minimum height of 157.5cms, measured at the shoulder, and are the only horses in the Indian Army, permitted to wear full manes, like their counterparts of the Household Cavalry in Britain.

The 'Mechanical Mounts' of the PBG have been at various times Daimler and Humber Armoured Cars, equipped with 2 pounder and 37 mm cannon and machine guns respectively, the indigenous Nissan Scout Car and the BTR 60 armoured vehicles.

[Photographs by Amit Pasricha].

Horses in the Warfare of Mankind

The earliest evidence of horses ridden in warfare dates back to between 4000 and 3000 BC in Eurasia. By 1600 BC, improved harnesses made the use of horses more common in the 'ancient Near East' and by 360 BC the Greeks had prepared an extensive treatise on horsemanship. There was a 'revolution' by the invention of the saddle, the stirrup and soon enough, the horse collar, all these greatly adding to the effectiveness of horses in battle. Such form of warfare included the riding of horses by warriors engaged in reconnaissance, skirmishes, communication and supply but most of all, for the ultimate shock-effect, mass cavalry charges that overwhelmed the foot soldier.

Going back into the history of northern India, horses came to the sub-continent from Persia (mass cavalry was organised at the time of Darius) but these were outfought by the famous Greek heavy cavalry of Alexander the Great who then demonstrated his military skills in the battle against Porus on the eastern side of the Jhelum River. As an aside, but most interesting in the study of contemporary history was that the battle of Chillianwala between the Sikhs and British on 13 January 1849 was fought on virtually the same battlefield 2100 years later although the use of horses by either side this time was limited owing to the terrain chosen.

Horses had also come to the Indian sub-continent from the steppes of Central Asia. The nomadic lifestyle of the Mongols was well suited to mobile warfare and these tribals soon became amongst the most militarily potent forces in the world. The literature of ancient India also refers to numerous horse nomads and there also are references to an invasion of India by the joint cavalry forces of the *Sakas*, *Kambojas*, *Yavanas*, *Pahlavas* and *Paradas*, called the "five hordes" or *Ksatriya* hordes.

Two millennium later, the heirs of such horse-warriors were manifest in the plains of northern India when the *Ghorchurras*, or irregular cavalry, came into fame, taking on the might of the Mughal Empire even as they interdicted the Persian forces of Ahmed Shah Abdali whose nine invasions of India began in 1747 and ended in 1769. As recorded, the Persians destroyed the Mughal administration in the Punjab, dealt a fatal blow to Maratha pretensions at Panipat but were in the end tormented by Sikh horsemen as they retreated for the last time across the Jhelum, never again to return.

Abdali may have been the bitterest of antagonists of the Sikhs but paradoxically, was the reason for the Sikh rise to power, having proved again that no peoples can become a strong and great nation without having gone through enormous strife and sacrifice.

Sikhs and the British Army

Former head of the British Army, General Sir Richard Dannatt, with Judge Sir Mota Singh QC, along with S Harbinder Singh Rana of the Anglo-Sikh Heritage Trail and 'Pops' from Tigerstyle are seen above at the entrance of the Imperial War Museum in London at the launch of 'Saragarhi Day'.

'Saragarhi Day' will hereafter mark the anniversary of the eponymous battle in 1897 that saw 21 Sikh soldiers lay down their lives to defend a remote army post against 10,000 Pashtun tribesmen. This day was marked by a series of events across the UK to recognise the contribution Sikh soldiers have made in the past and continue to make today.

That battle took place in the North-West Frontier Province, now part of Pakistan, in September 1897. The 21 brave Sikhs from the XXXVI Sikh Regiment fought till death and in doing so delayed the tribesmen long enough for reinforcements to arrive and defend nearby forts.

When the gallantry of Saragarhi was recounted, it led Queen Victoria to proclaim "The British, as well as the Indians, are proud of the XXXVI Sikh Regiment. It is no exaggeration to record that the armies which possess the valiant Sikhs cannot face defeat in war."

The 21 Sikh soldiers who sacrificed their lives were posthumously awarded the Indian Order of Merit, the highest gallantry award of that time that an Indian soldier could receive and equivalent to the Victoria Cross instituted later. Twenty-one Victoria Crosses in one battle!



General Sir Richard Dannatt said: "Sikh regiments have played an enormously important role in the British Army and the soldiers who laid down their lives at the Battle of Saragarhi were immensely brave and loyal. The Battle of Saragarhi is not well known and certainly hasn't achieved the recognition of a battle like Rorke's Drift but is an extremely important part of history and should be remembered and thanks paid to the soldiers and their families."

Judge Sir Mota Singh QC added: "These 21 brave soldiers laid down their lives to save others and it is really important that Sikhs of all ages recognise the sacrifice that they made. We are also asking the Government to formally recognise the sacrifice made by these Sikhs."

The Saragarhi Challenge Cup

of Saragarhi, in the turbulent North-West Frontier of the Indian sub-continent.

That was on 12 September 1897, in the year of Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee, when these twenty-one men of the Sikh Regiment in a display of unparalleled courage and sacrifice, fought against the most fearful of odds, making this not only one of the most stirring episodes of the Regiment but also that in the history of the Indian Army.

Those 21 soldiers fought it out to the end with incredible heroism and steeled resolve against thousands of fanatical Orakzai and Afridis, who had risen in rebellion against the British Empire.

This action was, in the words of the then Governor General of India: "A heroic devotion which has never been surpassed in the annals of the Indian Army". The Commander-in-Chief India said of them: "Fighting against overwhelming numbers, they all died at their posts, with unflinching loyalty and devotion to their oath while upholding to the very last, the traditional bravery of the Sikh nation."

123 years later, the atmosphere in England was far more benign. The Indian Sikh team was captained by Dr Pawandeep 'Tony' Singh, a radiologist by profession and an active player in the polo circuit for the last 25 years, having played all over the world. The other team members were: Jai Inder Singh Shergill, a 3rd generation polo player, grandson of Maj Gen Rajinder Singh 'Sparrow' and son of Lt Gen MS Shergill, who has played polo for the last 20 years

The magnificent Saragarhi Trophy presented to the winners of the British Army vs Sherdils Polo teams in England, September 2010. The small replicas were given to each of the players.

History was recreated on 18 September 2010, when for the first time in contemporary period a Sikh Polo team came face to face with the British Army team at the Royal County of Berkshire Polo Club. This Charity polo match was played between *Sherdils*, the visiting Sikh team from India vs the British Army team for the Saragarhi Challenge Cup. This has been initiated by HRH Prince Charles who dedicated the Polo trophy in memory of the 21 soldiers of the XXXVI Sikhs who fought valiantly to the last man and last round in the battle



representing Indian polo teams abroad; Lt. Col Navjit Singh Sandhu, of the 61st Cavalry and a regular member of the national and Indian Army polo team for over a decade and the youngest team member, Angad Singh, playing since 2005 and grandson of Maharaja Amarinder Singh of Patiala.

The British Army team comprised of Lt. Col Nick Hunter of the King's Royal Hussars serving in the British Army having played polo since the age of 16; Capt Tim Verdon, who joined the Royal Wessex Yeomanry in the mid 1980s and was captain of the winning Subalterns team in 1990; Major Matthew Eyre-Brook took up polo at Sandhurst in 2000 and became a member of the Rhine Army Polo Association and HRH Crown Prince of Johore, the eldest son of HRH Sultan of Johore and an avid polo enthusiast. The game was umpired by Satnam Singh Dhillon, an accomplished polo player in Cirencester and Maj



Action at the Royal County of Berkshire Polo Club.





As per the game, four chukkers were played in the match that afternoon.



HRH The Prince of Wales meeting the Sherdils.



The British Army Polo Team.

Gen (Retd) MS Sandhu, who commanded the President's Bodyguard and represented India at the highest levels of polo.

The magnificent trophy was conceptualised and presented by the *Nishaan* journal of the *Nagaara* Trust, New Delhi.

The match began at 3 pm at ground number 1 in the picturesque surroundings of the Royal Berkshire Club and was well attended by distinguished guests from England, India, the United States, Canada and Australia. The high profile game was also graced by the chief guest HRH Prince Charles, the main sponsor Mr Satnam Singh Chadha of the Adie Broswon Group, Sardar Tarlochan Singh, MP, Mr Navtej Singh Sarna, Indian Ambassador to Israel, Sardar SS Dhindsa, MP and Mr Subroto Roy of the Sahara Group amongst others.

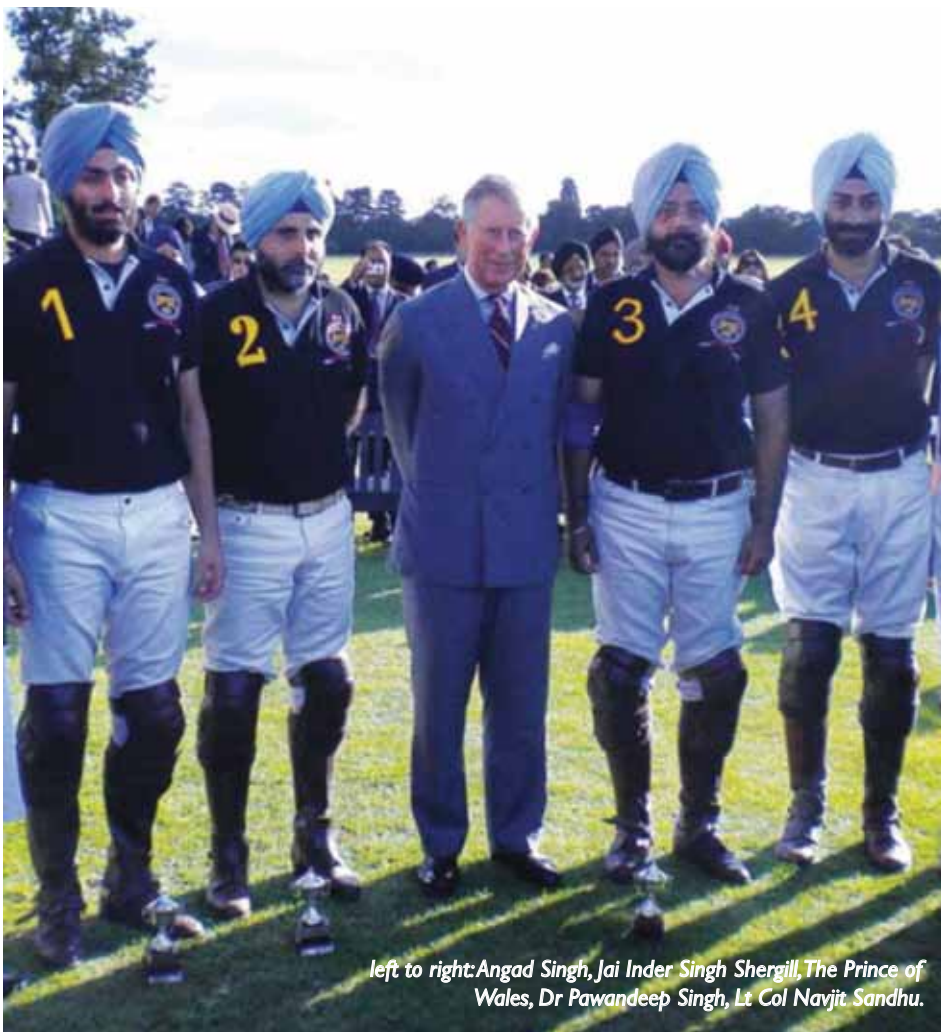
The 1st chukker on the 4 chukker match saw the *Sherdils* team dominate completely. The



The teams with the Saragarhi Trophy.



The Sherdils and the Saragarhi Trophy.



left to right: Angad Singh, Jai Inder Singh Shergill, The Prince of Wales, Dr Pawandeep Singh, Lt. Col Navjit Sandhu.

opening goal was scored by Lt Col Navjit Sandhu in a 40 yard penalty. Just before the end of the chukker the second goal was a beautiful field goal scored by Dr Pawandeep Singh.

The hosts fought back aggressively in the 2nd chukker. The *Sherdils* played valiantly despite the disadvantage of borrowed horses which were no comparison to the horse power of the British team, which resulted in them missing many mid field goals. In the 3rd chukker, the first goal for the hosts was scored by Capt Tim Verden and another by Lt Col Nick Hunter.

In the final 4th chukker, the third goal for the *Sherdils* was scored by the great efforts of Jai Shergill and Dr Tony



Sikh men and women of the British Army today flank a veteran of the Indian Army.



The well known BBC speaker Dr. Indrajit Singh and wife Kanwaljeet Kaur with guests at tea after the match.



Polo player of the future!

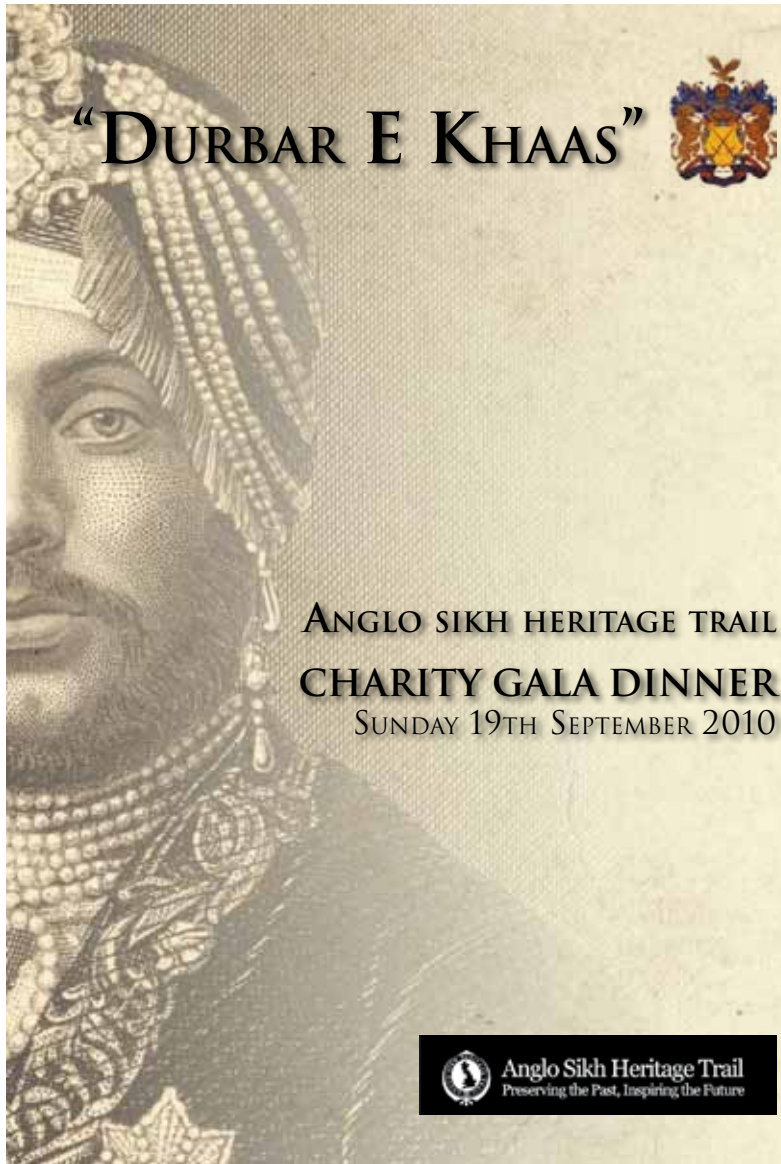
Singh. The equaliser was scored by Maj Matthew and the match was excitingly poised at this stage. The crowd cheered lustily at the evenly fought match but in the final moments, Prince Johore scored the last goal to seal the match in favour of the British team 4-3. But it was the *Sherdils* team that had won the hearts of all the spectators fighting aggressively and valiantly

in spite of having the disadvantage of playing in new surroundings for the first time and on horses which paled in comparison to those of the hosts.

The preliminary game had been a warm up match played the day before at Tidworth, where both the teams were even. The Garrison Commander presented a memento to the captain, Dr Pawandeep Singh of the *Sherdils*.

Origins of the “Sherdils”

Maharaja Ranjit Singh was so impressed by the feats of chivalry displayed by Hari Singh Nalwa in his battles against the Afghans and Mughals, that in 1804 he granted him a cavalry command of 700 men and horses with the honoured title of ‘Sardar’. Hari Singh Nalwa named his regiment as ‘Sher-Dil Rajman’. This was the origin of the famous ‘Sherdils’ of Maharaja Ranjit Singh’s army and over the centuries, this honoured title has been retained, earlier in the British Indian Army (as the 1st Battalion 14th Punjab Regiment – Sherdils) and retained in the present Pakistan Army as the 5th Punjab (Sherdils).



The finale to this wonderful event was the Charity Gala dinner held at the Elveden Hall on the 19 September. The Durbar-E- Khas was a glittering evening attended by the very distinguished personalities from all over the world. The performance by Madan Gopal Singh was enthralling which was followed by a presentation by Christie Campbell. Mr Navtej Singh Sarna read excerpts from his book, *The Exile*, followed by an auction by Edward Clive of Christies. A raffle draw followed by the auction of the Sherdils team T-shirt marked the conclusion of this two-day extravaganza.

Elveden Hall

“The plain, Georgian country house, once home to Admiral Keppel, was rebuilt from the ground up in red brick and Ancaster stone sprouting ornate wings and Tuscan porticos. Outside it looked more like a grand railway hotel than a country house. Inside a very English architect, John Norton, a notable restorer of East Anglican churches, worked from photographs of Lahore’s marble lined palaces and watercolours of August Schoefft to recreate a flamboyantly mock-oriental interior, scalloped Agra-style arches, shards of convex glass embedded in coloured plaster, ornamental foliage growing like jungle fronds to smother some ancient temple.”

Christy Campbell

The Maharajahs Box (Harper Collins 1997)





Book of the Year

The Last Sunset

The Rise and Fall of the Lahore Durbar

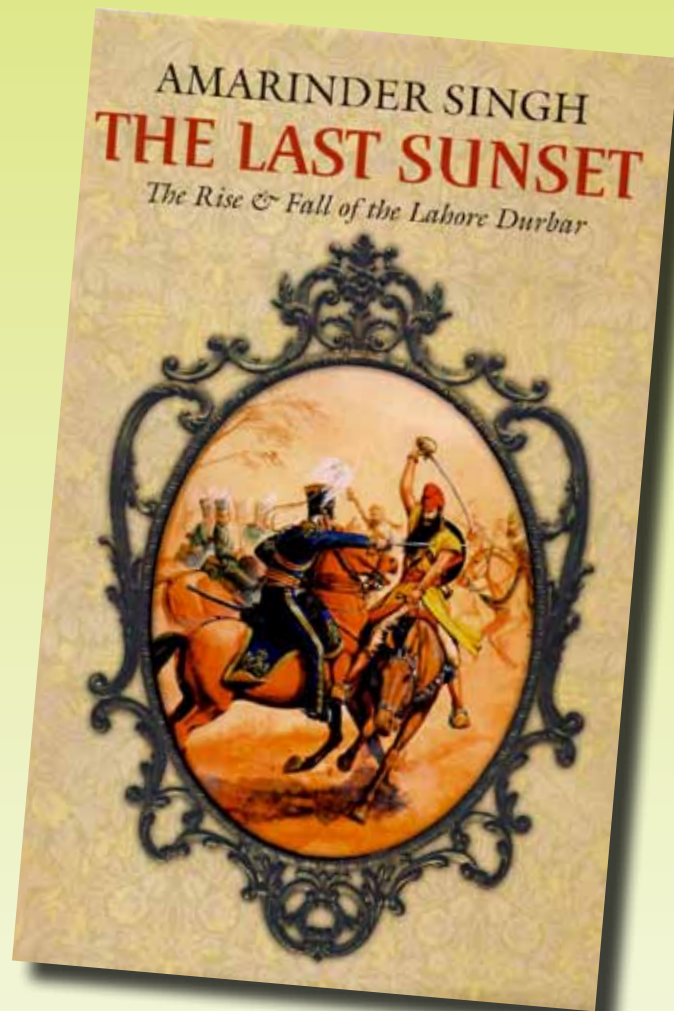
Former Chief Minister of the Punjab and Congress leader, Capt. Amarinder Singh's *The Last Sunset: The Rise and Fall of the Lahore Durbar* encompasses the history of the Lahore durbar, the glorious reign of Ranjit Singh and his exemplary organisational skills that led to the formation of the formidable Khalsa Army and the fiercely fought Anglo-Sikh wars. Both the Anglo-Sikh wars of 1845 and 1849 have been covered in detail.

The impact of the charismatic Ranjit Singh, who ruled Lahore is such that even 168 years after his death, he is being analysed in detail. Although illiterate, his great intelligence and will to learn made him one of the ablest rulers and military commanders in the history of Punjab - and India.

Written in gripping narrative, the book recreates the history of the Sikh Empire and its enigmatic ruler, Maharaja Ranjit Singh of the Shukarchakia misl. An outstanding military commander, he created the Sikh Khalsa Army, organised and armed it in Western style which was readily acknowledged as the finest in nineteenth century India. Ranjit Singh's early demise in 1839 and the subsequent decline of the Lahore Durbar, gave the British the opportunity to conquer the region till now fiercely guarded by Maharaja Ranjit Singh's army.

The Book is divided into five parts and takes a holistic look at the Lahore Durbar, before and after Ranjit Singh. The two Anglo-Sikh wars of 1845 and 1848 were high in action and eventually led to fall of the Kingdom and the State was finally annexed, with Maharaja Duleep Singh, the youngest son of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, being put under the protection of the Crown and later virtually deported to England.

The meticulous detail of the strength and composition of the Sikh Army on eve of the wars, their commanders and fate during and after the wars makes the book a sound reference for historians, researchers and the general reader. The beautiful paintings, portraits, maps and diagrams record the erstwhile era vividly for the contemporary reader and quotations from travellers and historians visiting Punjab impart a shade of romance and mysticism to the times of yore.



The Last Sunset

The Rise & Fall of the Lahore Durbar

By Amarinder Singh

Lotus Collection, Roli Books 2010

ISBN : 978-81-7436-779-2

Rs 695

ARMIES OF THE SIKHS

1799 - 1849

Fauj-i-ain
cuirassier,
c. 1839

Sowar, 2nd
Lancers, 1838

Dragoon, c. 1840

At the beginning of the 19th century, Ranjit Singh, then only 18 years of age, succeeded to the leadership of the Sukarchakia misl and after investing Lahore in July 1799, embarked on a series of campaigns which forcibly reunited the misls, took over many adjacent states and reduced them to tributary status which soon consolidated Punjab's disparate Sikh, Hindu and Muslim territories into a single unified state. This was the beginning of the Sarkar Khalsaji, or the kingdom of the Punjab which was the last independent Indian state before the British in their ever expanding colonisation of the subcontinent, finally wrested the kingdom after the Second Anglo-Sikh war of 1849.

The following was structure of the Khalsa Army, classified as traditional and modern, regular and irregular, state and Jagirdari. The Sikh horseman was legendary and although before 1799, Ranjit Singh's almost entire force consisted of horseman (which gave it the complexion of being monolithic) in his reorganisation, Ranjit Singh affected many changes in character of the Sikh cavalry. Even though its number rose

Aspi Muslim artilleryman, c.1840

Jinsi artilleryman, 1825-46



Aspi artilleryman, 1825-46

Fauj-i-ain sepoy, 1820s

Fauj-i-khas sepoy, 1830s-40s

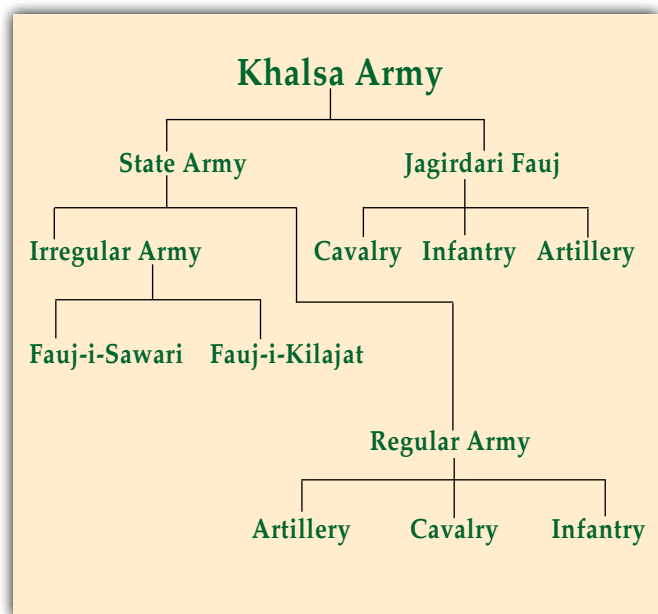


Fauj-i-ain naik, 1830s-40s

Ghorchurra khas sowar, 1838



Akalis, 1799-1849



from 2500 to about 6000, the status of the cavalry was reduced and other branches such as infantry and artillery gained in importance.

The cavalry evolved from the character of being a feudalistic levy, based on Derahs which were sub-divided into misals, became organised on new lines. Regular cavalry was formed and organised into rajmans' or regiments, patterned on European lines but the irregular cavalry (Ghorchurras) continued to expand in numbers.

Fauj-i-Ain (Regular army) was the largest, most highly trained part and considered as best of the Sikh army. This comprised all the three arms, artillery, cavalry and infantry, each one of which had its own separate organisation.

The largest unit of the regular army was the brigade which constituted elements of all three arms. Broadly, each brigade had three to four battalions of infantry, 1 or 2 batteries of artillery and one regiment of cavalry and its strength varied from between 4 to 5000. In 1845 the total number of brigades in the Khalsa Army was 13, the best trained of which were :

Fauj-i-Khas

General Avitabile

Paltan Khas (812 men)

Paltan Rup Singh (936 men)

Paltan Goorkha (693 men)

Paltan Bhagat Singh (901 men)

These were the Hazaara Goorkhas, predecessors of the famous 5th Royal Gurkha Rifles (Frontier Force).

The regular army was not, however, divided into brigades. There were some independent battalions too, including the battalions of Uman Singh, Ram Dyal and Dharam Singh. Similarly, there were several independent batteries of artillery.



For example, 4 out of 5 *jinsi*, some *aspi* and swivel batteries had no attachment with any brigade, were provided with a company of beldars (sappers and miners), an office establishment and the necessary services for the supply of ammunition and forage.

The regular infantry was divided into regiments and battalions. A regiment consisted of 2 battalions commanded by a colonel who was assisted by battalion commandants and adjutants. The regiment was, however, a manoeuvring unit.

[Extracts from 'Military System of the Sikhs' by Fauj Singh Bajwa]

The Order of Battle, 1845

On eve of the first Anglo-Sikh war in 1845, the following was the Order of Battle :

Fauj-e-Ain (Regular Army) : 22 brigades
62 infantry battalions, 49,000 soldiers
13 cavalry regiments, 7,800 troopers
32 artillery batteries

Deployment

The 22 brigades of the Sikh Army were deployed as follows :

Lahore – 11 brigades
Peshawar – 2 brigades
Hazara – 1 brigade
Kashmir – 1 brigade
Multan – 1 brigade
Nowshera – 1 brigade
Jammu – 8 battalions (with Raja Gulab Singh)
Samba -Raja Suchet Singh's brigade
-Raja Kesri Singh's brigade
-Raja Heera Singh's brigade
-Mian Labh Singh's battalion

Fauj-e-Khas

4 Infantry paltans (Sikh)
Gurkha paltan
2 Cavalry Rajmans
Shaddilah Risala (Jagirdari cavalry squadron)
Artillery of Gen Illahi Bakhsh 34 guns (Sikh & Muslim)
12 guns, horse artillery and 22 field guns, under Sikander Khan, Fateh Khan and Lahora Singh

General Avitabile's Brigade

4 Infantry paltans
1 Cavalry Rajman
10 guns, horse artillery under Baland Khan and 8 heavy field guns under Rustam Beg

General Kahn Singh's Brigade

4 Infantry paltans (Sikh & Muslim)
10 guns, horse artillery

General Mehtab Singh Majithia's Brigade

4 Infantry paltans (Sikh)
1 Cavalry Rajman (mixed)
12 guns, horse artillery (Sikh & Muslim)

General Tej Singh's Brigade

4 Infantry paltans (Sikh)
1 Cavalry Rajman
10 guns, horse artillery

General Gulab Singh's Brigade

3 Infantry paltans (Muslim)
14 guns, horse artillery (Sikh & Muslim)

Raja Suchet Singh's Brigade

2 Infantry paltans (Dogras & Muslim)
1 Cavalry Rajman
10 heavy garrison guns and four guns horse artillery

General Gulab Singh Calcuttawala's Brigade

4 Infantry paltans (Sikh)
16 guns, horse artillery
1 Cavalry Rajman

General Jawala Singh's Brigade

2 Infantry paltans (Sikh)
4 guns, horse artillery (Sikh & Muslim)

General Lehna Singh Majithia's Brigade

2 Infantry paltans (Sikh)
2 heavy garrison guns,
3 heavy field guns and 10 guns horse artillery (mainly Sikh)

General Bishan Singh's Brigade

2 Infantry paltans (mainly Muslim, some Sikh)
3 guns, horse artillery

General Gurdit Singh Majithia's Brigade

3 Infantry paltan (Sikh)
8 artillery guns (Sikh & Muslim)

General Court's Brigade

Colonel John Holmes
1 Infantry paltan
10 guns, horse artillery

General Dhonkal Singh's Brigade

2 Infantry paltans (Dogras)

General Courtland's Brigade

2 Infantry paltans (1 Sikh, 1 Dogra)
10 guns, horse artillery (Sikh & Muslim)

Sardar Nihal Singh Ahluwalia's Brigade

1 Infantry paltan (Sikh & Dogra)
11 heavy field guns and 4 guns horse artillery (Muslim)

Dewan Sawan Mull's Brigade

3 Infantry paltans (mainly Muslim, some Sikhs)
40 heavy garrison guns and 6 guns horse artillery

Raja Heera Singh's Brigade

2 Infantry paltans (Dogra & Muslim)
1 Cavalry Rajman
5 heavy garrison guns and 3 heavy field guns

Raja Partap Singh of Punch's Brigade

3 Infantry paltans (Sikh)

Raja Gulab Singh's Brigade

3 Infantry paltans (Dogra & Muslim)

40 heavy garrison guns and 15 guns horse artillery

Sheikh Imam-ud-din's Brigade

3 Infantry paltans (Muslim)

4 guns, horse artillery

Sheikh Ghulam Mohi-ud-din's Brigade

1 Infantry paltan (Sikh)

8 heavy field guns and 6 guns horse artillery (Muslim & Sikh)

State and Independent Artillery

Commandant Bhag Singh - 6 guns horse artillery (Sikh & Muslim)

Commandant Shiv Prasad - 8 guns horse artillery (Sikh & Muslim)

Missar Lal Singh - 10 guns horse artillery (Sikh & Muslim)

Sardar Kishan Singh - 2 heavy garrison guns (Muslim & Dogra)

General Kishan Singh - 22 guns horse artillery (Sikh & Muslim)

Sardar Shyam Singh Attari - 10 heavy field guns (Sikh & Muslim)

Mian Erithi Singh - 56 heavy field guns (Muslim)

General Mewa Singh - 10 heavy field guns and 10 guns horse artillery (Sikh & Muslim)

Colonel Amir Chand - 10 heavy field guns (Muslim)

Artillery of Lahore - Commandant Mal Mistry - 10 guns horse artillery (Muslim & Dogra)

Artillery of Amritsar - Commandant Sukhu Singh - 20 heavy field guns and 12 heavy garrison guns (Muslim & Sikh)

Artillery of Peshawar - 10 heavy garrison guns (Muslim & Dogra)

Miscellaneous - 50 heavy garrison guns (Muslim & Sikh)

Total Strength of the Fauj-e-Ain as listed above was :

Infantry : 60 battalions of 600 soldiers each = 36,000

Cavalry : 8 regiments of 600 troopers each = 4,800

Artillery : 384 guns used in the field, organised into 32 batteries (not inclusive of *Zambooraks*)

Horse artillery : 228 guns

Heavy field guns : 156 guns

Heavy garrison guns : 171 guns (not used in the field)

If the Fauj-e-Ain and Jagirdari *Zambooraks* (393

and 500, respectively) are added to the above, the total guns come to 893.

The regular Cavalry Rajmans were :

1st Dragoon Rajman

2nd Lancia Dragoon Rajman

Gurmukh Singh Rajman

Heera Singh Rajman

Mehtab Singh Rajman

Horse Grenadier Rajman

Ram Rajman

Lal Singh's Sowar Rajman

Akal Rajman

Gobind Rajman

Jagat Singh Rajman

Sher Singh Rajman

Hazoori Rajman

Jagirdari Fauj (Feudal Levies)

Infantry : Ramghols, Akalis, irregular levies and garrison companies 45,000 men

Cavalry : Ghorcharras, Jagirdari and Misldar Fauj- 27000 troopers

The Ghorcharras themselves were in 18 *derahs* which then added up to 21,239 men.

The *derahs* were as follows :

Derah Ghorcharra Khas

Derah Shyam Singh Attari

Derah Gurmukh Singh Lamba

Derah Sandhanwalia

Derah Ardaliyan

Derah Pindiwala

Derah Ramgarhia

Derah Attariwala

Derah Mulraj

Derah Dogra

Derah Naulakha

Derah Khas

Derah Raja Lal Singh

Derah Fateh Singh Jogi

Derah Imammudin

Derah Mangal Singh

Derah Jawahar Singh

Derah Mian Bhukam Khan

There were an additional 1,613 Jagirdari cavalry. These in themselves were of the same strength of an average *Derah*.

Text and images from 'The Last Sunset' : The Rise & Fall of the Lahore Durbar by Amarinder Singh of Patiala.



Koer Singh.

Sikhs – as Nur Mohammad saw them

Nur Muhammed now offered to accompany Nasir Khan on his contemplated expedition provided the Khan promised him the post of Qazi in Shikarpore or the Deras. Durrani on his return from Punjab bestowed these territories upon him as a reward for his services. And the Qazi, on his part, undertook to write an account of the Khan's exploits on his holy mission.

Nasir Khan accepted his offer and he accompanied the expeditionary force which joined the forces of Ahmed Shah Durrani in the winter of 1764. He was thus an eye-witness to all engagements and his narration of events is based on his personal observations.

On his return to Ganjuba on the conclusion of the expedition, Nur Muhammed completed the Jang Namah towards the close of Al-Hijari corresponding to about June 1765.

The work consists of 55 statements called *Bian* in Persian - each dealing with some event, personality, racial group, tactics of war, or the behaviour of the Sikhs.

The author has a strong prejudice against the Sikhs whom he remembers in no better words than "dogs, dog of hell, pig eaters, accursed infidels, dirty idolators, fire worshippers", etc., yet his account of the character of the Sikhs of the eighteenth century is simply invaluable to the students of history.

The author is lavish in praise of his mentor and the crusades - both Baluchis and Pathans, sometimes depriving the historical narrative of its objectivity. Further, he reserves a strong hatred for the Sikhs.

All these things minimise the historical value of the work. Yet, inspite of this , it is a very valuable

"Jangnama" is an eye-witness account of Ahmed Shah Durrani's invasion of 1764 of which our knowledge is extremely poor otherwise. The eye-witness was Nur Muhammed, a domicile of Ganjuba in Baluchistan who held the post of Qazi, which he inherited from his father Abdullah Hilwar of Ganjuba. He had some pretensions to being a man of learning, a scholar of Persian and a learned poet. His fame as a man of letters travelled to the city of Kalat, and the ruler of that place, Mir Abdullah Khan asked him to compile a book of his poetry. The suggestion appealed to him and he decided to compose an epic to extol the achievements of Abdullah Khan.

The decision, however, had to be abandoned, perhaps because of the death of Khan. In 1761, he went to Kalat understandably to get some favours now from Nasir Khan, who had succeeded Abdullah Khan and was seriously thinking of leading a crusade against the Sikhs whose power was increasing, thereby causing anxiety to Ahmed Shah Durrani and the Baluchis.

and correct corroboration in respect of their struggle against the Afghani invaders, the desecration by the Durrani of their holy tank and temple, the Darbar Sahib (Golden Temple) at Amritsar and martyrdom of Baba Gurbakhsh Singh Shaheed with his band of 30 Sikhs who valiantly challenged an army of 30,000 Afghans and Baluchis and sacrificed their lives at the altar of their faith.

It is from the *Jang Namah* alone that we learn that the Sikhs under the Bhangis had crossed the Indus and had extended their conquest as far as Multan and Deras by the middle of 1764 just a few months after the conquest of Sarhind. Moreover, *Jang Namah* is the only detailed account, known to us, of the seventh invasion of Punjab by Ahmed Shah Durrani.

So far as the Sikhs are concerned *Jang Namah* is an invaluable source of information. It visualises Sikhism and Sikh society as a separate entity, different from Hinduism.

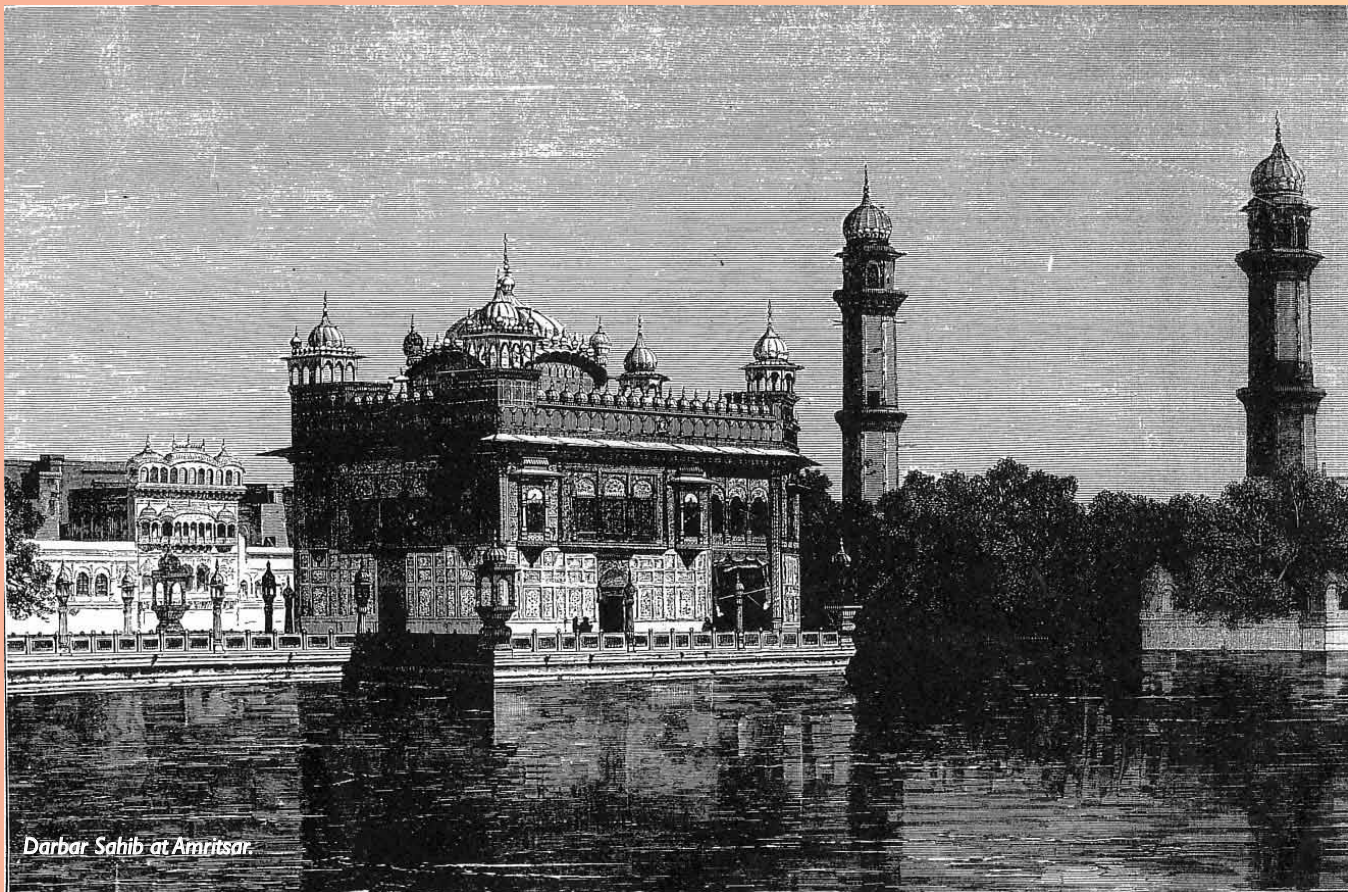
The conviction of Nur Muhammed was fully shared by his mentors and perhaps, this was the reason that Ahmed Shah Abdali's anger was directed against

Darbar Sahib which was the chief source of inspiration to the Sikhs.

The Sikhs offered resistance to Ahmed Shah Abdali in the manner that evoked praise even in the hearts of their detractors. Nur Muhammed in spite of his sympathy for his comrades-in-faith and hatred for the Sikhs could not help describing their "excellent conduct, their experience in battlefield, their liberality and their valour, intrepidity, agility and grand physical appearance". This he did most probably to impress upon the soldiers of the invading armies that Sikhs were strong enough to withstand their onslaught because in moral conduct they were excellent and none surpassed them.

In his account, he dwells on the qualities of the Sikhs about which every Sikh should feel proud. We present a liberal translation of Qazi Nur Muhammed's narration which elucidates their (Sikhs) high conduct, their mode of fighting, their faith and courage, etc:

"Do not call the dogs (the Sikhs) dogs, because they are lions (and) are courageous like lions in the



battlefield. How can a hero, who roars like a lion be called a dog? (Moreover) like lions they spread terror in the field of battle. If you wish to learn the art of war, come face to face with them in the battlefield. They will demonstrate it (art of war) to you in such a way that one and all will shower praise on them. If you wish to learn the science of war, O swordsman, learn from them. They advance at the enemy boldly and come back safely after action. Understand, Singh is their title, a form of address for them. It is not justice to call them dogs; if you do not know Hindustani language, then understand that the word 'Singh' means a lion."

"Truly, they are lions in battle, and at times of peace, they surpass *Hatim* (in generosity). When they take the Indian sword in their hands they traverse the country from Hind to Sind. None can stand against them in battle, howsoever strong he may be. When they handle the spear, they shatter the ranks of the enemy. When they raise the heads of their spears towards the sky, they would pierce even through the Caucasus (in the process). When they adjust the strings of the bows, place in them the enemy killing arrows (and) pull the strings to their ears, the body of the enemy begins to shiver with fear. When their battle axes fall upon the armour of their opponents, their armour becomes their coffin".

"The body of every one of them is like a piece of rock and in physical grandeur everyone of them is more than fifty men. It is said that Behram Gore killed wild asses and lions. But if he were to come face to face with them even he would bow before them (Singhs). Besides usual arms, they take their guns in hand (and) come into the field of action jumping (and) roaring like lions and raise slogans. They tear asunder the chests of many and shed blood of several (of their enemy) in the dust. You say that musket is a weapon of ancient times, it appears to be a creation of these dogs rather than Socrates. Who else than these (dogs) can be adept in the use of muskets. They do not bother (even if) there are innumerable muskets. To the right and the left, in front and towards the back, they go on operating hundreds of muskets angrily and regularly. "

"If you do not believe in what I say, you may enquire of the brave swordsmen who would tell you more than myself and would praise them for their fighting. This bears witness to (my statement) that

they faced thirty thousand heroes in the battlefield. If their armies take to flight, it is a war tactics of theirs. They resort to this deception in order to make the angry army grow bold and run in their pursuit. When they find them separated from the main body and away from help and reinforcement, they at once turn back and fight more ferociously (literal translation - they set fire even to water). "

"Did you not see that while fighting the Pathans, they took to flight which was deceptive. A world famous wrestler wielding high esteem and respect alighted from his horse and showed his great style as if he were Tuhmatan (a great warrior of Iran). O valiant fighter, do justice to their (act of) war. One of their armies invaded Multan and put the city to plunder and devastation and killed many of its inhabitants and carried away an immense booty. I am not sufficiently strong in mind to express what the dogs did there. But as God willed it, each of us has to submit to His Will. "

"Besides their fighting, listen to one more thing in which they excell all other warriors. They never kill a coward who is running away from the battlefield. They do not rob a woman of her wealth or ornaments whether she is rich or a servant (*Kaneez*). There is no adultery among these dogs, nor are they mischievous people. A woman, whether young or old, they call a *Burhi*. The word *Burhi*, means in Indian language, an old lady. There is no thief amongst these dogs, nor is there amongst them any mean people. They do not keep company with adulterers and house thieves though all their acts may not be commendable. "

"If you are not acquainted with their religion, I tell you that the Sikhs are the disciples of the Guru - that glorious Guru lived at Chak (Amritsar). The ways and manners of these people were laid down by Nanak who showed these Sikhs a separate path. He was succeeded by Guru Gobind Singh from whom they received the title of Singh. They are not part of the Hindus, who have a separate religion of their own."

"Now that you have familiarised yourself with the behaviour of the Sikhs, you may also know something about their country. They have divided the Punjab amongst themselves and have bestowed it upon every young and old."

Prof. Surjit Singh

“LAILI”





The story of a Maharaja and his passion for horses.

Ranjit Singh was a superb horseman, and horses were his passion. He would often spend a whole day in the saddle without tiring. A connoisseur, he had over 1,200 horses in his stables out of which he kept a thousand for his private use. The king of England presented him with horses from Scotland, and Arabian thoroughbreds were gifted to him by the Nizam of Hyderabad. The extent to which horses affected him comes through movingly in this description dating from his later years : 'as soon as he counts his horse with his black shield at his back, [it] puts him on his mettle – his whole form seems animated by the spirit within, and assumes a certain grace, of which nobody could believe it susceptible. In spite of the paralysis affecting one side, he manages his horse with the greatest ease'.

Drawing by Emily Eden of Ranjit Singh's beloved horse, Laili.

It might sound amazing today that an entire street of the Walled City of Lahore was cleaned and scrubbed for two whole days just because a horse had to pass that way. It was no religious ceremony, but just the immense passion of a horseman who felt more comfortable in his saddle than on his feet.

Almost 200 years ago when the Sukerchakian chief from Gujranwala, Ranjit Singh, declared himself as ruler of the Punjab in the Lahore Fort on Muharram 10, 1799, the day he conquered the city. He also declared that any man with any pride must give top priority to his horses, his work and his women-in that order !

To the left of the side entrance of the Lahore Fort is a British military barrack. Before the British built this barrack, this was the stable of the Lahore Darbar. At any one time Maharajah Ranjit Singh could keep almost 1,000 of the very finest horses there. When he ran out of space they went into the Hazoori Bagh, and when that was not enough, the horses went into the Badshahi Masjid. Such was the passion of the man who ruled the Punjab for a full 40 years with an iron grip, and rule he did with great wisdom. For a beautiful horse, he would go to any length, for once he got it into his head to acquire the "filly", it became an obsession with him.

But one horse in particular stands out from any other in the history of the Punjab and Lahore. The Maharajah had heard much about this legendary horse and vowed to own it, no matter what the cost. In the end it cost him "rupees 60 lakh and 12,000 soldiers," or so the traveller Baron Charles Ilugel quotes Ranjit Singh as having told him so himself. By current gold standards that would be almost Rs12 billion and an entire Division of infantry. The accounts of the Fakir family of Bazaar Hakeeman also corroborate this figure, actually put it even higher. What was, after all, so amazing about a horse that the Lahore Darbar went crazy to acquire it? After all, the maharajah had a large stable of Arabian thoroughbreds, not to speak of legendary horses like *Gauharbar* and *Sufaid Pari*, both of which are said to have "the speed of the wind". Not a single horse in his stable was then worth less than Rs20,000 by the rupees standard 200 years ago. A tale doing the rounds of Lahore then listed the price of the entire city of Lahore and the cost of the Maharajah's horses as being equal.

This legendary horse was known as *Asp-i-Laila* and belonged to the Barakzai tribe chiefs, either Dost

Muhammad or Yar Muhammad. It was a pure Persian breed and a "sight to watch." Its speed was legendary in the whole of the Khyber Pass, and what intrigued Maharajah Ranjit Singh was the fact that it was known for its intelligence.

The news of this 'great' horse reached the Lahore Darbar some time in 1822. Immediately Ranjit Singh dispatched intelligence agents to find out where the horse was located. One account put it at Peshawar, while another stated that the Barakzais had heard of the interest of the Maharajah from their agents in Lahore, and had shifted the horse to Kabul. This single horse then led to a full scale war between the Punjab and Afghanistan.

In 1822, the Maharajah sent his special minister Fakir Azizuddin to Peshawar to collect tribute from Yar Muhammad and among the gifts were some very fine horses. But *Asp-i-Laila* was not among them. On his query, Yar Muhammad said that he did not own the horse. This angered the Maharajah who set up a whole team of agents to track down the horse. Once he was sure the horse was alive and well and in Yar Muhammad's possession, discreet negotiations were conducted. By 1828 the patience of the Maharajah was exhausted and he sent a punitive force under Sardar Budh Singh Sandhwalia to acquire the horse. In the battle Budh Singh and hundreds of his soldiers were killed, but the Lahore Darbar won the battle after the two French generals Allard and Ventura, now buried in Lahore in Old Anarkali, were sent with another force to assist Budh Singh's force.

At the Afghan surrender the French generals were told that *Asp-i-Laila* was not there. In a rage, they arrested Yar Muhammad's brother and held him hostage. In the end, the stubborn Pathans told the French generals that the horse was dead. This sent the maharajah into a fit of rage, and he sent another punitive expedition under Sardar Kharak Singh to Peshawar, where his agents informed him the horse actually was. But before Kharak Singh could reach Peshawar, Yar Muhammad was killed by his own tribe for fighting over a horse, and his brother Sultan Muhammad fled for his own safety.

In 1830, Maharajah Ranjit Singh installed Sultan Muhammad as the governor of Peshawar. Gen Ventura at that point asked for *Asp-i-Laila*, which demand the new governor spurned. Gen Ventura

immediately arrested the new governor in his own palace and informed him that within 24 hours he would be beheaded. Gen Ventura had built a fierce reputation for executing scores of dacoits in Wazirabad, and they took his word seriously. At this point Sultan Muhammad agreed to hand over the horse, and on doing so, "cried like a child." The horse was immediately carried to Lahore in a special carriage guarded by well over 500 soldiers.

Laili reached Lahore at the western Akbari Gate of the Lahore Fort, where the road that comes from Badami Bagh and curves around the fort were all cleaned and scrubbed for two days in advance: the order was that not a single speck of dust should enter the horse's nostrils. And so Asp-i-Laila reached Lahore, and Ranjit Singh feasted his eyes on the horse

and simply stated: "It has been worth the trouble." One account puts the colour as black, as the name Asp-i-Laila suggests, another makes it dark grey. But no matter what the colour was, the horse had the honour of not only wearing the Koh-i-Noor diamond around its neck on special occasions, but of also being the horse that was brought out on special occasions.

It was also the last horse the Maharajah ever rode. He was lifted in illness and put in the saddle. Once there he was fine, for he was a natural horseman. No horse in history, so the legend goes, has had more spent on it than the acquisition of the Lahore Darbar.

This intriguing equestrian tale is written by Majid Sheikh. Regarded as one of Pakistan's finest journalists, Majid has spent years uncovering the secrets of Lahore, the fabled city where his family has long resided.



Ranjit's own horse-equipments are very gorgeous, the holster pipes being covered with gold tinsel, and studded with precious stones, particularly emeralds and topazes; while the bridle reins are formed of pieces of gold or silver, connected together over the leather which is thus concealed.

This 352.5-carat stone originally belonged to Timur who carved his name on it. Although known as the 'Timur Ruby', the stone was actually a spinel. It was a gift from the East India Company, along with other incomparable treasures including the Koh-i-noor, to Queen Victoria in 1851 after the annexation of Punjab.

“The Real Ranjit Singh”

Extract from the Book by Fakir Syed Waheeduddin



Ranjit Singh was a devout Sikh. His daily routine began with early morning prayers. He would have his bath, dress, put on his arms and go to the prayer room, where he would listen to a recitation from the Holy Granth. After that he would place over his eyes and forehead the “marvellous Kalghi” of Guru Gobind Singh. Only after he had gone through this whole routine would he sit down to transact the day’s business. So great was his faith in the Granth Sahib that he never took any big decision or launched upon any important undertaking without seeking its guidance. On occasions he would take auguries from it even in minor matters.

He was, however, not a zealot or a bigot and like all genuinely religious people had a healthy dislike for cant and humbug in religious matters. This seems to have been misunderstood by some foreign visitors to his court. For example, Victor Jacquemont in his “Letters from India” says of him, “He is a Sikh by profession, a sceptic in reality. Every year he pays his devotions to Amritsar, and what is very singular, at

the shrines of several Muhammadan saints, yet these pilgrimages offend none of the puritans of his own sect.” Similarly, W. G. Osborne writes in his *Court and Camp of Ranjit Singh*: “Though he is by profession a soldier, in religion he in reality a sceptic, and it is difficult to say whether his superstition is real, or only a mask assumed to gratify and conciliate his people” Again, W. L. M’Gregor in his *History of the Sikhs* says: “With regard to Ranjit’s own religious character it is somewhat doubtful if he has any fixed system, but as the sovereign of the Sikhs, who follow the religious tenets of Nanak, modified by Guru Gobind, it is politic on his part to support the religion, which he does in the most munificent manner.”

The fact of the matter is that, far from being either merely superstitious or hypocritical or politic, Ranjit Singh was deeply religious. He had a profound reverence for all that was holy and spiritual, irrespective of what religion it pertained to. His visits to the shrines of the Muslim saints and Hindu temples were as much acts of faith as those to the Golden Temple or to Taran Taaran and to all of them he gave donations, jagirs and presents with equal generosity. These offerings of spirit were of a piece with the veneration he paid to the holy men of all religions and all orders. He sometimes went to the length of stepping down from his throne and wiping the dust off their feet with his long, flowing beard. Many Sikh pujaris, Hindu bhagats and Muslim fakirs received this tribute of royal humility in open durbar. Nor did he ever set at naught the injunctions of his own religion. On a visit to the Akal Takht he was adjudged guilty of violating a sacrosanct canon. He at once bared his back for the Akali in charge of the Akal Takht to lay the whip across. If these acts can be characterised as superstition or hypocrisy, so can all religion.

Fakir Azizuddin has handed down accounts of many incidents in which Ranjit Singh’s belief in spiritual things and his catholicity of religious outlook exhibited themselves spontaneously. On one occasion the Maharaja and the Fakir were out walking in the outskirts of Lahore, when they met a bullock-cart carrying what looked like a huge book.

The Maharaja stopped the bullock-cart and asked the driver what he was carrying. "Maharaja," replied the driver, "I am a calligraphist and this book is a manuscript of the Holy Quran which is my lifetime's work. I am on my way to Hyderabad to sell it to the Muslim king of that country. I hear he is a very pious and generous man". The Maharaja turned to Fakir Azizuddin and said, "This man seems to think that there is nobody this side of Hyderabad who is pious and generous enough to pay him a good price." Then he asked the calligraphist, "How much are you expecting, my good man?" The calligraphist named what would be a huge sum for a manuscript of the kind even today—ten thousand rupees. Before the Minister could intervene, the deal had been closed. "Fakir Ji," commanded the Maharaja, "please see to it that the man is paid ten thousand rupees from the state treasury."

Soon after the manuscript had been acquired, the Maharaja asked Azizuddin to read out to him a passage from it. Azizuddin read out the *Sura Yusuf* (Chapter on Joseph) and then translated it for the Maharaja's benefit. "But Fakir Ji," remarked Ranjit Singh, "the Granth Sahib says the same kind of thing. What is the difference?" "None, Your Highness," replied the Fakir, "the goal is the same, only the paths are different." The Maharaja rewarded Azizuddin for this apt remark by making a gift of the manuscript to him.

An apocryphal version of this incident makes it more dramatic than it really was. The calligraphist, so the story goes, approached Fakir Azizuddin in the Maharaja's palace. The Fakir praised the work, but expressed his inability to pay what the calligraphist was asking for it. The Maharaja, it seems, overheard the argument and, as the man was going away, had him intercepted and brought to him. The man told him that he had been to all the Muslim princes in India except the ruler of Hyderabad and that none had agreed to pay him a fair price. The Maharaja took the manuscript from him, pressed it against his forehead as he would have pressed a copy of the Granth Sahib and ordered that the price the man was asking for it be paid to him. When, later on, the Foreign Minister remonstrated, the Maharaja replied, "God intended that I should look upon all religions with one eye. That is why he took away the sight of the other. This is a holy book. I paid not only the price of the man's labour, but also a tribute to God."

Another story, originating with Fakir Nuruddin, illustrates Ranjit Singh's open-mindedness about the outer forms of devotional acts. One day the Maharaja and Fakir Nuruddin were sitting facing each other and saying their beads—two devout men of different religions praying together. The Maharaja had a precious rosary of onyx beads and the Fakir one of Kahu wood. The former was counting the beads towards himself and the latter away from himself according to the practices of their respective faiths. Suddenly the Maharaja asked, "Fakir Ji, what is the correct way of saying one's beads?" "The object of saying one's beads, Your Highness," replied the Fakir, "is to take God's name. If you are praying for God's grace, you should move the beads inwards; if for warding off evil, then outwards." The reply pleased the Maharaja so much that he presented his own rosary to the Fakir.

It was Ranjit Singh's policy to enable all the communities to observe their religious practices with complete freedom, but sometimes contradictory demands from the various communities presented him with awkward problems. The following incident is typical of the way in which he used to help the communities to understand each other's point of view and thus resolve their differences themselves. A deputation of Sikhs from a part of Lahore waited upon the Maharaja and complained that they were finding it impossible to put up any longer with the loud voice of the muezzin in the local mosque five times a day, and they made the drastic demand that azan should be stopped. The Maharaja looked interrogatively at Fakir Azizuddin, who was in attendance. "Azan, Your Highness," said the Fakir, "is a call to prayer and, since the Muslims' prayer is congregational, they obviously cannot dispense with it." The deputation, however, persisted in its demand. The Fakir then said, addressing the Maharaja, "Your Highness, are these people willing to undertake that they will go to every Muslim's house and summon him to prayer five times a day?" The Sikhs agreed to this arrangement and it was decided that azan should be abandoned in favour of it. But a week later they came back, looking more worried than ever, and prayed for azan to be reintroduced. "We now understand," they confessed, "why the Muslim religion has adopted this particular system of calling people to prayers."

In keeping with Ranjit Singh's liberal views, he and the royal family used to take part alike in

Hindu, Muslim and Sikh religious festivals. The Maharaja on a few occasions was even present at Id-ul-Fitr, although that is a strictly religious festival, and during Muharram young princes used to make offerings (nayaz) just as if they had been Muslims. Ranjit Singh's Hindu, Muslim and Sikh subjects equally reciprocated his warm interest in their religions by remembering him in their prayers on important occasions—when he launched a new campaign, when he won a new victory, when he had a hairbreadth escape, when he was ill or recovered from illness, and finally, during his last illness and at his death and funeral. The total impression one gathers from the author's family papers and from the stories its members have been telling each other from generation to generation is that there was complete religious harmony during Ranjit Singh's reign. All the communities looked



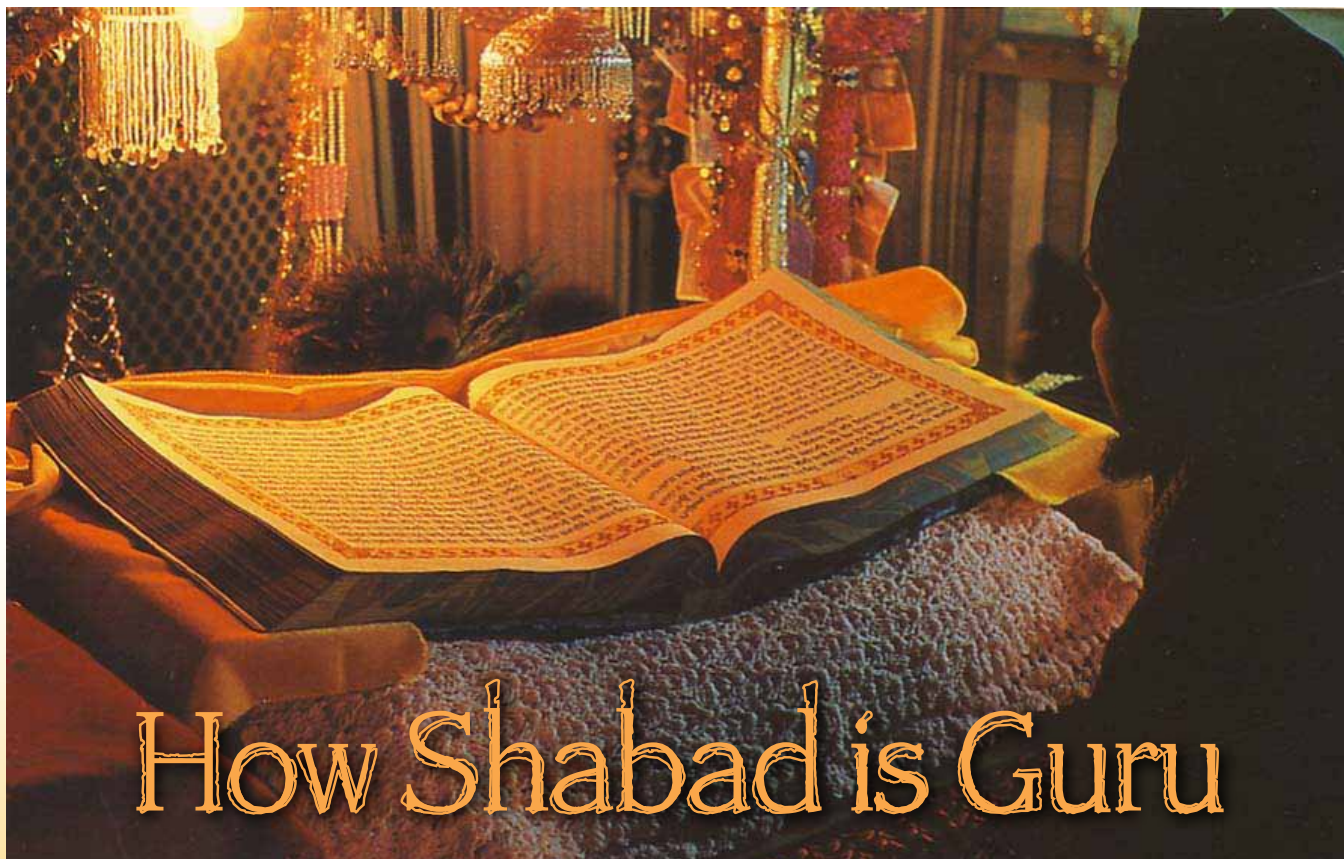
upon him not only as their protector but as one of themselves. He was a Sikh in the tradition of the founder of Sikhism, who used to join Muslims in their prayers and worship in Hindu temples and who made pilgrimages to Mecca as well as to Hindu holy places. Guru Nanak had summarised his faith in the simple words, "There are no Hindus, there are no Muslims." If there had been any Sikhs at that time, he would no doubt have added, "There are no Sikhs", in the same sense. Ranjit Singh brought Guru Nanak's

tenet up to date and then acted up to it. Born and brought up in the Sikh faith, he worshipped as Sikhs do, but he did so, remembering all the time these words of Guru Gobind Singh, last of the Gurus and compiler of the final version of the Adi Granth:

"He is in the temple as He is in the mosque.

He is in the Hindu worship as He is in the Muslim prayer.

Men are one, though they appear different."



How Shabad is Guru

The importance of a Guru in Guru Granth Sahib may be realised from the fact that among the many names of God in Sikhism there is also the name 'Vaheguru', which literally means a *Wondrous Guru*. Among the Sikhs it is widely known that the tradition of a human Guru started with Guru Nanak Dev and remained in vogue upto the tenth Guru Gobind Singh, the last one among them. The term Guru is used for all these ten great souls for they were the torch-bearers of Sikhism. In addition, the word Guru is always attached to Sri Guru Granth Sahib, because it contains the sum total of the inner divine experiences of the Sikh Gurus and some other saints. While pursuing this tradition of human Guruship we shall have to bear in mind that this epithet has been used only for those, who could stand the test of time eternal and were deemed fit for the same; for they finally merged in God by shattering away all worldly bondages. In the daily prayer (*Ardas*) of the Sikhs, the first stanza is the writing of Guru Gobind Singh, in which he starts by saying that first, "having served and remembered the sword, the power of God, I concentrate myself on Guru Nanak." Then after using this word Guru for Guru Angad and Guru Amar Das, all the nine personalities from Guru Nanak to Guru Tegh Bahadur have been referred to as Gurus. Guru Gobind Singh ultimately dedicated the whole of the power of Guruship and 'Khalsa Panth' to Sri

Guru Granth Sahib by saying that all the Sikhs are henceforth required to accept it as the Guru. Elaborate descriptions of the traits of the true Guru have been given in this Holy Scripture.

In Gurbani, much has been said about the functions of the '*sabad*' (*shabd*) but about the form and nature of the '*sabad*' the sacred texts are not so open. One has to delve deep to understand the hidden meanings behind this term. '*Sabad*' apart from its synonyms, *gosti*, *gurupdes*, *marg*, *sandes* religious life, in the Guru Granth Sahib, has been used in many more senses. But, primarily word '*shabd*' delineates *Parmatma* and *Oankar*. Generally speaking on the basis of Gurbani, the '*shabda*' can be held as an all pervasive power which is immanent force in all the beings and this power can be realised only by becoming gurmukh. Gurbani uses the word '*Sabad*' with variations; '*Guru ka sabad*', '*su sabad*' and *naam*, etc. It is accepted in the Sidh Gosti that through 'Guru-sabad' Shabda is to be realised. Understanding and shattering of *kama*, *krodh* and *haumai*(ego)-the obstacles on the way of realisation of internal shabda-come through 'Guru-sabad' which is the matrika stage of the same internal *sakshatktra* (revealed) shabda. It is *sabad* which destroys all mental distortions and worldly hopes and through 'Guru-sabad' one is able to keep the internal flame burning continuously. The ego is poison in man. It is made extinct by 'Guru-sabad' and then one goes to his own

eternal home for good. It is through 'Guru-sabad' that we understand the implications of the creation and the Creator. Thus, for Sidh Gosti, 'sabad' and Guru-shabda are equally competent for liberation. It is through the Guru-word that transmigration is ended. Yogis divided into different sects can be emancipated only when their ego dies being awake in the Word.

Rather than the nature of God, we are concerned here mainly with the Shabd aspect of God because in the Sidh Gosti, sabad has been clearly accepted as the Guru. It is told in this longer hymn Sidh Gosti that by realising Him here, there, and everywhere we can get across the world-ocean through Sabad, the Guru. On being asked by the Sidhs about his Guru, Guru Nanak replied that shabd was his Guru and his *surati* (meditative faculty) was the disciple of that Guru. It may be noted here that both *Shabd* and *surati* are subtle entities and in them there is no indication of grossness of body. The subtle merges with the subtle, transcending this body. According to Guru Nanak this 'Sabad' is the Guru and the 'Peer'. It is a profound and deep entity without which the world is lost in its mendane senses.

Guru Nanak considers this Oankar as the root of the whole creation. Brahma the so-called creator, the mountains, the ages, and the Vedas were all created by Oankar. This 'Onam' is the essence of the three worlds. In Raag Dhanasari Guru Amar Das says that the light of the *Sabad deepak* is pervading all the three worlds and those who absorb this light become pure. Pure *Naam* (sabad) effaces the ego of the mind and thus imbued with true devotion one receives eternal happiness. This Shabd-which is called Oankar- is there in our body also which as the cognizer and cognized force, makes us realise the reality outside and within the self.

The Word 'Sabad' (*Shabd*) has a subtle meaning, which refers to the mental world. According to Indian religious tradition, one form of expression of individuality may be explained as follows: The 'Shabd' has five stages viz, *Para*, *Pashyanti*, *Madhyama*, *Vaikhari* and *Matrika*. In the *Para* stage the speech becomes pure consciousness, which is present in the form of an urge or will for self-expression, without any manifestation even in the form of a subtle sound or an idea. This *Para* speech is *Shabd Brahm* which is in complete union with its ultimate origin, *Brahm* or the Supreme consciousness, the soul of individual as well as of the cosmic system. This *Para-vak* is self-shining *Oankar*, which is the origin and essence of

all sound. Commonly, *Shabd*, is the gross sound articulate or inarticulate emitted by men, animals and natural objects. This emitted *shabd* is called *Vaikhari* sound which is a descent from *Para* shabd through *Pashyanti* and *Madhyama* sound. *Para-shabd* is *bindu* and *Pashyanti* is creative thought and action by that *bindu* which is the causal body of *Shabd*. From this arises the subtle body of *Shabd* which is *Tanmatra* and *Matrika* which evolves into the gross body of sound and becomes letters (*Varnas*) uttered by the organs.

Pashyanti-vak is manifested in the form of subtle ideas, which consciousness directly sees or perceives. It is not manifested in any articulated sound form. *Shabd* is here manifested on the mental plane, and not on the physical plane. But the urge or the will for self expression in these grosser planes powerfully acts upon the physiological embodiments. *Madhyama-shabd* stands midway between the ideal form of speech and the articulate sound form of speech, between mental speech and vocal speech. At this stage certain subtle sounds are produced within the physiological system, in course of the internal effort to give outer expression to inner speech. *Shabd* is still within the body and has no outer manifestation in the form of words and sentences.

All human languages are embodiments of *Vaikhari-shabd*. At this stage 'Sabad' comes out through the co-operative effort of the vocal organs, in the form of articulate speech or uttered words audible to the sense of hearing of others. It is through *Vaikhari-shabd* that an individual can communicate his ideas to other individuals and thus enables others to know and share their thoughts, feelings and desires. At the *matrika* stage the *Shabda* is represented through phonetic constituents of *Vaikhari-shabd*. Now *Shabd* comes in the shape of verbal sounds which are represented by *akshar* (letter). They are the seeds (*bijas*) of all languages, of all forms of articulate speech. They are called *matrika* forms from which all kinds of words and sentences of the apparently diverse forms of languages in the world, are evolved. This *Vaikhari-shabd* may differ on the basis of different geographical conditions, but the thought movement at perceiving a particular object is similar in men of all the different regions of the world. When a French man, an Indian or an African thinks of an object, the image formed is similar in all the cases, though the utterance of the name may differ. This is the reason that a man who has the power of thought-reading, may tell and appreciate the thinking of others without understanding their speech.

Having understood the stages of *Shabd* alluded to above a very important question arises. We have seen that subtle *para-Shabd* or the *Shabd-Brahm* becomes gross in the form of *pashyanti* and this *pashyanti* form further becomes grosser in the form of *madhyama* and then this *madhyama* finally turns to be *matrika* after having changed into *vaikhari* stage. *Matrika* is the grossest form of the *para-shabd*. *Vaikhari* (articulated speech) is four times grosser than the *para-shabd* and being so even, it is such a subtle entity that it can be heard only and cannot be seen. Now the question is: when from all the human beings this *Shabd-Brahm* in the form of *vaikhari Shabd* is emanating, then why the words of a man of piety saint touch our soul and influence it and why the words of a scoundrel make no impact upon anybody. We accept the sermons of a pious hard working person but the long speeches of an arrogant liar slip above the head of everybody. Going deeper into this question, a fact on the basis of the discussion above about the stages of *Para-Shabd* emerges that while reaching the *madhyam* stage, the *Shabd* takes a clear form of presentable idea which is to be brought out in the form of *vaikhari*. We all know very well that while speaking before an audience we become fully conscious of our family, academic, social or political status whatsoever. Our full energy is channelised by us in such a way that we try our best to influence or in crude language to scare the person or a group of persons before us. This very motivation of our energy is our cultivated ego which makes us conscious of our material or spiritual gains we have hit upon per chance or by virtue of being born in the family of goldspoon feeders or by our hard labour done without earning humility. This ego more or less as we have it, we go on mixing in the *Vaikhari* form of the *Shabd-Brahm* and according to the degree of ego (*haumai*) the *Vaikhari* of the individual goes on being polluted and thus made ordinary, more ordinary and consequently ineffective. The individual who considering ego as a chronic malady has erased his deep rooted ego, brings out his *vaikhari* is bound to impress upon the listeners. Greatmen, saints and Gurus, as and when they speak, their saying never goes without hearing and influencing and on the other hand the long statements of a dishonest arrogant person will be treated as trash.

All the scriptures of the world contain therein the *Matrika* (written) stage of the *Parashabd*. From above, it is clear that subtlest *Parashabd* in order to be audible and visible transforms itself in the *Matrika*

stage. As a corollary of the points already discussed, it seems quite justified when the Gurus or the code of conduct of Sikhism prescribe *Nitnem*, i.e. recitation of hymn in the morning and evening. If the *Parashabd* can devolute to the stage of *Matrika* (written hymns) then the proper recitation of and concentration upon the *Matrika* can definitely take the recitor or meditator to the subtle *para* stage which is nothing but *Brahm* or *Parmatma*. In fact the fountain of *Para Shabd* is always gushing forth from inside of the *jiva* but the ego, cunningness and pragmatism of the *jiva* is all the twenty-four hours busy in suppressing and drying up this fountain. To bring that level of drying elixir up we have to pour holy water of *Nitnem* and recitation from above similarly as we pour a bucket of water from above in a hand-pump when it goes dry. The lower level comes up and we enjoy the taste of fresh water.

We have seen how subtle the *Shabd* is, and how it comes to *Vaikhari* and *Matrika* stages. The whole of this process is so subtle that it is seldom distinctly realised by man although it goes on continuously within him. The same subtle *Shabd* (*Para-shabd*) is Guru Nanak's *Shabd-Brahm*, who, in Sidh Gosti has been accepted as the Guru.

Before we undertake to explore the chief aspects of *Shabd* considered by Guru Nanak, it will not be out of place to see what the sense is behind understanding the *Gurbani* as *Shabd-Brahm* and how this was revealed to Guru Nanak. Bhai Veer Singh in the foreword to *Gurmat Nirnay* of Dr. Bhai Jodh Singh, an eminent scholar of Sikh Philosophy and Religion explains the reason of the origin of *Gurbani* and holds that divine experience and divine knowledge which were bestowed upon Guru Nanak from the very start, were shared by him with the people through musical vibrations and the people were overwhelmed with a supernatural light and bliss. Sometimes the Guru was asked questions by the spiritually weak people who did not experience this internal bliss. The Guru answered them through discourses but when they were still unconvinced, the inspired Guru delved deeper into the depths of *atma* and appeared almost a different being with a shining and glittering face. As a result, divine music flowed in hymns and the *Para-Shabd* through divine dialogue went on pouring melting and dyeing the onlookers in His steadfast colour. These divine hymns covering long and small discourses with the seekers of right path were written by or got written in the name of Guru.

Guru-‘Vahiguru’- the educator, the giver of life, and the saviour, was unmanifested and resided in the invisible regions. We came to know him as Guru Nanak when he came on earth; that divine Guru made great men walk in His light and become the sustainers of the ‘Baani’ (*Shabad*). The divine Guru-light collected the manifested hymns also of the earlier lights. After scrutiny and selection, much more was added to it. The problems of spiritual life, the details about the groping steps of the *sadhakas* and the experiences of men reaching light from darkness, were retained in the Guru Granth Sahib, with appropriate comments. The Guru Granth became the manifestation of—This is It, This is It—the unmanifested ultimate reality. Finally the fifth Guru compiled the *Saguna Shabd-Brahm* in the shape of Scripture for all. In a nutshell, Bhai Veer Singh emphasises that the holy scripture Sri Guru Granth Sahib was first, illumined in the heart of the Guru in the shape of divine knowledge, and from there, through divine melody became *rupatmak* (visible) in a musical order and the *Shabd-Brahm* was made incarnate as Guru Granth Sahib. All the virtuous deeds, religious purifications, self-mortifications, devotions, austerities and pilgrimages abide in the ‘*Shabad*’. Guru Nanak says that the true Guru unites the man with the Lord and then the sin, sorrow and death fly away.

In the hymns of Guru Nanak, ‘*Shabad*’ is described more in terms of what it does than in terms of what it actually is. Thus the function of the ‘*Shabad*’ is to be realised in experience and not merely known in any purely intellectual sense. Creation is due to *Shabd*. The agitation in the primary substance projecting itself into the sensuous plane becomes audible as *dhvani* or sound, but is itself only the possibility and substratum of sound. Creation is said to be *Shabd-prabhav*, that is, it proceeds from, and is a manifestation of the stress of cosmic *Shakti*. In this sense every movement or process in the universe is *Para-shabd*. *Ashabd-jagat* is a contradiction in terms. Whilst the stress or constituting force is one and the same, it manifests itself differently to the different sense organs.

Thus we have seen why Guru Nanak gave so high a status to ‘*Shabad*’ by accepting it as the Guru. In Guru Nanak’s hymns, thoughts are abundantly available which tell us how the *Shabd-Brahm* is realised and why the following of *Shabd* is necessary. It is one of Guru Nanak’s teachings that we should not forget the *Naam* of Hari and try to attain the Lord. The storehouse

(ocean) of ‘*Sabad*’ is inside. It can be obtained by surrendering the ego and self-conceit. Piercing, that is, delving deep into the ‘*Shabad*’ is necessary by the *sadhak* to attain the door of the Lord; otherwise all his pleasure and pomp and show are useless. Through ‘*Shabad*’ we do attain the Lord and his love. Without the ‘*Word*’, the world is led astray and is born to die again and again. Further, Guru Nanak says that if one realises the ‘*Word*’, one prides not on one’s self Ego, avarice and love of the self are the main impediments in the way of ‘*Shabad*’ realisation. If the good is to be received, the leaving of these bonds, and dwelling on the word, are required. It is through the Guru that we meet the Lord who makes us understand the infinity of His power, and this understanding is possible only when ego is put off by realising that there is nothing but ‘*Shabad*’ in all the three worlds. Guru Nanak says that with the recitation of the true ‘*Shabad*’, the unstable mind is restrained and the nectar is realised. Through ‘*Shabad*’, the dignity of salvation is obtained and false pride is lost.

Shabads may be either directly or indirectly apprehended. In the latter case they are received; the ordinary individual does not hear the natural name or sound of Agni or Ram directly; he is told that it is so, having received it from those who have heard that sound. It is ‘received’ (*Apta*) and not directly apprehended (*Sakshatkarta*). So from the point of view of apprehension, ‘*Shabads*’ are of two kinds, *Sakshatkarta* and *Apta*.

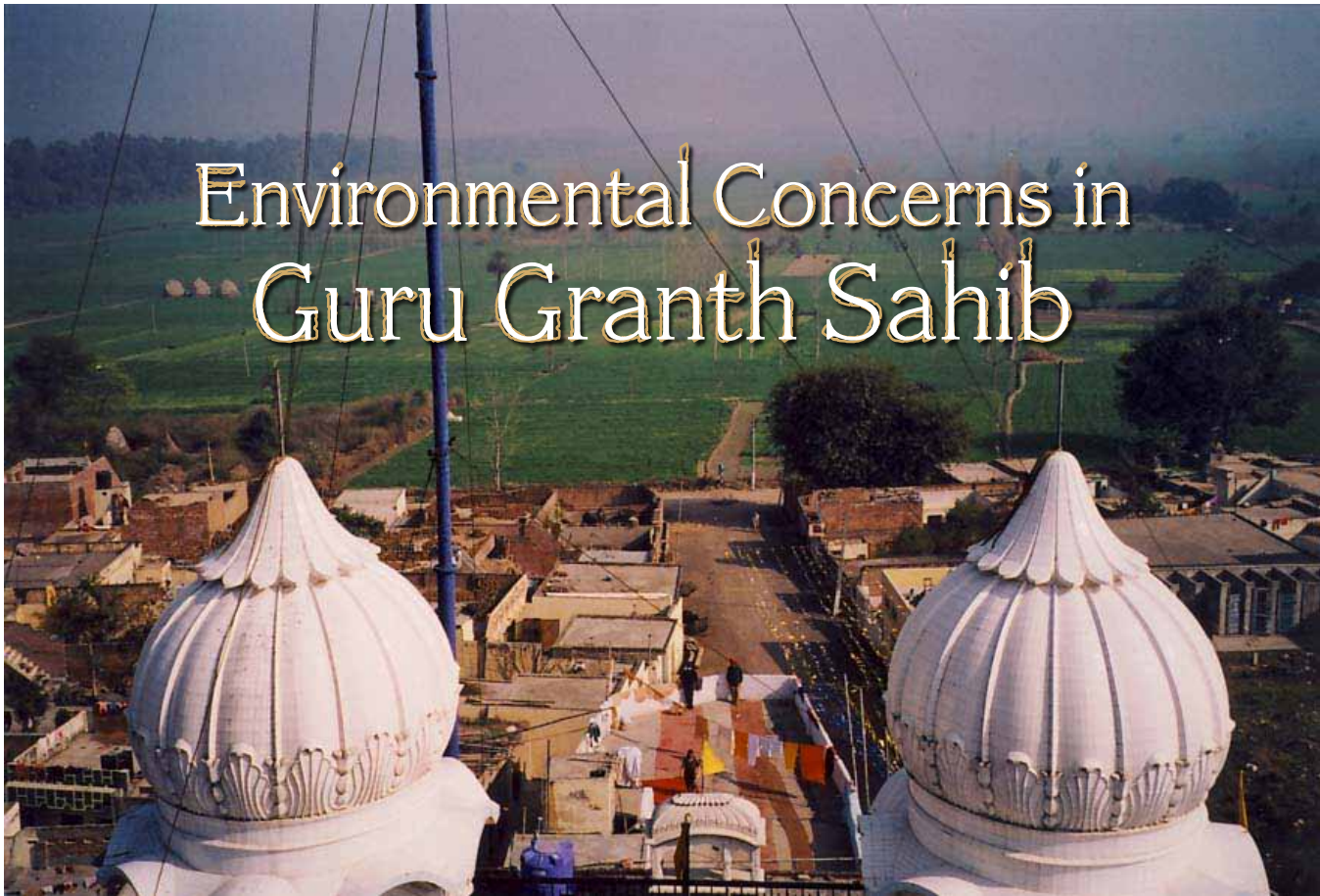
Guru Granth Sahib’s hymns are *apta* hymns for the followers but were *sakshatkarta* for the Gurus. Guru Amar Das says that only seeing of the Guru in person will not help in reaching salvation, because the Guru may be seen by the whole world. So long as one does not reflect, ponder and follow the *Guru-Shabad* (*apta vaky*), emancipation is not possible.

Like Guru Amardas, contemplation upon ‘*Guru Shabad*’ is deemed necessary by Guru Nanak for attainment of *Mahasukha* and *Mukti*. Such emancipated Gurmukh never loses anything. Guru Nanak goes beyond the stage of mere reflection and contemplation by saying that contemplation alone does not help so long as we do not practice the ‘*Guru Shabad*’. Through practice alone can life be enriched.

Dr. Jodh Singh

Courtesy Sri Guru Gobind Singh Collage of
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Environmental Concerns in Guru Granth Sahib



All the biotic and abiotic factors that act on an organism, population, or ecological community and influence its survival and development constitute its environment. Biotic factors include the organisms themselves, their food, and their interactions. Abiotic factors include such items as sunlight, soil, air, water, climate, and pollution. Organisms respond to changes in their environment by evolutionary adaptations in form and behaviour. At present humanity is facing great challenges for its survival as both these factors have come under great stress due to its unbridled demands of national economic growth and individual needs and desires.

Grave Crisis

On the abiotic front, a grave ecological crisis is caused by man's exploitation of Nature, which is leading to a large scale depletion of natural resources, destruction of natural resources, destruction of forests, and overuse of land for agriculture and habitation. Pollution is contaminating air, land, and water. Smoke from industries, homes and vehicles, is in the air. A smoky haze envelopes the major cities of the world. Industrial waste and consumer trash are choking streams and rivers, ponds and lakes, killing the marine life. Much of the waste is a product of modern' technology. It is neither biodegradable

nor reusable, and its long-term consequences are unknown. The viability of many animal and plant species, and possibly that of the humankind itself, is at stake.

At the biotic level, humanity is facing a social justice crisis, which is caused by humanity's confrontation with itself. The social justice crisis is that poverty, hunger, disease, exploitation and injustice are widespread. There are economic was over resources and markets. The rights of the poor and the marginal are violated. Women, constituting half the world's population, have their rights abused.

Obviously, the contemporary human society is in the midst of a grave environmental crisis. There is a serious concern that the earth may no longer be a sustainable biosystem. Although human beings are seen as the most intelligent life form on earth, yet they are responsible for almost all the ecological damage done to the planet. The Sikh scripture, Sri Guru Granth Sahib (SGGS), declares that the purpose of human beings is to achieve a blissful state and to be in harmony with the earth and all of God's creation. It seems, however, that humans create their surroundings as a reflection of their inner state. Thus, the increasing barrenness of the earth reflects a spiritual emptiness within humans.

Interdependence

Sikhism is very concerned with the relationship between humanity and the environment. Sikhs believe that an awareness of the sacred relationship between humans and the environment is necessary for the health of our planet, and for our survival. In SGGS, man and material world (biotic and abiotic components of the environment) are no more seen as external to each other, but being involved in inter-dependent relationship, reciprocally conditioning the life of each other. Guru Nanak stresses this kind of interdependent relationship in his composition 'Japu Ji':

Air is vital force, Water the progenitor, the vast Earth is the mother of all, Days and Nights are nurses, fondling all creation in their lap.

(SGGS: 8)

Sri Guru Granth Sahib declares that the purpose of human beings is to be in harmony with all creation and that human domination is to be rejected. The Sikh Gurus recognised human responsibility towards the material world and its phenomena. So, the importance of Air, Water and Earth to life are emphasised over and over again in the Sri Guru Granth Sahib. The earth is referred to as the mother and as such requires our respect. Great care needs to be taken to ensure that no damage occurs to it while the Sikh is going about his or her daily life. The pollution of these three elements is against the principles laid down by the Gurus. The Sikh Scriptures emphasise the importance of the abiotic components of environment in the hymn:

Air, water earth and sky are God's home and temple – sacred places which need to be protected and looked after.

(SGGS: 723)

The Sikh Gurus showed the world, the way to appreciate the interdependence of living beings and their environment and the way to nurture this inter-relationship. All their constructions adhered to this principle. They built many Gurudwaras surrounded by large pools, which supported marine life, especially fish. This was clearly a sign to live in harmony with environment rather than in conflict with it. Guru Har Rai, the seventh Sikh Guru developed Kiratpur Sahib as a town of parks and gardens. Located on the banks of tributary of the Sutlej, he planted flowers and fruit bearing trees all over the area. This created a salubrious environment, attracting beautiful birds to the town and turning it into an idyllic place to live in.

Nature - a Spiritual Guide

Nature (the material world and its phenomena), a major component of our environment, is a great spiritual teacher because it enables the spiritual seeker to be in touch with Ultimate Reality. God is revealed through His All-powerful Creative nature. As pointed out in Gurbani, everything seen is God in action. The Sikh scriptures are replete with examples about the interrelationship of the Creator (God) and Nature.

Nanak, the True One is the Giver of all; He is revealed through His All-powerful Creative Nature.

(SGGS: 141)

The Supreme Creator created the play of Nature; through the Word of His Shabad, He stages His Wondrous Show.

(SGGS: 1037)

SGGS places a great deal of spiritual significance on the lessons we can learn directly from the Nature. One can learn true selflessness; real renunciation and sacrifice from it. According to SGGS; 'Earth teaches us patience and love. Air teaches us mobility, Fire teaches us warmth and courage; Sky teaches us equality and broadmindedness, Water teaches us purity and cleanliness'.

(SGGS 1018).

Harmony with Nature

Sikhs believe that the material world and its phenomena (Nature), like all creation, is a manifestation of God. Every creature in this world, every plant, every form is a manifestation of the Creator. Each is part of God and God is within each element of creation. God is the cause of all and He is the primary connection between all existence.

He is within-see Him outside as well; there is no one, other than Him. By divine prompting look upon all existence as one and undifferentiated; the same light penetrates all existence.

(SGGS: 599)



“The Creator created himself .. And created all creation in which He is manifest. You Yourself the bumble-bee, flower, fruit and the tree. You Yourself the water, desert, ocean and the pond. You Yourself are the big fish, tortoise and the Cause of causes. Your form cannot be known.”

(SGGS: 1016)

SGGS stresses the importance of living in harmony with Nature. It opposes the idea that the struggle of the human race is against Nature and that human supremacy lies in the notion of “harnessing’ Nature. The objective is harmony with the eternal - God - which implies a life of harmony with all existence. The history of the Gurus is full of stories of their love for animals, birds, trees, vegetation, rivers, mountains and sky. Many Sikhs, though not all, also have a strong tradition of being vegetarian. A simple life free from conspicuous waste is the Sikh ideal - a life that stresses mastery over the self rather than mastery over Nature.

Earth is a Dharamsaal

SGGS emphasises the significance of various aspects of Nature and declares the Earth as Dharamsaal (a place for righteous action).

He created Night and Day, seasons and occasion. So also Air, Water, Fire and the Nether Regions, Amidst these has He fixed the earth, the place for Righteous Action.

(SGGS: 7)



By this portrayal of the world (earth) as a place for righteousness and purity, SGGS insists that we relate with others with equality and justice. Sri Guru Granth Sahib reveals that real peace can only be found when desire and greed are subdued and diminished. This will only happen when the individual realises that God is found in all the element including water, earth and the woods and he stops damaging these elements purely to satisfy his material greed.

You shall find peace, and you mind shall be soothed and cooled; the fire of desire shall not burn with you. The Guru has revealed God to Nanak, in the three worlds, in the water, the earth and the woods.

(SGGS: 617)

World Society

On the Biotic front, according to Sikhism, environmental concerns must be viewed as part of the broader issue of human development and social justice. Many environmental problems, particularly the exploitation of environmental resources in developing nations, are due to the poverty of large parts of the population. Therefore an integrated approach is necessary.

Sikhism emphasises the main objective for humanity as the harmony with all existence. Striving for a life of harmony, therefore, also implies a life of supporting individual rights and environmentalism - a life that works against injustice toward anybody and anything.

The tenth Guru in 1699 founded the Order of the Khalsa, whose members practice the spiritual discipline of Sikhism and are committed to ensure the preservation and prevalence of a World Society. Over the last three centuries the members of the Khalsa order have stood up for the rights of the oppressed and the disenfranchised even at the cost of their own lives. The Khalsa vision of the World Society is:

Henceforth such is the Will of God: No man shall coerce another; No person shall exploit another. Each individual has the inalienable birthright to seek and pursue happiness and self-fulfillment. Love and persuasion is the only law of social coherence.

(SGGS: 74)

The Khalsa have opposed any force that has threatened the freedom and dignity of human beings. In the eighteenth century it was the oppressive rulers of northern India, and invaders from Afghanistan; in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries they have struggled against oppression by European

colonists and Indian governments. For the Khalsa, justice requires the participation and inclusion of all in obtaining and enjoying the fruits of God's creation. Justice achieved through cooperative effort is desirable. The ideal for the Khalsa is to strive for justice requires the participation and inclusion of all in obtaining and enjoying the fruits of God's creation. Justice achieved through cooperative effort is desirable. The ideal for the Khalsa is to strive for justice for all, not merely for themselves.

Intoxicants Free Simple Life

SGGS describes the norms for a Sikh to live a life which does not harm their mind, health, others around them, society, or the environment. Therefore, Sikhs are prohibited from consuming tobacco, alcohol or any other intoxicant, and keep a simple vegetarian diet. Gurmat is against causing cruelty and suffering to animals.

Those who do not use intoxicants are true; they dwell in the Court of the Lord.

(SGGS: 15)

Kabeer, those mortals who consume marijuana, fish and wine - no matter what pilgrimages, fasts and rituals they follow, they will all go to hell.

(SGGS: 1377)

It is now a known fact that smoking is both a primary and secondary health hazard. In addition to harming the environment, it has seriously harmful effects on the person who smokes, on the bystander who breathes the secondhand smoke, and on the unborn foetus of the female smoker. Though this has only been scientifically verified in the last half century, Guru Gobind Singh, the tenth Guru of the Sikhs, listed the use of tobacco as one of the four major acts forbidden to initiated adherents of the Sikh religion. Though tobacco was introduced into India only in the mid-1600s, he had the wisdom to specifically interdict it in 1699. From its very beginning, Sikhism had forbidden the use of any intoxicants or mind-altering substances for any purpose except medicinal.

Integrated Approach to sustainability

In Sikh beliefs, a concern for the environment is part of an integrated approach to life and nature. As all creation has the same origin and end, humans must have consciousness of their place in creation and their relationship with the rest of creation. Humans should conduct themselves through life with love, compassion,

and justice. Becoming one and being in harmony with God implies that humans endeavour to live in harmony with all of God's creation. A true Sikh is for individual human rights, the environment and justice for all.

All life is interconnected. A human body consists of many parts; every part has a distinct name, location, and function, and all of these are dependent upon each other. In the same way, all the constituents of the universe and the earth are dependent upon each other. Decisions in one country or continent cannot be ignored by people in other countries continents. Choices in one place have measurable consequences for the rest of the same system. SGGS assures that the entire creation is inter-related mutually supporting one another.

(SGGS: 273)

All creation on one thread has He strung.

Any solutions to the problem of the environment must be sensitive to women's concerns, and must include women as equals. Piecemeal solutions to environmental problems will merely focus, for example, on limiting population growth through family planning measures, which often end up abusing women's rights, and should be rejected on those grounds alone. SGGS contains important lessons on this. Guru Nanak and other Sikh gurus advocated equality for women and took steps to implement this. Community-based sharing of resources (e.g. langar) is another practice prevalent in Sikhism, which can be adopted worldwide to share scarce resources with special emphasis on recycling and avoidance of wastage.

(SGGS: 1108)

Life, for its very existence and nurturing, depends upon a bounteous nature. A human being needs to derive sustenance from the earth and not deplete, exhaust, pollute, burn, or destroy it. Sikhs believe that an awareness of that sacred relationship between humans and the environment is necessary for the health of our planet, and for our survival. A new "environmental ethic" dedicated to conservation and wise use of the resources provided by a bountiful nature can only arise from an honest understanding and dedicated application of our old, tried and true spiritual heritage. Such an integrated approach to current environmental crisis can led to permanent sustainability of life on mother earth.

*D.P. Singh
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Preservation & Renovation of Sikh Relics

Sikh Monuments, Arts, Holy Relics and Manuscripts in Jeopardy



The wedding of Guru Nanak, from a manuscript of the Janam Sakhi (Life Stories), 1800-1900. Lahore. Manuscript page, opaque watercolours on paper.

Man kind lives at a time when it is easy to forget the value of the past. We are surrounded by the lure of modernity and bombarded by incessant messages about the value of almost anything new. As a result, the works of our cultural and artistic heritage often languish owing to benign neglect or simple lack of attention. In more extreme and tragic cases, great monuments have even been willfully destroyed, most memorably when the Taliban willfully destroyed the 1500-year-old Buddha statues in 2001—a UNESCO World Heritage site—on the grounds that they were idols, which are forbidden under Sharia law. The world's outrage at this atrocity is a clear reminder that we do in fact understand the price we collectively pay, no matter what our culture or religion--when any cultural treasure is lost or destroyed, for whatever reasons.

I owe a depth of gratitude to historians and art experts like the late Patwant Singh, Dr. Mohinder Singh, Gurmeet Rai and others, whose scholarly work on the Golden Temple and other Sikh monuments have inspired us and taught us so much. I also wish to offer my sincerest acknowledgements and gratitude to Kiki Kapany, Jaspreet Singh and Sonia Dhama for their most valuable contribution to this article.

Without doubt, many of us are passionate amateurs, intimate observers and collectors of Sikh arts, with a commitment to bring to notice the deteriorating condition of Sikh arts and monuments to Sikhs as well as non- Sikhs. If this trend is allowed to continue, our important arts and monuments could be totally lost within as little as a generation, thus destroying the ability of our children, our grandchildren and the world at large to view the beauty and grandeur of Sikh heritage. And we won't have the Taliban to blame, only ourselves. By acting now, we can prevent this particular tragedy.

Sikh Arts

My interest in Sikh Arts goes back to the works of one of my ancestors, who was head of the Patna Takhat, (one of the seats of learning of the Sikhs). He did prodigious work on the teaching of Sikh religion, perhaps most notably compiling two Janam Sakhis of Guru Nanak with approximately 40 paintings in each document. These Janam Sakhis were later inherited by my grandmother and one of the earliest memories I have as a child was watching my grandmother read these texts to ladies of the neighborhood every afternoon. Eventually my grandmother gave these documents to my father who then, some 30 years ago gave them to me. My fascination with them encouraged me to look for other original works of the Sikhs.

In the 1970s I discovered that just as there are countless branches of Indian Arts: the Kashmiri arts, Pahari arts, South Indian arts, Buddhist arts, Mughal arts – and all of these arts have emerged through the artist's cultural, regional or religious affiliations - so it is with Sikh Art. Over the past 300 years an enormous body of work has been created that is indeed Sikh Art,



which is art created by, for or about the Sikhs. The range of Sikh Arts encompasses oil and watercolor paintings, lithographs, manuscripts, textiles, arms and armaments, sculptures, jewellery, buildings and architecture.



Asian Art Museum - Gift of the Kapany Collection, (4 images of Janam Sakhis)



These can be found in numerous collections all over the world. Some of them are at the:

- Toshakana Collection at the Golden Temple, Amritsar
- Government Museum & Art Gallery, Chandigarh
- National Museum, New Delhi
- Hermitage at St. Petersburg, Russia
- Asian Art Museum at San Francisco
- Bamba Duleep Singh collection at Lahore
- British Museum at London
- Victoria & Albert Museum at London
- Private collections of the Maharaja of Patiala, Kapurthala and others
- Imperial Hotel Collections at New Delhi
- Royal Ontario Museum at Toronto
- Wallace collections at London
- Various private collections

Remarkably, various classical and modern artists from all over the world have made significant contributions to Sikh Arts. Some of the more famous artists are Emily Eden, Alexis Soltykoff, Prince



The Golden Temple of Amritsar, Kapur Singh circa 1886, oil on canvas, Kapany Collection



Satinder Kaur Kapany Gallery of Sikh Art at the Asian Art Museum in San Francisco, California

Saltykov, William Carpenter, William Simpson, George Beechy, Franz Winterhalter, August Schoefft, George Richmond, Sobha Singh, Santokh Singh, Arpana Caur, Amrit & Rabindra Singh, Sukhpreet Singh, B.S Malhan, Devender Singh and others.

As Sikh Art was being sold all over the world, in the form of Mughal, Pahari and Kashmiri art and artifacts, we started building our personal collection and now own approximately 300 pieces of Sikh Art, of which we have donated approximately 100 to the Asian Arts Museum in San Francisco. We also gave the Museum funding to enable creation of a permanent exhibit of Sikh Arts. In fact the forty pieces of the Janamsakhis of Guru Nanak that my ancestor compiled, have now been permanently transferred to the Asian Art Museum, so that the entire world can enjoy these. We are of course very proud of these modest steps we have taken to preserve Sikh Art and continue to collect between 10 and 15 new artefacts every year.

Monuments and Buildings

However, the need to protect Sikh Art is just the beginning as, in so many ways, most important and enduring heritage of the Sikhs can be found in the many monuments that have been built. Think of the hundreds of Gurudwaras commemorating the initial visits of the Sikh Gurus in Punjab, Pakistan, India and abroad: the Golden Temple in Amritsar, the Gurudwaras at Anandpur Sahib, Patna Sahib and Hazoor Sahib. In 1985, Pardeep Singh Arshi wrote the book *Sikh Architecture in the Punjab* on the architectural features of various Gurudwaras. The foreword of the book, written by Khushwant Singh states, "Anywhere in the world you can spot a Sikh temple as a building apart from others. Its domes are different from the domes of mosques or Hindu temples, as are the arches, balconies, columns, interiors and general layout". It is therefore very surprising that hitherto no serious study has been made on the Sikh style of architecture. This book adds a new dimension in the understanding and appreciation of all that is beautiful about the Harmandir Sahib, The Akal Takhat, Baba Atal and the innumerable Sikh Gurudwaras, from the elevation of Anandpur in the foothills of the Shivaliks to those scattered in the vast plains of Majha, Malwa and Doaba.

Guru ki Maseet, Sri Hargobindpur, Punjab

Then there is the *Guru Ki Maseet*, popularly known as the Guru's Mosque, which was built for the local Muslim population at Hargobindpur by the sixth Guru, Guru Hargobind Singh, some 375 years ago. It is currently being looked after by a sect of the Nihang Singhs. This is a truly remarkable story in which Gurmeet Rai, director of the Cultural Resource Conservation Initiative, has played a central role. Gurmeet Rai has worked on the renovation of

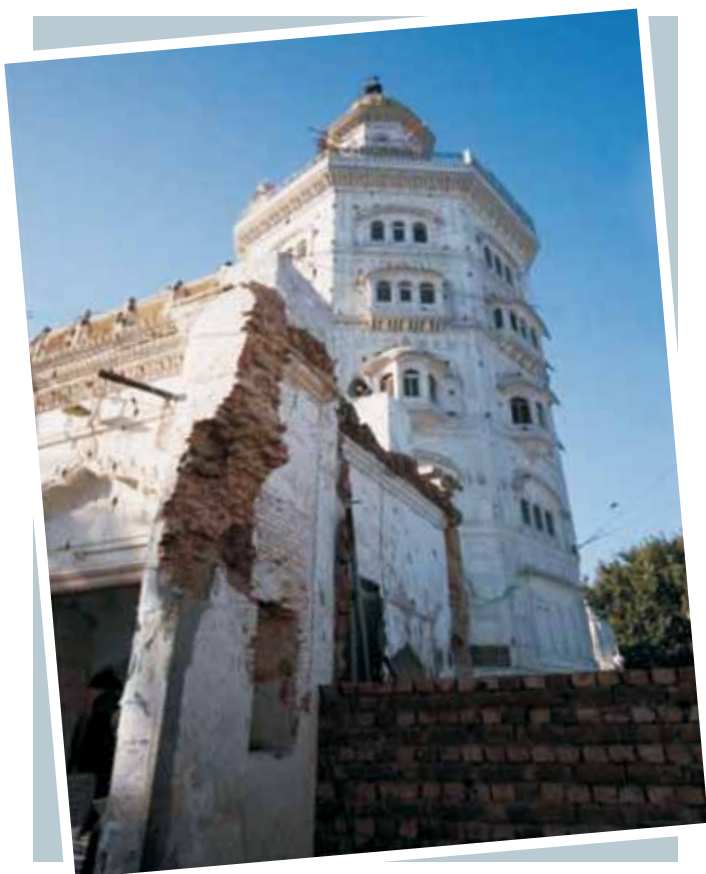


Guru Ki Maseet, Sri Hargobindpur, Punjab

various Sikh monuments for many years and made very significant improvements to the overall field of renovation and restoration. The Sikh Foundation have worked with her and UNESCO on the first phase of this renovation. It was an incredible undertaking in which Sikhs offered their labour, Muslim masons repaired the walls and an all-woman team of restorers led by Gurmeet Rai lent its expertise. Thanks to their collective efforts, the first phase of the renovation was completed in March 2004. Gurmeet Rai has not only worked on architectural renovation, but has been a leading activist in the movement to protect and renovate Sikh monuments.

Gurdwara Baba Atal, Amritsar

One of Amritsar's finest architectural marvels is Gurdwara Baba Atal Rai, which commemorates the life of Guru Hargobind's son, who died tragically when he was only nine years old. It was raised in



1778-1784 with repairs and additions carried out from time to time. This is a nine-storey octagonal tower standing 40 metres high, so designed as to have a double octagonal structure, one rising on the exterior and the other on the interior. The doors are made of

silver and brass with elegantly embossed designs of Sikh and Hindu themes. The best specimen of the art of embossing on brass that thrived in Amritsar in the preceding century, is seen on the plates embellishing the Gurdwara. Also the interior walls of the edifice were covered with murals, which were most likely made in the last decade of the 19th century, by Mehtab Singh. Most of the personages portrayed in the paintings, except Guru Nanak, are presented in profile coloured with Indian red, ochre and other earth colours, with frequent touches of gold. A sense of perspective and foreshortening gives the illusion of depth and volume. The figures are projected with



Gurdwara Baba Atal Rai, pictures by Jasprit Singh.

the help of light and shade and are some of the finest painted in India in the second half of the 19th century. Tragically two storeys of artwork have been painted/ tiled over and lost to the world forever.

Kila Mubarak at Patiala

Apart from Gurdwaras, are the great Sikh palaces at Patiala, Kapurthala, Lahore, Nabha as also other historic havelis and forts. Notable among these is the magnificent "Kila Mubarak", a 10-acre complex comprising the main palace (Kila Androon), the guesthouse and Darbar Hall. The buildings are unique in their architectural styles and are richly embellished with murals and other ornamentation. The history associated with this heritage site goes back to 1763, when the city was founded by Baba Ala Singh. Maharaja Narinder Singh (1845-62) later fortified the fort and city further.

The rapidly deteriorating condition of so many of our greatest treasures is indeed shocking. Staircases



Kila Mubarak at Patiala. Pictures by Sonia Dhami

are crumbling, walls are eroding and sculptures are broken. The sites themselves are often strewn with litter. Of course, given the vast problems of providing decent homes, drinking water, food and health care to the spiraling populations of India and Pakistan it is easy to understand why the restoration and maintenance of these sites is not always the highest priority. And even though there are many local people who would like to do something, more often than not

they simply cannot be permitted or are unable to afford the mammoth costs.

Sadly, even when the value of these sites is recognised and the will to protect them exists, the maintenance and management of the sites is fraught with numerous problems, including inadequate budgets and lack of skilled professionals. Not only are great architects and crafts people required

who can carry out renovation and restoration but also people who can figure out how to continue to maintain these monuments after they are restored and prevent future deterioration are mandatory in this quest for heritage preservation. Whatever solutions are proposed, they will have to take into consideration the legal approvals needed from governmental departments, local organisations, present occupiers as well as the communities' interests and current politics. The sources of funding that can be tapped into could be Sikh diasporas, relevant local, national and international trusts and foundations and world bodies like UNESCO.

Certainly there are places in order of priority which need immediate attention. At the top of the list has to be the Golden Temple, the Sikhs' holiest shrine, which was damaged extensively in 1984. The list also includes 26 different Gurdwaras in Pakistan, such as Nankana Sahib, where Guru Nanak Devji was born; Panja Sahib, where in 1521 Guru Nanak stopped a boulder hurled at him from above, which today still carries the imprint of his hand; and Gurdwara Dera Sahib, which marks the martyrdom of the fifth Sikh Guru Arjan Devji.

Of importance too are the places and monuments associated with Maharaja Ranjit Singh, including the Lahore Fort, ancestral buildings and tombs in Gujranwala. Similarly the princely states of Kapurthala founded in the 11th century, has several very important buildings such as the Jagatjit Palace, formerly the palace of the erstwhile Maharaja, which is based on architecture of the Palace of Versailles and Fontainebleau. Its Moorish Mosque, a replica of the Grand Mosque of Marakesh, Morocco, is a spectacular example of the city's secular history that we should also be concerned about.

There are also the battlefields where Sikhs fought mighty battles, at Mudki, Ferozeshah, Subraon on the eastern side of the Sutlej and Chillianwalah, Gujarat and Multan, all these in now Pakistan.

Paintings

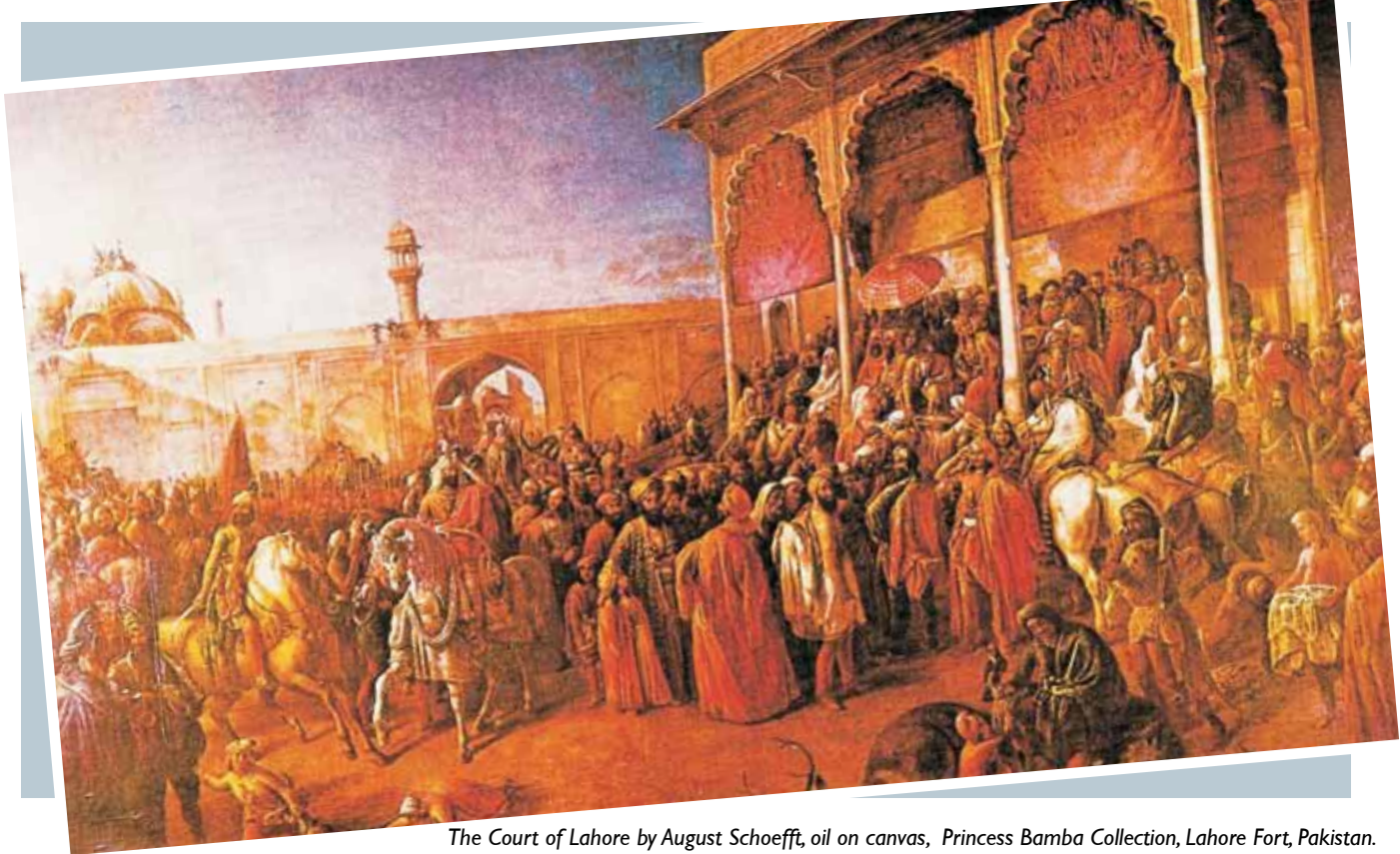
The majority of Sikh Art in paintings and manuscripts remain in the Punjab and India, where the quality of museums is a grave deterrent to the maintenance of these creations. Artwork, especially ancient artwork, needs to be well preserved; it must have a controlled environment, with proper lights, temperature and

humidity. Artwork can only be shown for a few months at a time after which it needs to "rest" for many months.

Still, this is simply not the case in most museums in India and Pakistan and the unfortunate result is permanent damage to artworks. Apart from the dismal state of museums, murals and other wall paintings at the Sikh architectural sites e.g. Kila Mubarak in Patiala are also in a state of constant decline. The Bamba Duleep Singh Collection at the Lahore Museum consists of 18 oil paintings, 14 watercolours, 22 ivory paintings, 17 photographs, 10 metallic sculptures and artifacts. This important body of Sikh Art was in the collection of



Maharaja Dalip Singh by Franz Winterhalter, London 1854, oil on canvas, Royal Collection, Osborne House.



The Court of Lahore by August Schoefft, oil on canvas, Princess Bamba Collection, Lahore Fort, Pakistan.

Maharajah Duleep Singh at his Suffolk home in England. Later his daughter Princess Bamba Duleep Singh inherited the collection and brought it to Lahore, where she died in 1957. She bequeathed the collection to Pir Karim Baksh Supra of Lahore who later sold it to the Government of Pakistan in the 1960s. A majority of the paintings in this collection were rendered by European artists. The mammoth oil painting by August Schoefft depicting the Darbar of Maharaja Ranjit Singh showing 55 historic personalities is a particularly important art piece. Thus, it is absolutely critical to devise a way to enable these museums preserve and maintain their collections.

Manuscripts

We recently celebrated the 300th anniversary of the installation of the Guru Granth Sahib as our eternal Guru. Yet scores of Sikh manuscripts and Adi Granths are lost owing to neglect and misuse. Manuscripts are a very important documentary source of history for scholars, researchers and calligraphers. Many manuscripts of the Sikhs are in collections of universities, government archives, religious organisations and private collections. A major collection of Adi Granths, all hand written on handmade paper and some with beautiful illuminations and motifs,



Janamsakhi, 19th century, Government Museum and Art Gallery, Chandigarh.



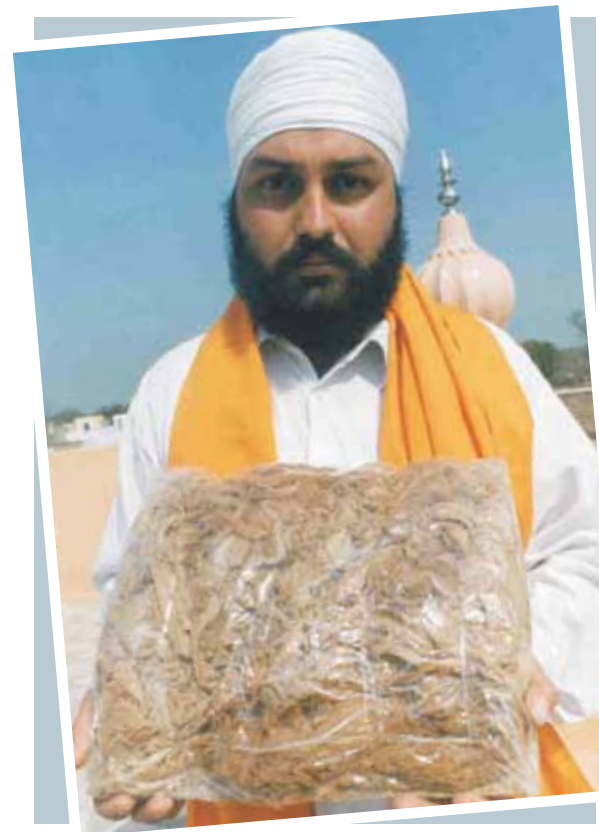
*Sri Guru Granth Sahib, miniature size,
Kapany Collection*

are with the Government Museum and Art Gallery, Chandigarh. These were retrieved from Gurdwaras in Pakistan after the partition of India in 1947. Of significance is an *Adi Granth* dated 1676 which is a copy of *Bhai Banno's Bir* (a contemporary Sikh disciple of Sri Guru Arjan Dev, the fifth Guru of the Sikhs) with a *nishaan* of Guru Tegh Bahadur, the ninth Guru of the Sikhs. The *nishaan* was procured before the martyrdom of Guru Tegh Bahadur in 1675 A.D. Commendable efforts by "The Nanakshahi Trust" in digitising our history have been made. Nevertheless a consolidated effort for collation and restoration needs to be further undertaken. Moreover the question of the missing Sikh manuscripts from the Golden Temple complex during 'Operation Bluestar' needs to be thoroughly investigated. According an estimate, more than 20,000 books, 2500 manuscripts of the Guru Granth Sahib, 200 rare books and documents, 160 *hukamnamas* and Sikh relics and 250 rare paintings are still not accounted for.

Holy Relics

A large number of holy relics and articles of the Gurus are in possession of private parties, state archives and universities. Important artifacts in private collections include the *khanda* used by Tenth Guru Gobind Singh for preparation of *amrit* and was given to Shiam Singh along with a sword. It is still with the family at Anandpur Sahib. The *toshakhana* in Faridkot has a shield of Guru Gobind Singh.; Gurdwara Siropao Nabha has a turban of Guru Gobind Singh's, traditionally associated with the battle of Bhangani; Gurdwara Dhillwan Kalan in Faridkot has a blue *chola* of Guru Gobind Singh's, while Gurdwara Meon Sahib in Jullundhar has the wedding dress of the fifth Sikh Guru, Arjan Dev.

Most of these items are extremely fragile and need utmost care and technique in their handling, such as the touching and handling with bare hands causes irreversible damage to the antiquities due to oil and other grime. They need to be stored in



Dastar of Guru Gobind Singh before restoration

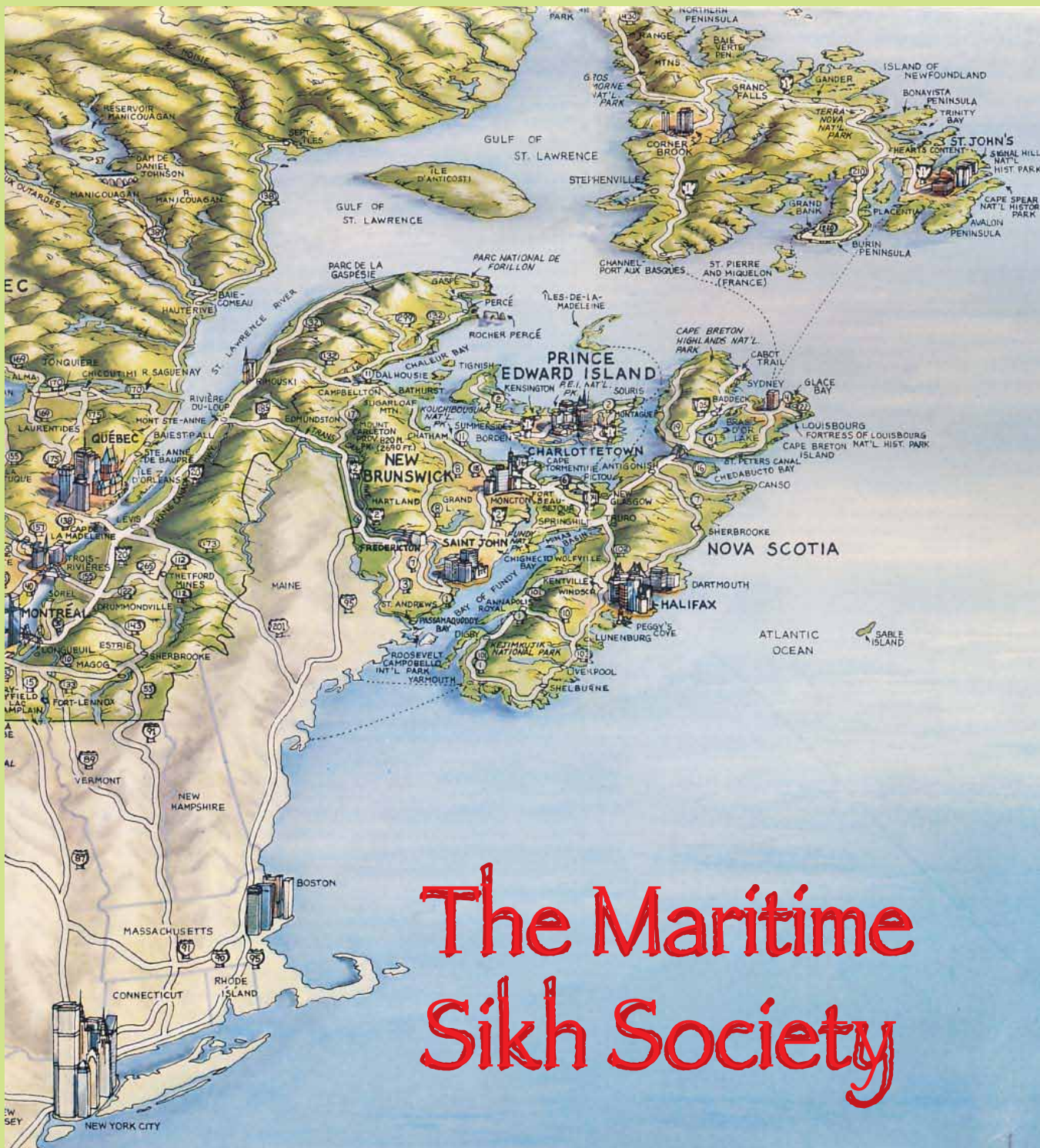
an environment where moisture, humidity and temperature is controlled to ensure their preservation, which most of the owners are neither aware of nor have the resources to undertake.



Dastar of Guru Gobind Singh after restoration

One need not be an architect, an art collector or art dealer to help preserve and protect the Sikh heritage. The first serious study of Sikh architecture was compiled just 25 years ago and obviously a great deal more remains to be done in order to muster unique skills, talents and expertise for this great cause.

*Dr. N.S Kapany
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USA*



In 1992, the Maritime Sikh Society in Halifax made history by becoming the first gurdwara in North America — and possibly the world — to have an all-women executive committee to manage its affairs.

In December 2009, the members of the Society once again selected an all-women executive team to manage the temple, including President Kanwal Kaur Sidhu.

I am honoured and privileged to be given this opportunity to serve the Sikh community. I am humbled by the trust and faith placed upon us," stated Kanwal Kaur Sidhu.

Kanwal Kaur has a deep connection with the Society going back to her father, Gurcharan Singh, who in April 1968 had invited Sikhs from all over the region to celebrate Vaisakhi at his home. It was



there that the notion of a formal Sikh organisation was tabled, a committee formed and the Maritime Sikh Society conceived.

Sidhu's mother, Surjit Kaur, also served as president in 1993-94. In fact, since its inception, women have played key roles and have participated fully in all affairs and activities of

the society. When India's high commissioner, S. Gurdiyal Singh Dhillon, once saw a woman leading the ardas ceremony in the gurdwara, he said, "This is the first time I have seen a woman performing an ardas at a gurdwara. You have given them the equal rights they deserve."

We spoke with Kanwal Kaur Sidhu about the role of women at MSS and the status of women in society today.

Kanwal Kaur Sidhu, President, Maritime Sikh Society, hopes the organisation's all women management team will encourage more Sikh women to get involved in the affairs of Sikh institutions. In addition to Sidhu, the Maritime Sikh Society's management team includes Krishna Grewal Vice President, Manvinder K Dhillon Secretary and Sushman Paul, treasurer.

Extracts from an interview

What kind of feedback have you received to having an all-women executive?

Kanwal Kaur Sidhu: So far we have received only positive comments and a lot of support! It has been very encouraging. India's Sikh cabinet minister, Mr. M.S. Gill, commented in the Tribune that the "SGPC (Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee) should emulate Halifax's example". Hopefully, this story will encourage more women to take leadership roles in gurdwaras and men will be more accepting of the idea.

What are some key roles women play in the gurdwara?

We actually don't have a professional granthi here in the Halifax gurdwara. All the seva is done by

volunteers in the sangat. In addition to preparing langar, women perform many of the other duties at the gurdwara. For example, it is mostly women that recite ardas, do kirtan and recite the lavans at weddings. They are free to take vaaks, administer oaths to the incoming executive or address the congregation. Currently, Mrs. Satpal Kaur Sodhi is doing a series of lectures on the lesser known Gurus of Sikhism. She is highly knowledgeable in Sikh traditions, culture and religion. She has published several books on various aspects of spiritual life and Sikhism.

Our gurdwara would definitely not be able to run without our female members of the sangat!

The male members of the Maritime Sikh Society fully support the aforementioned roles that women take on in our gurdwara. We are very fortunate that our gurdwara enjoys a harmonious relationship between the men and women, and the men play just as important a role in the smooth operation of the gurdwara. They always support and encourage the women to come forward and serve in any capacity, including serving on the executive.

What inspired you to get involved and run for president?

I have been a part of our Sikh community here since I was a young child. The Maritime Sikh Society was founded in 1968 in my parents' house. There were only about 27 Sikh families at that time here in Nova Scotia.

For the first 10 years, the Maritime Sikh Society held gatherings in rental halls or school gyms. My father, Gurcharan Singh Sidhu, served in various capacities for the first eight years of this Society. As a young child I was involved in all the activities, whether it was helping carry heavy carpets for the floor or washing dishes after a service. My father was a very spiritual man who had a deep love for gurbani. He embodied all that our Gurus taught us. He was a very humble, kind, compassionate man who showered all those he knew with lots of love. His friends belonged to all faiths as he did not see any divisions between people. He only saw humanity. You could say my father was most influential in me developing a deep love for my culture and my Sikh faith. Gurbani kirtan played in our house continuously. My mother, Surjit Kaur Sidhu, is also a very learned and devout woman. She was the force behind my father, silently doing seva for years on end and never looking for recognition. She has also served as the president of MSS. I took on this seva to honour my parents and to carry on my father's legacy.

What are some of your goals with MSS?

My main goal is to serve this community to the best of my ability while keeping in mind the basic tenets of Sikhism. I hope to be a positive role model to the young women here while teaching them that in Sikhism, we are all equal. Not just in terms of gender, but in terms of race, caste, class, etc.

Why do you think more women are not involved in these types of roles at other gurdwaras?

This is likely because Sikh women are still suffering under traditional prejudices, bias and challenges. While the Rehat Maryada clearly states the equality of men and women while doing seva in the gurdwara, many times we don't see women participating because of cultural ideas that don't see women as equal. These are the same cultural chains the gurus worked so hard to get rid of.

Gender equality is enshrined in the Sikh religion but has that translated to equality in the Punjabi community?

It is very unfortunate that many of the progressive teachings of the Sikh Gurus, which were 500 years ahead of their time, have been forgotten.

However, Sikhism did originate and develop in India, which is a male-dominated society.

In most developing societies where educational resources are limited, girls are treated differently and more poorly than boys. Social pressures, chauvinistic attitudes, and essentially forgetting what the Sikh Gurus taught us have resulted in the position of Sikh women being hampered.

Fortunately, though, the situation is improving. In a recent study, "Jat Sikh Women: Social Transformation Changing Status and Lifestyle, 2010," the author Amarinder Sandhu finds that education among the girls in Punjab is on the rise. With education, economic empowerment and an analytical look back at the teachings and lives of the Gurus, the study of Sikh Scriptures has reawakened Sikh women as well as Sikh men. They are now conscious of rights of women as equal partners in human progress, and citing the Holy Scriptures, they are fighting back for these rights. Sikhism promised an equal place to women but unfortunately the practice fell far short of the preaching.

What are some areas where you'd like to see more action on gender equality in our society?

I would definitely like to see action taken in the area of domestic violence against women. I believe education is the key to empowering young women who are often the

victims of domestic abuse. A lot of these women are unaware that there is a way out and continue to suffer silently.

Female infanticide is also undoubtedly a serious problem that needs to be rectified. Although Indian culture has improved with regards to respecting women, we still do not place women on an equal level with men, leading to many female abortions. It isn't only the men that devalue women, but the women as well. I do think, though, that the situation is getting better and the issue is being picked up and addressed by the Punjab government, Sikh clergy and the media.

What about the role of women in Sikh religious institutions?

In the time of Guru Amar Das Ji, three of the appointed Masands were women.

These women were in charge of spreading the message of Sikhism, handling sangat issues and the administration in their communities. Throughout history, Sikh women have always stood side-by-side joining in all panthic seva. We have had a history of Sikh women being head of Sikh congregations, and leaders in Sikh battles and Missles.

It is a tragedy that, today, there is even an issue of Sikh women not being able to partake in early morning seva and kirtan seva at Darbar Sahib or other gurdwaras. Can you imagine not allowing Mata Gujri Ji to do seva? In Ardas we daily speak of the Sikh men and women who have given their ultimate sacrifice for the seva of the panth. Guru Gobind Singh Ji solidified the concept of equality with the introduction of the ONE Khalsa of Kaur and Singhs.

It is very sad that whereas in the times of our Sikh Gurus we saw Sikh women in leadership roles in the clergy, today there seem to be no women occupying such positions.

What do you do in your gurdwara to help educate people on the equality of women?

Well, I think our community here in Halifax is quite fortunate in that the members are all quite highly educated. This extends to the community's views on gender equality and the valuable position women occupy in society. Women in our community are highly valued members of the congregation and greatly contribute to the running of the gurdwara.



The Maritime Sikh Society was founded in 1968 to serve a small community of Sikhs in Halifax. It recently made news with the election of an all-women slate to manage the affairs of its Gurdwara.

What do you think Sikh parents can do to help interest their children in the religion?

It is very important for parents to take their children to gurdwara on a regular basis. The children should be encouraged to become important participants in all forms of seva at our religious institutions. This develops an important connection to our religion and also cultivates friendships with other Sikh children, especially in smaller communities such as ours.

Sikh parents should teach their children how the tenets of Sikhism (such as seva, equality and love for all) correlate to their day-to-day lives. The best teacher always leads by example. Children learn best when behaviours are modelled for them. They should be made aware of what a beautiful faith we have and how it is one of the most progressive religions in the world.

What advice do you have for young Sikh women in general?

First and foremost I would encourage all young Sikh women to strive toward getting a good education. Education is power and it opens minds. They should follow their passion, whatever that happens to be. They need to stay connected to their roots and their faith. We all need an anchor in our lives and it is our faith that sustains us in time of adversity. Our heritage is one that is so rich and diverse. We have a goldmine that the western culture is only now discovering.

I would also encourage all young women to get involved in their community and give of themselves in some way — volunteer at the local gurdwara, help the homeless, any charitable activity.

**Jagpal S Tiwana,
President MSS 2009
Maritime Sikh Society.**

[Courtesy Mehfil Magazine April 2010]

As Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh mingled with the leaders of G-20 countries, symbolising India's ascent as a power, a ghost from the past surfaced — the macabre 1984 riots. Out there in the streets of Toronto walked the expatriate Sikhs, demanding justice for the victims and punishment for those who perpetrated the riots. They questioned the democratic credentials of India and petitioned for recognition of the riots as "genocide". The protest was a rude shock to those who believed the emergence of Manmohan Singh as Indian prime minister must have addressed, in some measure at least, the alienation of the Sikhs in Canada, which was in the '80s a hotbed of Khalistan separatism.

Quite palpably, the alienation of Sikhs persists—deeply, even bitterly. Ask the five lakh Sikhs who have made Canada their home, and they will likely lament their inability to forget the riots, which, in their narration, is referred to—justly—as a "genocide" or a "massacre". And genocide and massacre, irrespective of the years between the time of their occurrence and the present, demands justice for the victims and punishment for those who masterminded it. "The anti-Sikh riot is not a closed chapter yet," says Jaspal Singh Bal, the Toronto-based spokesman of the *World Sikh Organisation of Canada*.

In contrast to those who believe that a Sikh as prime minister is a salve soothing enough for troubled memories to be forgotten, many here say the six years of Manmohan's prime ministership have stoked expectations for justice. As Balraj Deol, editor of *Khabarnama*, a Punjabi weekly published from Toronto, says, "No one could have done more to enhance the image of Sikhs in the world than Dr. Manmohan Singh. But I think this is the best time for reconciliation."



When two nations meet : (Courtesy The Sikh Cultural Society Inc., New York)

Heat from a Flame afar

But these protests, these voices, are perceived by a section in the Indian establishment as a concerted attempt to revive the demand for Khalistan and, simultaneously, exploit the human rights issue to destabilise India. Sources in government say they have been taken aback at the gradual re-emergence of Sikh extremism and terrorist activities in Canada. This fact had worried Manmohan enough to raise it more than once with his Canadian counterpart, Stephen Harper. Sources also say the Sikh militants in Canada are trying to revive old links with the LTTE to channel funds for separatists in Punjab.

Sikh activists here scoff at such charges, saying it's typical of the Indian state to dub as secessionist or terrorist any person who raises the issue of human rights violations. Gurpatwant S. Pannun, legal advisor to Sikhs For Justice, a voluntary group, says, "A systematic campaign is on to tarnish

the image of the Sikh community in Canada." Perhaps the Indian authorities are a trifle paranoid, forgetting that Indians here have played an important role in championing human rights in Canada, which has an enviable history on this count. As Gurwinder Singh, a Vancouver-based political commentator, says: "There were strong protests in Canada when Emergency was imposed by Indira Gandhi. There have been protests not only against the anti-Sikh riots but also against the violent attacks on Christians and Muslims in India."

The Indian diaspora's experience of Canada has also influenced perceptions. Second-generation Sikhs can't fathom why a peaceful demand for a separate Sikh state is anathema to India, often citing in conversations the contrast of Canada where those wanting Quebec



Dr. Manmohan Singh with Sikh MPs and state legislators of Canada

to secede are also MPs. Jatinder Singh, a young IT professional in Canada, mentions it before saying: "All options for justice are on the table."

But such responses are too pat for the Indian authorities, troubled by the tendency among some Sikhs to laud Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale besides Talwinder Singh Parmar, who allegedly masterminded the *Kanishka* plane explosion. Pictures and posters of these leaders are displayed during Baisakhi celebrations in many Canadian cities, a fact even the IT professional admits. In the same breath, though, he explains, "Their photos in gurdwaras have a different meaning here than what they have in India." Like what? Perhaps as men who fought for the community, he suggests. Obviously, it's a polemic not at all convincing.

The Indian establishment is mistaken in believing that all those who raise the demand for justice are militants. Jagdish Grewal, editor of the *Canadian Punjabi Post*, says, "The pro-Khalistan sections are still stuck in the past and can't move forward. But there is no denying that there is resentment among large sections of people, who feel that the powerful persons responsible for the anti-Sikh riots have not yet been charged." S.J. Singh, a former Indian Airlines commander who narrowly escaped being lynched in India during the 1984 riots and is now based in Toronto, says, "I am no secessionist, but I certainly want to see the perpetrators of the 1984 riots brought to justice."

This line of thought is perhaps known to Dr. Manmohan Singh, who made it a point to interact with the Indian-Canadian members of parliament. Among them was Sukh Dhaliwal, who had unsuccessfully moved a resolution in the Canadian parliament just a few days ago to get the 1984 riots recognised as "genocide". Believing it is better to engage rather than isolate men such as Dhaliwal, Manmohan tried to apply a poultice to their wounds. He said he had already apologised for the 1984 riots in Parliament, accepted the weakness in the Indian legal system, and pointed to his government's efforts to reopen all the riot cases for providing compensation to those affected. Flanked by the deputy chairperson of the Planning Commission, Montek Singh Ahluwalia, also a Sikh, Manmohan said, "We cannot get away from our past, but the challenge lies in looking ahead."

But this "healing touch" had some Sikhs decry the subtext of Manmohan's plea. For instance, Gurpatwant S. Pannun of *Sikhs For Justice* lashes out: "It's statements like this that promotes the culture of impunity, that encourages and ensures the criminals that if they attack the minority community they will not be punished." And Dhaliwal says, "The prime minister needs to see that positions of emotional distress over such a terrible moment in history do not translate into extremism...." Really, the opinion of Sikhs here can change only if the UPA government provides a generous compensation to the riot victims and punishes the guilty.

Pranay Sharma
Courtesy : Outlook