

IV/2010

NISHAAN

NAGAARA

**Pluralistic Vision in
Guru Granth Sahib
Sufism and Sikhism
Baba Sheikh Farid
On Barahmasa**

Handwritten signature or text at the bottom of the page.

Contents

Issue IV/2010

- 2 Editorial:**
Sufism and Sikhism:
Interactive profile
JSN



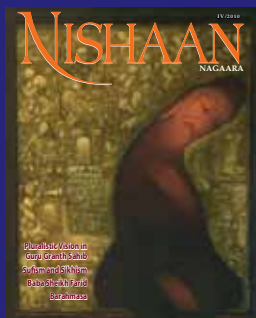
- 4 Sufism and Sikhism**
Daljit Singh and Guruka Singh



- 10 Baba Sheikh Farid**
Dr Debabrata Das



- 13 Pluralistic Vision in
Guru Granth Sahib**
Prof. Shashi Bala



Cover : Rumi—also known as Jalāl ad-Dīn Muhammad Rūmī—was a 13th century Persian poet, jurist, theologian, and Sufi mystic. His teachings are one of the best introductions to the philosophy and practice of Sufism.
Painting by Sidharth



- 30 Brothers in Life**
Chander Suta Dogra



- 34 Bhai Jawahir Singh's many
splendoured life**



- 40 Sidharth on Barahmasa**



- 45 The Joy of Serving**
Suman Kapoor



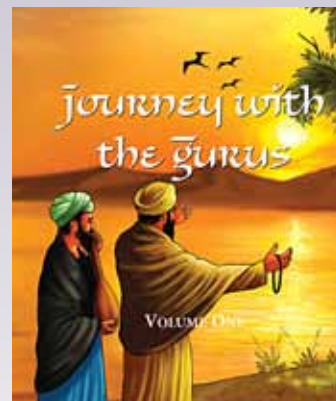
- 46 The Need to Believe**
Dr J S Neki



- 48 Sikh-Sufi Connection**
I J Singh



- 52 Preserving the 'Joorā'
tradition in sports**



- 62 Book Review**
Rubin Paul Singh

Editorial Director
Dr Jaswant Singh Neki

Executive Editor
Pushpinder Singh

Joint Editor
Bhayee Sikander Singh

Editorial Board
Inni Kaur
Dr I.J. Singh
Dr Gurpreet Maini
Malkiat Singh
Monica Arora

Distributors
Himalayan Books, New Delhi

Editorial Office

D-43, Sujan Singh Park
New Delhi 110 003, India
Tel: (91-11) 24617234
Fax: (91-11) 24628615

e-mail : nishaan@lycos.com
website : www.nishaan.in

Published by

The Nagaara Trust
16-A Palam Marg
Vasant Vihar
New Delhi 110 057, India

Printed by

Agean Offset
B-220, ECOTECH-III
Udyog Kendra-I
Greater Noida Ind. Area
Dist- Gautam Budh Nagar

Please visit us at:
www.nishaan.in

The opinions expressed in the articles published in the Nishaan Nagaara do not necessarily reflect the views or policy of The Nagaara Trust.



Editorial

Sufism and Sikhism: Interactional Profile

Sufism is the mysticism or esotericism of Islam. The word is commonly thought to have come from the Arabic *su_f* (wool). It stands for the rough woollen clothing that characterised the early Muslim ascetics.

Sufism is the science of direct knowledge of God; its doctrines and methods are derived from the Koran and Islamic revelation. Not unlike exoteric Islam, "Sufism makes free use of paradigms and concepts derived from Greek and even from Hindu sources" (Cyril Glasse: *The Concise Encyclopedia of Islam*, London, Stacey International).

The early history of Sufism is not yet clear. It seems to have emerged from a determination among some early Muslims not to be distracted by the rapid Muslim expansion over vast territories from the vision and practice of Muhammed to realising the absolute sovereignty of God in life. The contrast was extreme between the simplicity of the old desert life and the comforts of the new order. While this new or martial order was busy spreading Islam through the use of the sword, the Sufis were doing it through humanitarian and compassionate methods.

In Sufism, the initiatic chain of transmission of a Divine grace (*barakah*) or blessing is called a *silsilah*. Most recorded *silsilahs* consist of persons who have subsequently received that pristine *barakah* and passed on to the chain of their successors. Most of the *silsilahs* trace their source to the Prophet through Abu Bakar, Umar and Ali.

Sufis entered into India prior to its conquest by the Muslims. Their ingress was along the trade routes mostly in the company of caravans. The important

silsilahs that found their way into the Indian subcontinent included

- *Chishti* – founded by Sheikh Ali Hujwairi who settled in Lahore but one among his lineage, Khwaja Muinuddin settled in Ajmer.
- *Suhravardi* – founded by Sheikh Bahauddul Zakaria, who settled in Multan first, but later influenced Bengal and Bihar.
- *Qadri* – established by Sheikh Abdul Qadir Jilani.
- *Naqshbandi* – established in India by Sheikh Ahmad Sirhindi who first settled in Sarhind and then moved to Delhi.
- *Maghribi* – established by Baba Ishaque who settled in Katau in Rajasthan, near Nagpur.

The two *silsilahs* that had major interaction with the Sikh faith and the Sikh community were the Chishti and the Naqshbandi. These two *silsilahs* were very different in outlook. While the former was entirely esoteric and realising God was its avowed ideal, the latter was primarily exoteric and believed that meeting God was all right, but the important thing was to live life according to the edicts of Quran and *Hadith*. Which means that the emphasis of the former was on the mystical experience, and that of the latter on *shariah*, the prescribed canonical law. That created a schism within the Sufi ideology which led to a split relationship of the Sufis to Sikhism.

Guru Nanak, in his own words, roamed far and wide in search of *gurmukh* (God-oriented) people. Among those he discovered was one who had lived over two centuries before him. He was physically no more, but his profound sayings in chaste

Punjabi language were fortunately still available with his descendants. That holy man was a *Chishti* sufi, Sheikh Farid. Guru Nanak was so taken in by his compositions that he kept a copy thereof in his personal journal. This work eventually was incorporated in *Sri Guru Granth Sahib* (then called *Pothi Sahib*) when Guru Arjan Dev compiled that pluralist scripture. And the Sikhs revere *Farid-bani* as *Gurbani*. Another Sufi whose hymn finds a place in the same holy book is Bhagat Sadhna.

A *Chishti* fakir, Mian Mir, was the contemporary of Guru Arjan Dev. According to a legend popular in the Sikh chronicles, he was invited by Guru Arjan Dev to lay the foundation stone of Harmandar Sahib. That was the level of mutual affection between Sikh Gurus and Islamic Sufi leaders. As a corresponding gesture, Guru Arjan Dev got a mosque constructed for the Muslim workmen that had been engaged in the construction of Harmandar Sahib.

Such mutual cordiality between other Sufi groups and Sikhs was being appreciated widely, even by Emperor Akbar who was himself keen on such understanding between Muslims and non-Muslims. Neither side engaged in proselytisation. Yet, it so happened that some Muslims on their own embraced the Sikh faith. This was enough to irritate the Naqshbandi leader Sheikh Ahmad Sirhindi, who was in favour of active, and even coercive, conversion of non-Muslims to Islamic fold. Another factor that enhanced his irritation was the fact that the Sikhs also had become *ahl-e-kitab* (followers of the book) like Muslims and that, he apprehended, might undermine Islamic supremacy over Sikhism. He had attained proximity with Akbar's successor, Jehangir, and was able to influence his views and inject into his mind strong prejudice against the Sikhs. That led to the arrest of Guru Arjan Dev and on his refusal to accept conversion to Islam, his execution through torture. All his property was confiscated and his son was imprisoned in Gwalior fort. Sufi Mian Mir's intercession was, in a way, responsible for his eventual release.

Even the martyrdom of Guru Arjan Dev did not dampen the cordiality between the Sikhs and other Sufi *silsilahs*. It is recorded by Bhai Santokh Singh in *Gur Pratap Suraj Granth* when Guru Gobind Singh was born in Patna, a Sufi fakir, Pir Bhikhan Shah learnt of it through spiritual intuition and made obeisance

that day to the East instead of the usual one to the West. When his disciples demurred, the Pir explained that God had revealed himself through a baby born in Patna, in the East; hence his obeisance in that direction. A little later, he went to see that divine child. He presented the child with two pots, in his own mind, one representing the Hindus and the other Muslims. The infant Guru put his little hands over both. That assured the Pir that the child had indicated his patronage both for the Hindus as well as Muslims. After Guru Gobind Singh had become the Guru, some meetings are reported to have happened between the Pir and the Guru.

Then, there was Pir Buddhu Shah who hurried along with his sons and seven hundred disciples to help the Guru when the Guru had been attacked by the forces of the Muslim rulers and some Pathan mercenary soldiers had deserted him. All his sons were killed in the battle. The Guru and the Pir continued to hold great regard for each other ever afterwards.

Such mutual cordiality was not only visible between the Gurus and the Sufi leaders, it had also percolated down into their followers. During the battle of Anandpur, Bhai Kanhaiya doled drinking water not only to the wounded Sikh soldiers, but also the wounded Muslim soldiers.

Bulleh Shah, the popular Sufi poet of his days made several reverential references to the Sikh Gurus in his kafis. Here is an example:

Agle jae bakale baithe,

Pichlian farsh vichae

Ulte hor zamane aey

This refers to the time after the expiry of Guru Harkishan who had indicated before his martyrdom that his successor was in Bakala. Then the real Guru was in his cellar absorbed in meditation, but a score of imposters had established themselves as the actual Guru. Bullah laments, "what crooked times had dawned". Several other references are available in his works so much so that in one place he invokes the Guru with as much reverence as he does his *murshad*.

One tends to ask oneself here, "Are we preserving, if not furthering such relations even now? If not, why not?"



Guru Nanak (painting by Sidharth)

Sufism and Sikhism

One of my friends' nieces asked me a question in the Gurdwara Langar Hall: "What is the difference between Sufism and Sikhism?" I just wondered where I should start. The first thing that came into my mind was the Sufi Saint named Mian

Mir, who was requested by Guru Arjan Dev, the fifth Sikh Guru to lay the foundation of the Harmandir Sahib, the Golden Temple.

A couple of months prior to this, one of my Iranian friends happened to mention that there are many



similarities between Sufism and Sikhism. He was also kind enough to lend me a book called *Sufi: Expressions of the Mystic Quest* by Laleh Bakhtar which gave me considerable insight into the tenets of Sufism.

Hatim-al-Asamm established four key principles of Sufi life:

- To remember that no other person eats your bread for you.
- To remember that no one but you performs your actions.
- To remember that death is coming, so you should address your life in readiness for it.
- To remember that you are under the eye of God.

The Sikh faith advocates similar principles of *Naam Japna*, uttering the name of God; *Kirt Karna*, earning an honest living and *Wand Chakna*, sharing one's blessings with others who are in need. Every action good or bad is under His command or his eyes. The day one is born, one has to accept death to gain favour in the spiritual path of devotion.

As Rumi, in his poetic verse says: *I died from mineral and plant became; died from the plant and took a sentient frame; died from the beast, and donned a human dress; when by my dying did I e'er grow less; another time from manhood I must die to soar with angel-pinions through the sky. Midst Angels also I must lose my place since everything shall perish save His face."* Let me

be Naught! The harp-strings tell me plain that unto Him do we return again! (Jalal al-Din Rumi, "Mathnawi", translated by EG Browne).

Sufi devotion to God is often characterised by intense ecstatic experiences and such states come through the achievement of *dhikr* or remembrance, a way to experience the intense presence of God. Similarly, in the Sikh faith God is remembered by utterance of his Name and it is more effective in the presence of like-minded individuals whose goals are to get connected with God.

Sufi devotion, like the Sikh faith, has beautiful poetry and music which in Sikh faith is called *Gurmat Sangeet* (sacred music of the Sikhs.) In both Sufi and the Sikh faiths this involves meditative practices that can lead to union of the individual with God.

Rumi aka Jalaluddin Balkhi (1207-1273) befriended a dervish, an ascetic called Shams. Rumi was a prolific writer of poetry, offering profound religious insight and he created the 'whirling' dance adopted by his followers to connect with God. Similarly, in the Sikh faith when chanting, the devotee may spontaneously begin a circular body movement striving to achieve internal bliss and connect with God. Regular meditation and constant remembrance of the Divine through Divine Names and through repetition of the sacred songs achieve the connection with God.

The word 'Sufi' actually means wool, referring to woollen garments. The root is 'safa' which means purity in Farsi. This refers to a simple and inexpensive woollen garment which implies simplicity and purity in life. The Sikh faith has similar philosophy. The word 'Sikh' originated from *sikhya* (*shishya*) meaning a humble disciple or a learner. Guru Nanak, founder of the Sikh faith had that simple message of remembering God by uttering the Name, honest living and sharing one's earnings with others and serving others without any recognition or any gain. He was humble enough to go on his many travels and consolidate these good practices and religious philosophies in what we now know as the Sikh faith.

Both Sufism and Sikhi advocate simplicity, equality and a shift in one's life away from materialism. Sufism recognises the Immanence and Transcendence of the One in all. Sikh belief is the same. Sufi philosophy is based on the nature of Reality, which is transcendent and the Sikh faith also advocates seeking union with the inner Truth through meditation and invocation of the Divine Name by ecstatically repeating mantras of the Shabad Guru.

The Mool Mantra shows the way in which Sikhs relate to the transcendence and immanence of God. God is seen as Immanent in all existence. He is qualified with certain attributes to which the individual human self can offer devotion and love. God as revealed in this creed is Indivisible, Absolute, Timeless and Uncreated. This transcendent-immanent aspect of God is the general trend of belief in religious devotion. As with Allah is in Islam, Ik Oankar in the Sikh faith is transcendent yet always present in all things.

Guru Nanak's message was *Truth is high. But higher still is truthful living*. Guru Ji also said that one must put away pride. The essence of religion is humility, service and simplicity.

The origins of Islam, Christianity, Hinduism, Confucianism, Judaism and other faiths were established much earlier so Guru Nanak Dev had the opportunity to analyse all faiths and distil the essence of a practical way of life and thus the Sikh Dharma came into existence.

The words of the Mool Mantra are so important that the true meaning cannot be translated in a way that gives the true essence of the meaning. The Mool Mantra speaks of the Oneness of God, His eternal existence and His role as the creator and sustainer of all things. He is said to be beyond time, birth and death. People know him through the Grace of the Guru, which means through himself, because Nanak always refers to God himself as the Guru. *Naam, wand* and *kirt karni* are the essential components of the Sikh way of life.

Education equips an individual with detailed knowledge of a chosen field, whether it is philosophy, psychology or law. Such knowledge prompts individuals to analyse the existence of God in scientific terms. Mysticism and personal spiritual links are difficult to explain and reason on the basis of science or theory. Analysis has no place in spirituality because the experience is ineffable and cannot be explained in logical terms. But the experience of this reality gives the individual the Grace and the strength to achieve his aspirations and ambitions in life. Saying that God exists but that he/she/it is not palpable or visible but can be experienced in meditation is akin to trying to tell someone what a strawberry tastes like if they have never eaten one. Better by far to simply offer that person a strawberry.

Guru Nanak Dev comments on religion "*It doesn't matter to me from which source one is inspired. My prayer unto dear God is, please take that person into Your arms if that person is inspired to come and meet with You.*" How you are inspired does not matter so long as you are inspired rightly into God's arms and we should be tolerant enough to accept other's sources of inspiration, which certainly are manifold.

Mir Mohammed Muayyinul Islam (1550-1635), popularly known as Sain Mian Mir was a famous Muslim Sufi who resided in Lahore specifically in the town of Begampura. He spent most of his life in and around Lahore. He was a close friend of the Fifth Guru, Guru Arjan Dev and was invited to lay the foundation stone of the Harmandir Sahib (now known worldwide as the Golden Temple).

Main Mir Ji is still highly respected by the Sikhs. He was a man who had no prejudice against any religion and had a very deep love of Guru Nanak's teachings. He travelled often to Amritsar to meet with Guru Arjan Dev. In turn whenever the Guru visited Lahore, he would always meet with the Saint Mian Mir. Saint Mian Mir knew a large number of the Gurus' verses by heart. Guru Arjan Dev, the fifth Sikh Guru, often visited Lahore, the birthplace of his father (the fourth Guru, Guru Ram Das) to meet his relatives. On the occasion of one of such visit, he called on Mian Mir. The two men of God met and became life long friends. Mian Mir was thirteen years older than Guru Arjan.

Guru Arjan Dev was responsible for the construction of many tanks and buildings. In 1588, he planned to build a temple in the centre of the holy tank at Amritsar or the pool of nectar. As the temple was to be thrown open to people of all castes, creeds and climes, he invited Mian Mir to lay the foundation stone of Harmandir Sahib. Mian Mir came to the city of Amritsar wearing a religious mendicant's long cloak made up of patches of coarse wool and a cone-shaped cap, with a rose flower on top.

Mian Mir was given a very warm welcome for which Guru Arjan Dev was famous. The two holy men embraced each other in sincere love and regard. The purpose of the temple was disclosed to the Sufi saint. Mian Mir was delighted at the fine objectives the Guru had in mind. The foundation stone was laid. Hymns were sung in praise of God and sweets were distributed to all.

Sufism is like all forms of mysticism, being the experience of The One in Every One. By reason of its esoteric aspects it introduces secret practices and initiation rites that vary depending on the masters who teach them.

The most original aspect of Sufism is its spirituality. In the Sufi view, God is approached by degrees. Firstly, the law of the Koran must be respected but this is only a first step which does not lead to the understanding of nature of the world.

The rituals are of no use if one doesn't know their hidden meaning. It is only through an initiation that one is enabled to see behind the appearance of things. For example, man is a microcosm, a world in miniature, in which the image of the universe is to be found, the macrocosm. So it is quite natural that in deepening one's knowledge of man, one should arrive at an understanding of the world which is already a step towards realising God.

According to the Sufis, all existence comes from God and God alone is Real. The created world is but a reflection of the Divine "the universe is the Shadow, of the Absolute". The ability to discern God behind the screen of things implies purity of soul. It is only through an effort to withdraw from the world that one can approach God: "Man is a mirror which, when polished, reflects God."

The God that the Sufis discover is Love and the way to experience Him is through Love: "whoever knows God, loves Him; whoever knows the world turns away from Him".

"If you wish to be free, become a prisoner of Love." The Sikh faith also teaches that it is Love that enables one to connect with God. "Hear you all! I say the truth, only he attains God, who loves Him truly (*Saach kaho'n sun leho sabhai, Jin prem kee-o tin hi prabh paa-eo*).

There are three spiritual virtues which the Sufi internalises, as does the Sikh. The three are humility (*khushu*), charity (*karamat*) and truthfulness (*sidq*). Humility corresponds to one's being and not to one's actions. It is the realisation that God is everything and we are nothing. Essentially, it is awareness that we are non-existent, for actually God exists with every human being and every human being has something to teach us and by

being unegoistical, one learns from all and become humbler. Charity is very closely related to nobility. It is all about surrendering oneself to God and therefore the supreme charity is to invoke the Name of God since everything comes from and belongs to God. Truthfulness lifts us from the platform of existence to the platform of knowledge. These three virtues need to be internalised to lead one to spiritual union to God.

Dhikr and Sama

'Dhikr and Sama' were based on words attributed to the Prophet: "Whenever men gather together to invoke Allah, they are surrounded by Angels, the Divine Favour envelops them, the Divine Glory (as-Sakinah) descends upon them, and Allah remembers them in His assembly." The hospices became centres where lay people from the countryside would gather together with the members of the order to obey the Quran's injunction to remember God often.

This was done in the celebration of the *Dhikr*, which involved the communal rhythmic repetition of a phrase, usually from the Quran, in which one of the names of God appears. Breath control and body movements were also used as techniques to aid in achieving concentration and control over senses and imagination. The mala or rosary was used since the 8th century as an aid to counting the many repetitions (it entered Christian Churches from Sufism via the Crusades.) This concentrated meditation can lead to a mystical trance and enlightenment which transforms man's whole being.

Sama was first developed in the mid-9th Century in Baghdad. It is another communal practice, defined as a concert of music, poetry recital, singing and dance, which leads the participants to a mystical experience where they seem to hear the music of the heavenly spheres and the voice of God Himself. It attunes the heart to communion with God and is thought to remove all veils hiding God from man's inner vision.

Both the Sikh and the Sufi believe in One God and the deep remembrance of God through meditation. Both understand that we are all His creation and that He exists within us and without. Both the Sikh and the Sufi imbibe the virtues of morality, humility, charity, kindness and truthfulness.

Daljit Singh and Guruka Singh

Sikhism's Sufi Connection: Baba Sheikh Farid Ganj-i-Shakar

Baba Sheikh Farid Ganj-i-Shakar is not a 'baptised' name, but a galaxy of venerable modes of address with which Farid-up-Din (1175-1265) who used Masud as his pen-name, began to be adored after his death by his devotees. The elders are respectfully called Baba in Iran, Afghanistan and Northern India. *Sheikh* (Urdu writers spell it as *Slwikh*, while the Punjabi ones as *Sheikh* in respective transliteration) is a reverential religious title among Muslims for *sufis* (mystics) who are variedly referred to as khwaja, pir or sultan. Farid in Arabic means 'rare' which indeed Masud had been. The epithet Ganj-i-Shakar stands for 'a treasure of sweetness' which eulogises the modest and sympathetic temper of the seer. Khaliq Ahmad Nizami, Professor of History, Muslim University, Aligarh, in his well documented book *The Life and Times of Slwikh Farid-ud-Din Ganj-i-Shakar* (1955) provides comprehensive-information about Sheikh Farid. Farid-ud-Din's grandfather was a part of the exodus, of scholars, artisans and of other such careerists who considered it expedient to migrate to Northern India from Kabul when Afghanistan was trampled by hordes of Mongols during the eleventh century. The Mongols were given to mass plunder, carnage and arson leading to vandalism.

The eleventh century marks a watershed in the history of India as well. The caste-based Indian society bereft of social equality and dignity of individual had been stagnating under barren rituals and silly superstitions. Concepts like social welfare had no place in the set-up. India had been divided into hostile princedoms which unscrupulously invited foreign invaders even for settling personal scores. In due course the throne at Delhi was occupied by the Slave Dynasty of Turkish origin, which foreboded the liquidation of native Rajput power and the gradual subjugation of Hindustan at large. Delhi began to be developed as a city of minarets, mosques and pleasure parks, with a *khanqah* (preaching centre of Muslim mystics) scattered in its suburbs.

Multan, near the confluence of the Chenab and Ravi, which had been a halting place for the migrants coming through the Bolan Pass had acquired importance as a seat of Quranic leaning and Muslim mysticism. It was the theological glimmering of Multan which induced the elders of Baba Farid to proceed towards it instead of their getting enamoured by the growing royal glory of Delhi.

Farid-ud-Din was the second son of Jamal-ud-Din Sulaiman, born at Kahtwal near Multan (year of birth is stated conflictingly as 1173 and 1175 by different writers). His early education had been under the strict supervision of his mother, Qarsum Bibi, a pious devout housewife. He later shifted to Multan for further learning from where he left, as advised, for Delhi at which place the legend that Farid became, began to unfold itself as the stem of a religious order called the Chishti silsilah. His teacher Khwaja Qutab-ud-Din Bakhtiyar Kaki, was an erudite mystic who preached and practiced the gospel of oneness of God through selfless service of mankind. An authentic source which throws light on various aspects of Farid's life is *Fawaid-ul-Fuad* by Amin Hasan Sijzi which is a chronicle of conversation that Sheikh Nizam-ud-Din Auliya, next in silsilah succession to Baba Farid, used to have with his predecessor. In this book, Farid is all through referred to as Masud, his pen-name, which confirms that the honorific terms with which he is adored were adopted later. Even Ajodhan, a *pattan*, (place for crossing a river on boat, ferry) where Baba Farid chose to settle in his later years, began to be called Pak Pattan (sacred ferry) by the pilgrims after his demise. All tales about the pebbles or mud getting sweetened in his mouth, the changing of gur into salt etc. seem to be floated in due course by his devotees, as blind faith creates myths.

Secular Outlook

It is not the loftiness of Baba Farid as a theologian, but the soothing effect of his secular activities which

is stressed herein. Prof. Khaliq Ahmad Nizami in his publication epitomises the impact of Baba Farid on his followers as:

'Muslim mysticism is, in its essence, a message of love. It aims at creating harmony in the discordant elements of society. True to these ideals, Baba Farid strove day and night to create that atmosphere of love and good-will which was, and is even today, the greatest desideratum of human society. A healthy social order - free from dissensions, conflicts, discriminations, hatred and jealousy - was the thing he longed for. In love, faith, toleration and sympathy which included even the enemy, he found the supreme talisman of human happiness. "Do not give me scissors", he told a visitor who had presented him a pair of scissors, "give me a needle. I sew. I do not cut".'

The treatise of Prof. Nizami interests primarily those who have a working knowledge of Persian. But the monograph *Saba Sheikh Farid - His Life and Teachings* by Gurbachan Singh Talib, published by the Punjabi University, Patiala, in 1973 to commemorate the eighth birth centenary of Baba Farid, describes in a lucid style the prolific contribution of the seer to various aspects of human development.

Association with Faridkot

Principal Talib refers to the association of Baba Farid with Faridkot (then called Mokhalhar) in 1225 CE as:

'...Faridkot would be on the road from Delhi and Hansi to Ajodhan... here Sheikh Farid is reported to have been drafted into forced labour by the men of a Hindu Chief, Mokhal. But seeing the miraculous lifting of basket of sand as cubit over his head, the people fell at his feet, and the chief too begged for forgiveness. The saint blessed the place at the show of repentance by the chief, and in grateful remembrance the place was named after him, Faridkot (the fort of Farid). That name it still bears and its inhabitants deeply love and cherish the association of their town with the great saint...'

Pioneer of Punjabi Verse

In spite of his early education in Persian and Arabic, Masud chose to communicate his precepts through the Multani dialect of Punjabi. This added to the efficacy of his preaching because his sweet expression in the language, which his congregation understood, made the impact of his precepts instantaneous and deep.

Guru Nanak Dev, almost three centuries after the demise of Saba Farid was impressed by the enlightening

and fascinating aspect of Farid's writings in Punjabi. The Fifth Nanak, Guru Arjan Dev, while compiling the *Adi Granth*, included 112 shalokas (couplets) and 4 shabads (hymns) by Saba Farid. This had been a rare recognition of the teachings of Farid who sparkled as a bright star in the age of dreadful despotism, degrading social iniquity and debasing theological bigotry.

In the opening lines of his poem *Hindustani Bachhon ke Qaumi Geet* (National Song for Indian Children), written as early as 1905, Dr Mohammed Iqbal eulogises Saba Farid as:

*'Chishti ne jis zamin mein paigham-i-haq sunaya
Nanak ne jis chaman mein wahidit ke geet gaya
Mera watan wuhi hai, mera watan wuhi hai'*

(The land where Chishti preached his gospel of truth, the garden where Nanak sang about oneness of God. My motherland is that, my motherland is that)

(Bang-i-Dara, Part 1)

The *Adi Granth* is really the only source available for research on Saba Farid's poetry. Recently Sayyid Babar Ali brought out in Urdu *Kalam Saba Farid Shakar-i-Ganj*, (Pictures Ltd, Lahore, 1984). It includes within pictorial margins the shlokas and shabads of Saba Farid in Urdu script as they appear in *Adi Granth*. In the next part they are reproduced in alignment both in Shahmukhi and Gurmukhi scripts with comprehensive footnotes. This scholarly work has been dedicated to Sardar Harcharan Singh Brar (Chief Minister Punjab 1995-96), the author's classmate at Aitcheson College, Lahore during the pre-partition years. Some such exercise should be emulated in Gurmukhi and Devnagri scripts for the effective extension of the message of Saba Farid at the national level through universities having Saba Farid Chairs.

Saba Farid had been prominent among the seers who sanctified the secular practices through righteous conduct. The Khanqahs and Dargahs at Nizam-ud-Din at Delhi, Ajmer and Ajodhan (Pak Pattan) are the citadels of that unique cultural heritage which disapproves social inequality, human exploitation and intolerance erupting from fanaticism. The menacingly growing theological obscurantism and militant terrorism brewing in its lap are quite reminiscent of the vandalism which the Mongols had perpetrated mercilessly in an earlier millennium.

Prof. Hazara Singh

Baba Sheikh Farid

Confluence of the Punjabi and Persian Cultures

Sheikh Fariduddin 'Shakar Ganj, popularly known as Baba Farid, or Baba Sheikh Farid Ganj-i-Shakar (1173-1265) is regarded as the prime mystic-poet of the Punjabi language. With Baba Farid a new star blazed on the horizon of greater Punjab. By his mellifluous poetry, he conferred an independent status upon Punjabi, especially in his *doha* format. Baba Farid's dohas in inspiringly sweet poetry are highly revered and forever enshrined in the *Guru Granth Sahib*.

Iran (ancient Persia) has been the spiritual nursery of Sufism, which quickly found a congenial sanctuary in India – particularly in the Kashmir Valley. Sheikh Farid, acclaimed by all Punjabi scholars as the first great poet of Punjabi literature, was a Sufi and had his dynastic roots in Iran.

Although Sheikh Farid is said to have composed verses in Arabic, Persian and in some local dialects which are found in Sufi literature, he is generally

known as the foremost among Punjabi Sufi poets. His compositions in the *Adi Granth* are the first recorded versions available in the Punjabi language.

Much of the material concerning his life comes from hagiography. According to *Siyar-ul-Aulia* (1351-88), as one of the earliest documents, Sheikh Farid was born in 569 (AH) corresponding to 1173 CE, at Khotwal in the Qazi Shuaib, who belonged to a ruling house of Kabul, and migrated to the Punjab in the middle of the 12th century under the prolonged stress of the Ghuzz (Ghazni) invasions. After a short stay at Lahore and Kasur, the family of Qazi Shuaib settled down at Khotwal, where he was appointed the Qazi (Islamic Jurist) by the Sultan. Jamal-ud-din Sulaiman was raised at Khotwal where *Lehandi* (western) Punjabi was the spoken language of the people. He married a Punjabi girl, Quulsum Bibi, the daughter of Sheikh Wajih-ud-din Khajendi of Khotwal. Sheikh Farid was second of the three sons born to them.



Sheikh Farid went to Multan for higher studies in Islamic Jurisprudence. In Multan, he came in contact with a visiting saint, Khwaja Qutb-ud-din Bakhtiyar Kaki, the spiritual successor (Khalifa) of Sheikh Miun-ud-din Chisti who established the Chisti order of Sufism in India. In due course, Sheikh Farid became his disciple and got himself initiated into the Chisti order. After the death of his master Khwaja Qutb-ud-din Bakhtiyar Kaki in 1235 CE, Sheikh Baba Farid became head of the Chisti order. He made the unique contribution of giving an all-India status to the Chistiya order and disseminated its ideology far and wide. Soon it turned into a powerful movement for Islamisation of the masses. It is generally assumed that the Chisti order surpassed the other Sufi orders, such as the Qadiri, the Suhrawardi and the Naqshbandi, in popularity and influence in India. One of the main reasons for its success seems to be the fact that Farid used the local dialect, 'Multani Punjabi' (*Lehndi*), to reach out to the masses with his preaching. The two main languages of Islam, the Arabic of the Quran and the highly sophisticated Persian of the *literatti* and officials, were unknown to the non-elite, who thus were excluded from higher religious instruction.

Baba Farid settled on the river Sutlej at Ajodham, where he established his *Khanqah*, the centre of Sufi fraternity, to propagate his mission. There he remained from about 1236, until his death on 17 October 1265. His home has been known, ever since as Pak Pattan, literally 'the ferry of the pure'. A number of Punjabi tribes there still claim to have been converted to Islam by Baba Farid.

The German scholar Anne Marie Schimmel states that "Farid-ud-din Ganj-i-Shakar of Pak Pattan is credited with having used a kind of old Punjabi for his mystical songs."

These songs were intended to be recited or sung as a part of religious music in Sufi worship. They influenced the population, particularly the women, who used to sing these simple verses while doing their daily chores.

Thus, Baba Farid's poetic compositions in the local dialect, i.e. Multani Punjabi, were transmitted orally to successive generations and these were written down, if at all, only at a very late stage. When Guru Nanak visited Pak Pattan on his missionary tours he probably secured these compositions from Sheikh Ibrahim (d.1552), who was twelfth in descent from Sheikh Farid.

That Guru Nanak knew well the works of Baba Farid is quite evident from the fact that in his own Gurbani he made corroborative comments on some of his verses.

The inclusion of Baba Farid's poetic hymns in the Adi Granth does underline the high spiritual reputation and attainment that the Sufi poet must have enjoyed in his own lifetime.

Guru Nanak (1469-1539) the widely revered saint guru and the founder of Sikhism, whose Bani ranks as a classic of Punjabi poetry, also traveled to Iran. In his book, *Travels of Guru Nanak*, Dr SS Kohli writes "The first important city visited by the Guru in Persia was Tehran". Punjabi poetry, from its incipient stage, has been informed with the Iranian influence.

The official language of Iran, *Farsi* (Persian) had indeed been the official language of Punjab upto the period of Maharaja Ranjit Singh's rule. Hundreds of Persian words in *tatsam* (words derived without any change) have enriched the vocabulary of Punjabi language, e.g. *arak, achar, kafan, nargis, tarbooj, nefa, pyjama, nikah, pak, janaza, etc.* Many Persian words have been assimilated in *tadbhav* form. The interaction of two cultures manifests itself in polyglotism which is apparent in the Punjabi language: *aman-chain, saf-suthra, kaul-karar, gur-pir, peelee-zarad, kala-siah, etc.* Reference to Iran and symbols of Iranian life have beautified the style of Punjabi poetry.

*"Tere acke badhah irano dhavan
Tadon nadiyan vahin apuyhiyan phal baint liyavan."*

The genius of Iran and its official language *Farsi* (Persian) have been a seminal influence on growth of the Punjabi language, literature and culture. The influence can be summed up in the linguistic forms, literary style and thought patterns of Punjabi literature. Study of Punjabi literature is incomplete without a reference to the Iranian influence.

Whenever Punjabi is spoken even for a minute, some words from the Per-Arabic sources albeit in popular, non-academic forms, must come alive. *Adi Granth*, holy scripture of the Sikh faith, yields a large volume of vocabulary from this source. The result of this common bond of language is that a Punjabi in Iran, Afghanistan (or those parts of Central Asia where the cultural tongue is Persian,) will find himself in a highly familiar fraternal atmosphere complete with turban or dupatta.

Dr Debabrata Das

The Sikh and the Sufi of Sind

In the latter part of the fourteenth century, a great movement came into existence in India. It was a movement that later made the political achievements of Akbar possible. This political upheaval was preceded by a wave of religious revival, bestowed in the north of India by such immortal saints as Kabir and Nanak. National movements always seem to arise out of some such religious revival. Kabir was a Muslim, Nanak was not but Nanak was claimed by the Muslims as their leader, being called by them Nanak Shah and Kabir is claimed by the Hindus as one of their great teachers, his chief Gadi being in holy Benares. This was a movement that was intended to unite Hindu and Muslim and the two great masters, Kabir and Nanak, typified in themselves this ideal of unity. About the same period there came, with liberalising forces, a movement that afterwards went by the name of the Sufi Movement. The religion of Sind is Sikhism and Sufism. The Hindus in Sind are chiefly Sikh, the followers of the teaching of Nanak. Guru Nanak himself visited the north of Sind. The Sikhs of Sind are chiefly Hindu Sikhs, and have very little in common with the Punjabi Singhs. Sikhism found a strong foothold in Sind, perhaps because of the Buddhist influence there; the Sikhism of Guru Nanak contains in itself the original spirit of Hinduism, minus all the accretions of latter-day Brahmanism. So Sikhism has given back to the Sindhi the spirit of the old religion which he had lost to some extent owing to the causes mentioned above.

The influence of Sufism in Sind both on the Hindus and Muslims has been tremendous. Many of the great original Islamic families in Sind accepted Sufism. Shah Latif, the greatest poet and mystic of Sind, was a Kureshi of the family of the Prophet, and a lineal descendant of the Mughal House of Herat near Afghanistan. Sachal, the next great poet and mystic of Sind, belonged to the House of Khalif Umar, whose very near descendant, Shahabuddin, came with the Arabs and became the ruler of Sehwan. These great families have been the real repositories of the best that is in Islam; they have kept intact its culture.

Sufism is the mysticism of Islam and Ali, the lion of God and son-in-law of the Prophet, is said to have been the first initiator and organiser of the mystic school of the Sufis but later on the Sufi Movement took on special colour as in Persia. The great Sufis of Persia, the immortal Rumi, Jami, Hafiz and many other resplendent mystic lights, have shed their effulgent and glorious spiritual rays on India; to this day they are the beloved teachers of Muslims as well as of Hindus. Sind has had a full share of this bread of life from the Persian Sufis. Afghanistan also claims to be the birth place of one of the greatest of Sufis, Senai, whose influence even to-day is not insignificant.

When Sufism as such first came into India cannot be ascertained. Of course the spirit and teaching of Sufism are completely found in the Vedanta, and in the latter-day saints of India but the comparatively fresher flowers from Persia added a charm, a beauty, a fragrance, that enriched the mystic treasure. The Sufis of Sind are peculiar in the sense that the garment of their mysticism is neither specially Islamic nor Persian, but it contains in its warp and woof the threads of both the Indo-Aryan Sanatana Dharma and the Arabic-Persian mystic culture. In fact there is hardly a country in the whole of Asia, including India, in which the mystic thought of two great civilisations, the Indian and the Arabic-Iranian, is seen in so beautiful a union as in Sind. There is a good deal of Sufism in the Punjab, and Punjab too has had some very great Sufis, such as Bulashah and Mian Bahu but many of the Sufis of Punjab were in close touch with Sind, as till comparatively lately Multan was a part of Sind, whose boundaries extended even as far as Cashmere. The Punjab has even now many Sufis, but Sind being singularly free from religious orthodoxy has absorbed more of Sufism than Punjab where, on account of different political conditions, social and religious restrictions are more manifest than in Sind. In Sind at the present moment, there are numerous Hindus and amongst them some of the best brains of Sind, old and new, who are Sufis by religion. In fact, throughout Sind, the Hindu Amils are attached to the chief centres of the Sufis, and are the main supporters and advisers of the holders of the Gadi.

The Interfaith Dialogue



Prof. S.S. Noor speaking at the Seminar. Others in the picture are Dr. Kazi Nurul Islam, Dr. Hans, Dr. Manmohan Singh, Dr. Raghbir Singh, Dr. Jaspal Singh, Dr. Muthu Mohan, Dr. H.K. Sagoo and Dr. A.K. Merchant.

Pluralistic Vision in Guru Granth Sahib

Paper presented at the International Seminar on 'Pluralistic Vision in Guru Granth Sahib' held between 16-18 December 2010, organised by Bhai Vir Singh Sahitya Sadan, New Delhi in collaboration with Department of Culture, Government of India.

Interfaith dialogue indicates an understanding and acceptance of religious diversity and encourages not agreement but relationship; not amalgamation but acknowledgement of the authenticity of others; not a move towards one world religion but appreciation of diversity by sharing the common points as well as genuine differences. This type of interaction is not confined to religious issues only but includes social and cultural issues also. Dialogue is an inherent aspect of human existence and expression of any authentic human activity is not possible without dialogue. Dialogue among different religious communities should not be confined to the intellectual level only but it ought to be dialogue of concern, dialogue of deeds and dialogue of spiritual experiences.

The present scenario all over the world presents paradoxical trends of thinking with the increase in religious fundamentalism, fanaticism, dogmatism on the one hand and awakening about religious pluralism

on the other hand, thereby breaking the boundaries to explore the means to bring people of different faiths on one platform for interfaith understanding. Interaction of different religious traditions is due to globalisation when voluntary endeavours are made to convene meeting for interfaith understanding. In the late fifteenth and early sixteenth century, there was not any scope for such interfaith meetings to bring different religious communities on single platform. In spite of multi-religious society, each religious tradition was exclusive, closed and isolated from the other owing to geographical distances, diverse languages, cultures, profound ethnic and racial biases and prejudices. Hence no amicable interaction among diverse religious communities existed and if there was any, that was of dominance either of the ruler class or of the invaders as is explicit in *Babar-Vani*. Both inclusive and exclusive tendencies of humans are detrimental to harmonious living and are responsible for creating disharmony, mutual distrust and violation of human rights.

Guru Granth Sahib is well-known in the Scriptures of the World Religions for its cosmopolitan spirit and for being an ideal role model for initiating interfaith dialogue and for reflecting the contemporary religious traditions with an in-depth understanding and sagacious vision and also by incorporating the spiritual compositions of Bhagats and Saints belonging to different traditions, different regions and different castes. The present paper is an attempt to highlight the meaning, nature and objective of interfaith dialogue as revealed in Guru Granth Sahib and to study the ways and directions provided for the interfaith understanding in the present times.

Meaning of Interfaith Dialogue

Dialogue is a constitutive part of our nature and is an act that defines us as human beings. The ontological basis of dialogical nature of human beings is pluralistic expression of the Ultimate Reality. The different religious preceptors communicated their spiritual experiences in accordance with their own nomenclature yet the universal aspect of their experience emphasise on divine love, divine bliss and divine goodness. Raimundo Panikkar has mentioned the possibility of three types of interfaith dialogues at the academic level, namely interpersonal dialogue, intrapersonal dialogue and critical comparative dialogue. First, the interpersonal dialogue means conversation with the representatives of other religious traditions and is indispensable for pluralistic societies. Second, intrapersonal dialogue occurs within a person as a response to other religions and it starts 'when something stirs within us, when we feel threatened, encouraged, inspired, provoked or profoundly shaken by other religious traditions'. The foundational basis of such type of dialogue lies in an 'unavoidable human quest for meaning and truth' and this yearning for reality is the basis of other types of interfaith dialogues also. Third, the critical and comparative dialogue can be of two types viz. dialectical and dialogical. Whereas the former takes place at the level of doctrines and treats members of the other religious communities as objects of rational inquiry, the latter involves the entire person and not just the cognitive dimension of humans.

Before talking about the nature and objectives of interfaith dialogue, it is essential to keep in mind three dimensions in all religions viz., first, the conceptual vision about the Ultimate Reality; second, the aim of human life; and third, the way to achieve that purpose. Guru Granth Sahib enunciates the doctrine

of One God - transcendent as well as immanent and manifestation of this oneness in pluralistic ways, thus recognising the efficacy of other religious faiths for the attainment of human purpose. This pluralistic vision is clear in Guru Amardas' *salok*

The world is burning in fire: O God, Save it out of Thy Mercy

Through whichever door (path) it comes to Thee, Save it from there.

This philosophy of oneness also gives sanctification to all existence leaving no doubt for any differentiation and creates a feeling of universal brotherhood. Guru Arjan Dev states

*God alone is our Father and we all are His Children;
Thou, O God are alone our Teacher.*

Stressing on the divine essence of man and manifestation of diversity out of One light, Bhagat Kabir invokes the people of different religious faiths to rise above doubt and to visualise the Creator in the created and the created in the Creator:

God created His Light first and from it created all humans;

From the One Light emerges the whole world; whom then we call good, whom bad?

The aim of human life, as stated in Guru Granth Sahib, is self-realisation and thereby God-realisation. Guru Amardas invokes the human mind to know thy divine essence as by knowing one's essence one can know God and understand the mystery of life and death. The conceptual vision of reality and purpose of life may be the same but there are certainly major variations in different religious faiths regarding the path to achieve the goal. As Guru Nanak puts a query, how to be truthful and how to break the wall of falsehood? And answers that, it is possible by going in accordance with the Divine Will and for this he suggested the path of *Nam-Simran* i.e. love of God and purity of conduct. Nonetheless, these dimensions are the underlying basis of interfaith dialogue in Guru Granth Sahib. To promote harmonious relationship with different religious communities, Guru Nanak, the founder Guru of Sikh Religion, visited different religious places of pilgrimage during his four *Udasis*. He met with the religious leaders of variant faiths, initiated interfaith dialogue with them and had lively interactions with the religious representatives of his times but with no intention of imposing his ideology on others or degrading the others.

Objectives of Interfaith Dialogue

The Holy Scripture stressed not only an attainment of knowledge of truth but also implementation of that knowledge in one's own life. The main objective of dialogue is to understand the meaningful in man and for this understanding we need to know not only the persons but also the total setting of life as well as its activities i.e. beliefs and practices of others. For this purpose, the Gurus have initiated not only spiritual dialogue but also a dialogue of life as well as dialogue of deeds with persons of other religious traditions. Guru Nanak states, "So long as humans live in the world, they should listen and speak to others about the Divine Name because our stay in the world is transitory, so we should die to the self while alive."

The basic structure of the scripture shows its cosmopolitan spirit which is against religious exclusivism, dogmatism, fundamentalism and egoistic individualism. To avoid the possession of religion by the priestly class and by the political dominance, stress is laid on one religion of truth for the whole mankind, which is eternal:

There is one Religion of Truth, if one knows and realises by the Guru's wisdom; God is ever the same age after age.

Nevertheless, this stress on one religion of truth does not mean negation of other religious faiths rather it connotes awareness of inner unity amidst apparent diversity as the cornerstone of inter-religious dialogue. The recognition of separate identity of different religious communities with their different beliefs and practices is portrayed in *Raga Ramkali* where Guru Arjan Dev observes:

*Some people call God Ram, others Khuda;
Some serve Him as Gosain, others as Allah;
But He is only One Doer and Cause and Beneficent Lord;
O, God, bless me with Thy Mercy, O Compassionate One.
Some go to bathe at pilgrimage places; others go to perform Haj;
Some offer worship, others bow down their head;
Some read Vedas, others the Semitic texts;
Some wear white, others blue;
Some are called Turks, others Hindus;
Some seek heaven, others paradise;
Says Nanak: Those who realise the Divine Will;
Alone know the secret of One Powerful God.*

This recognition of other faiths' identity with emphasis on inner religiosity is the basis of any spiritual dialogue. Any spiritual discourse is futile if it is based on mere intellectual arguments, debates, dialectical methods and unless it is dialogical dialogue based on intuitive realisation of the other person and the religious tradition to which he belongs. That is why the Gurus stressed on the need to realise the meaning of God's existence in human life and in the world of experience or the recognition of God's presence in one's daily experience as the source of all things. Only an insightful person can read the depth of the other and see in its inmost core, the Infinite Self in which all beings are united. This inner vision is a sort of moral command which makes man responsible towards others. It is an illumination of the soul and an intuitive realisation which may be interpreted as 'a moral demand to undertake a certain course of action' as in Judaism or 'the discernment of the sacred within oneself as in the Indian tradition'. The critical comparative dialogue at the academic level is not possible without knowledge of others and it necessitates understanding religious doctrines, ceremonies, rituals, beliefs and language of other religious communities. The interfaith dialogue in Guru Granth Sahib is initiated in diverse ways at the doctrinal, social, religious and cultural levels. Whereas the spiritual dialogue relates with the conceptual and mystical aspects of religious experience, dialogue at the social level shows concern, respect for human dignity and hospitality towards persons of other faiths and stands for humanitarian attitude towards the spiritual evolution of man.

Dialogue of Spiritual Experience

Guru Nanak's *Siddha Gosht* in 73 stanzas is a detailed spiritual discourse and an exposition of interfaith dialogue with the motive to understand the others. The attitude of reverence for other faiths is clearly visible in the beginning of the *Siddh Gosht*, when Guru Nanak hails the assembly of the *Siddhas*: '*Siddha-sabha kari asani baithei sant- sabha jaikaro*'. Here he offers salutations to the assembly of holy persons, with his firm conviction that the eternal God is to be attained through the holy congregation. It is evident from the discussion of Guru Nanak with the yogis that he did not denounce the actual motive of *Yogic Cult*; instead he exhorted them to shed off their perversions and express their meaning from a new angle. The yogis asked him a series of questions regarding his source of knowledge, system, Guru, disciples, teachings, cause of his wanderings and also enquired about the way to cross

this worldly ocean. The yogis acquainted the Guru with their way of yoga i.e. total negation of worldly life, life of contemplation in the forests and adoption of yogic symbols. The crux of Guru Nanak's views becomes apparent, not only in his condemnation of external symbols, austere practices and life of renunciation but also in ways he recommends for the same end in view. He uses the yogic terminology to convey his own ideas and referring to the ascetic way of life of the yogis' states ardently that without the Divine Name, mind can never remain constant, nor passions can be stilled.

Addressing the contemporary dual orthodox communities, Guru Nanak says it is necessary to be more than a Hindu or a Muslim. After revelation his first words "there is no Hindu, no Musalman" indicate that mere possession of religion is not necessary to be religious. Guru Nanak was fully acquainted with the beliefs and practices of his religious contemporaries and he initiated dialogue to invoke them and to get response from their side and this response was in the form of inner transformation.

In the words of S. Kapur Singh:

"His (Guru Nanak's) divine mission demands acceptance of genuine dialogue rather than conversion as the goal of transcending particularism—with a view to discover a universal concept, not synthesis or synthetic amalgam, but deeper penetration of one's own religion in thought, devotion and action...."

However, the aim was to inculcate among the adherents of contemporary traditions this feeling of 'deeper penetration of one's own religion' as well as 'cultivation of moral qualities' to bring an overall transformation in their way of living, thinking and feeling. Guru Nanak stressed on the practical aspect of religion for full development of human beings and pointed out the consequential effect of cognitive efforts made by the contemporary religious leaders. For instance, more reading and writing creates anxiety; roaming over the pilgrimage places makes one boastful; adoption of sectarian garbs inflict pain on the body; starvation creates loss of taste and silence makes man unable to wake from his ignorance.

Dialogue of Bhagats and Saints

The incorporation of hymns of bhagats and saints in Guru Granth Sahib, acknowledgement of their spiritual attainments by the Gurus in their own hymns and preservation of their separate identity is clear

evidence and practical example of pluralistic vision of Guru Granth Sahib for initiating an interfaith understanding. For mutual understanding dialogue should provide enough space for others by recognising their faiths and paying due regard to their spiritual experiences. Dr. JS Neki in one of his articles defines dialogue as neither 'a sort of monologue, nor a debate, nor a dialectic exercise but a genuine dialogue should provide 'due deference to the others pronouncements, explanations and responses.'

Dialogical attitude demands a certain sense of one's identity and firmness in one's own faith but this does not mean immobility or obstinacy in one's stand. Though the main doctrinal themes are in conformity with the basic spirit of the Granth, yet the ideas and reflections of their religious background are maintained and kept in the perspective of their own thought structure. For instance, Bhagat Jaidev's use of *Vaishnava* names of God such as *Hari*, *Chakardhar*, *Govinda* and Sheikh Farid's adherence to *Shariat*, day of judgment, fear of *dozak*, and *satan*, etc. The insertion of Guru Arjan Dev's hymns in the compositions of Bhagats and a sort of dialogue among these Bhagats show their close relationship with one another. This type of inter-dialogue takes place in the compositions of Bhagat Kabir, Sheikh Farid, Bhagat Dhanna and Bhagat Surdas. The emphasis on *nam-simran* as well as performance of routine duties is explicit in the inter-dialogue of Bhagats. In Bhagat Kabir's hymns, it appears sometimes that he left his profession of weaving, as his mother laments and he replies that 'so long as I pass the thread through the shuttle, so long do I forget my Loved Lord, Who is refuge of mine and my children.' Bhagat Trilochan's reply to Bhagat Namdev in Guru Arjan Dev's verse indicates 'with the tongue utter the Name of the Lord and work with hands and feet but cherish thy God, detached in heart.'

Dialogue of Ethical Perspectives

Not only to the religious leaders but Guru Nanak addressed also the followers of other sects also and told them to adhere to the essentials and to discard redundant and meaningless formalism. Accordingly, he pointed out the redundancy of external formalism in the performance of religious rituals and practices of followers of Islam and Hinduism, to make them realise the true way to their own religion. This type of dialogue was based on the notion of ethical equation and not manipulation of others for own advantage. Each man has meaning in life and hence he should be treated humanely, and it could have been possible if the relations have face to face encounter on the basis of equality.

Hence the aim was neither to convert others nor to impose his ideology on them but to inculcate the feeling of critical self-analysis and cultivation of moral qualities for inner transformation. Taking the case of a pandit, he reads Vedas, performs prayers, worships idols, takes rosary, puts saffron-mark on his forehead and wears dhoti but performs all false practices in his daily life. If he is aware of the presence of God, he must have realised the futility of these deeds. Similarly, the orthodox practices of Muslim community are pointed out by saying that to be a true Muslim, one should make mercy as his mosque, faith as prayer-mat, honest living as Quran, humility as circumcision and good conduct as fast.

Guru Nanak and other holy preceptors were fully acquainted with the nomenclature of contemporary religious faiths and they observed with their sagacious vision the intricacies in the behavior of adherents of those religious traditions. Guru Nanak was conscious of the defects of conventions of contemporary society and he made use of those conventions to convey his own idea to society. He reacted strongly against the hypocrisy of the priestly class who beguiled innocent people by their formal ways of worship and by their outward appearance. He has minutely noticed the deceit and hypocrisy in the character of the contemporary Brahmins and kshatriyas who were leading a dual life. Whatever may be the inherent cause, either to please the Muslim rulers or to gain economic benefits, they accepted the subjugation of Muslim invaders. They worship their idols within, but read Quran and observe the code of Turks. Guru Nanak stressed on 'truthful living as higher than all other virtues'. Only if one is pure of heart, one attains truth. Guru Arjan Dev also stressed on the inner purity of mind and truthful conduct as the highest form of religion. He says:

*Of all religions, this one is the purest
Meditating on the Divine Name and doing pure
deeds.*

*Of all the activities, the best activity is
Washing the evil of mind by associating with the
Saints.*

*Of all efforts, the noblest effort is
Meditating on God in the heart for ever.*

*Of all speech, the purest speech is
Listening the Lord's Praise and uttering with
tongue.*

*Of all places, that place is blessed one
Nanak, Where dwells the Lord's Name.*

Dialogue of Social Relations

Man is a living being, an organism, capable of doing action not only as a living being, but as a being-in-the-world; who does not just happen to live in this world but reaches his full personhood only in and through this world and in interaction with other persons. Each man has certain infinity, so the relation should be face to face encounter on the basis of equality. To Guru Nanak, the whole ethical life of man is an expansion and expression of this inter-personal relationship. The meaningful relationship with others is not possible without the presence of the wholly other. Nevertheless, there is a dimension of meaning in which persons encounter one another. It is an ethical dimension that specifies or determines the religious character of man. This type of personal interaction with others is possible only in society.

The prevalent notion of world-negation and life of asceticism was denounced with the belief in the dynamic and creative aspect of the Absolute Being. Hence any abstract idea of God without a world would be a spiritual life with no hold on the real or in other words a life of pure escapism. Stressing on the integration of spiritual and temporal aspects for the development of human personality, philosophy of life-affirmation and world-affirmation is recommended in place of life of recluse. Instead of repression of mental modifications (*citta-vrttis*) by the difficult methods, the way suggested is by sublimation of urges and directing them for some higher aim through nam-simran. Referring to the rigorous practices of a sect of Jainism, it is stated that they are neither yogis nor jangams nor qazis, nor mullas but persons leading an unclean life on the pretext of ahimsa or non-injury to the living beings. A vivid portrayal of their daily life makes it clear that such persons have no realisation of the divine presence, no sense of human dignity, no consciousness of higher aim except their own stern notion of purity. On the other hand, those who eat the fruit of their toil and share with the needy alone know the right way.

Dialogue of Social Customs

Guru Nanak not only denounces the superstitious beliefs of *sutak*, empty ceremonies of *janeu* and *shradhas* but he also offers a new interpretation to such socio-religious rites and rituals. Regarding the superstition of impurity (*sutak*), he stresses that the impurity lay in the mind due to its doubt and vision of duality and its cure is to attune oneself to the Divine Being. This impurity has been explained symbolically as

the impurity of mind, tongue, eyes, ears and is to be identified as avarice, falsehood, beholding another's woman, wealth and beauty and in hearing to slander respectively. In a similar tone, he repudiates the sanctity of traditional custom of *janeu* ceremony and stressed on the inner purity which is possible by imbibing virtues like compassion, contentment, continence and truth. Regarding the custom of *shraddhas*, it is stated that one can receive in the hereafter only that what one earns with sincere efforts on the earth. He challenged the Varna-system of contemporary Hindu society by pointing out that a real brahmin is only he who practices austerity, contemplation, self-control, righteous deeds is contented and cultured; a real khatra is he who performs heroic deeds, who is compassionate, charitable and beneficent.

Dialogue of Religious Worship

The contemporary notion of devotional bhakti is illustrated by Guru Nanak by reference to Rasa-Lilas or dramatic performances of Rama and Krishna, the incarnations of Vishnu. The persons belonging to this cult of bhakti perform actions by mimicking the ways of the incarnations of God, interpret the Vedas, sing, dance, beg, wear precious ornaments and sing about the heroic deeds of emperors and queens. Devotional method of the Guru is in sharp contrast to the prevalent methods of devotion. Here the denunciation of these modes of worship is due to their outward formalism devoid of inner spirituality. This type of behaviour is confined to the level of mental consciousness only.

However, real devotion includes both the fear of God and love of God and both these mental states are related to each other. Whereas fear of God makes man always conscious about his deeds and cultivates love for God, the repetition of *nam* is indeed, suggestive of voluntary development of faith in the devotee, thereby transforming him into a new being and creating in him a sense of identification with the whole cosmos. Self-control, discipline, *nam-simran*, meditation on *sabad* are means to induce faith and love; truth and service are the ends which overflow spontaneously as man attains perfect harmony with the Supreme Reality. The devotee in this state of elevation performs acts of self-abnegation and all expression of reverence and devotion are considered as due to divine Grace. In this devotional perspective, all beings are considered equals and kindness to the poor is a manifestation of divine compassion. It can be attained by invoking divine Grace culminating in meditation and self-culture. True worship means sublimation of ego, life

of detachment, practice of truth, meditating on Divine Name through firm devotion, with the help of Guru and Divine Grace.

In Guru Granth Sahib, inter-religious dialogue comprises not only cognitive mental exercise at the academic level but it inspires for a dialogue of deeds and dialogue of concern which implies an attitude of love, tolerance and acceptance of others. The practical implication of this message of the Gurus is visible in the institutional set up of the Sikh religion, leaving aside all barriers of caste, creed and denominations of any kind. To the enlightened person, there appears no duality, no enmity, no alienation and this condition is depicted by Guru Arjan Dev as:

*Envy of others has gone away from my mind;
As I have attained the company of the holy.
Neither any enemy nor stranger; with all are we in
accord.*

The Sikh Gurus, no doubt, have offered a critical analysis of the contemporary religious thought and rejected their external paraphernalia but only to inculcate in them a spirit of deeper penetration in their own religion. The aim of interfaith dialogue in the scripture is neither subjugation, nor domination, nor conversion, nor degradation of other traditions but to make them visualise the kernel of truth and implement it in their lives for spiritual transformation. This is evident from the interpersonal, intrapersonal and critical comparative nature of dialogue which is based on ethical equation of all human beings, experiential vision of Ultimate Reality and acknowledgement of spiritual experience of other holy preceptors belonging to different traditions. Interfaith dialogue does not mean denial of the identity of individual traditions through a synthesis or assimilation of other faiths.

To resolve the present crisis, we need to seek guidance from the message of Guru Granth Sahib, for self-analysis and self-appraisal to find the depth meaning of our human existence in order to develop interfaith understanding among different cultural identities and religious traditions and to promote harmonious co-existence by inter-religious dialogue.

*Prof. Shashi Bala,
Dean, Faculty of Humanities & Religious Studies,
Guru Nanak Dev University,
Amritsar*

On Sufism and Poetry

The emotion is the meaning

It's not surprising that Sufis place so much emphasis on music and especially poetry in their teachings and their understanding of the way to salvation or reunion with the Divine. The general Sufi sense of what reality consists in is inherently poetic; it seems not only to parallel the cosmos that a poetic imagination, in the most general terms, conceives, but really seems to embody that version of reality.

Let me make some observations about what poetry actually is and then we can see how it aligns and intersects with the Sufi view of the world. Much of what follows is apt to seem painfully obvious, or self-evident. But my experience is that it's always of vital importance to keep the basic underpinnings, the basic facts and understanding of your subject clearly in view at all times when working out more complex problems; otherwise, the complexities take on lives of their own and begin to detach themselves from their sources, which mystics say is our essential problem.

All poetry is inherently mystical. In the first and most basic way, its primary aim is to communicate at non-rational levels. This idea is easy to grasp rationally, on the face of it, but tricky to grasp in practice or as a matter of fundamental understanding because of the way we learn to read and think of poetry in the modern age. That is, as dutiful and well-trained followers of the scientific method, we learn to analyse poetry using primarily logic and rationality and to frame verbal summaries of what a poem 'means' based on these rational analyses. Analysis no doubt has a place in understanding poetry because poetry is made of language and language requires us to create categories to communicate; that is, especially in the modern (not to say, English-speaking) world, we think of language as an instrument that conveys practical, sortable, down-to-earth 'meanings,' which implies meanings we can grasp at pragmatic, rational levels, concrete or abstract. So, since poetry is made of everyday words, our natural disposition is to try to grasp its rational, utilitarian meanings.

Lots of people who read poetry in this analytical framework get frustrated very quickly. This frustration sets in because poetry's rational, utilitarian meanings are sometimes hard to grasp and even harder to

paraphrase. These meanings often do not seem self-evident and often seem obscure or veiled, and even when they are eventually grasped, they can seem trite or useless, and one wonders why should there be so much work to understand such a simple thing, something that could be said much more directly!

Actually, there is an answer to this objection: the poem whose rational meaning seems trite probably (if it's a truly worthwhile poem) was meant to convey a whole different range of meaning, the kind of meaning I've called non-rational. In other words, while analysis of a poem's meaning has its place, it is unfortunately the least appropriate method of understanding poetry because poetry's major meanings are non-rational.

To say this in yet other words, the meaning you can think of is usually not the most powerful or affective (sic) meaning the poem conveys, or builds up: let's begin to disperse the subject-object understanding of what happens when you read or hear a poem. Instead, the poem through its verbal impact spurs you to 'feel' or 'sense' meanings rather than 'think' meanings.

It does this in two general ways: through image and metaphor, and through its sound. If you are still with me in this overly abstract discussion, then you probably begin to see why Sufism devotes itself to poetry. There is more to say about this.

Metaphors exist to convey, or evoke, or create sensibilities that cannot be conveyed or created using direct terms. For our purposes, this means metaphors evoke 'feelings' in the range of emotions, but also sensibilities, in the range of intuitions, and of moral and spiritual senses of meaning which are very difficult or impossible to express directly. For a simple example, Robert Frost's poem *Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening*, a poem most Americans are familiar with, evokes through its imagery a sense of gorgeous winter beauty and peace, but inside which is a certain friction or tension. Now, the poet could have expressed this feeling in direct terms by saying "A man was struck by the beauty and peace of the snowy woods, but he felt a certain tension because he had to continue on his way." Even this sentence contains helpful imagery, but it in a way encapsules the rational

gist of the poem. But imagery of the poem creates in the reader the actual feelings of peace, beauty and tension; these actual feelings make up a range of experience entirely different from the experience of the rational thought that sums up the poem.

In other words, metaphors make you feel a meaning rather than think it. They circumvent the limitations of rational analysis and expression and aim at the heart, to use an old-time metaphor. When you read a poem and have no idea what the rational meaning is, and yet you feel an emotion of some kind aroused by the images or events in the poem, then your inability to paraphrase or summarise the poem is really of no account, you have grasped the poem by feeling the emotion. The emotion is the meaning.

In keeping with the mystical sense that there are levels or stages of reality, poems build up not only emotional responses, but also (let's say) intuitive, moral and spiritual responses. If you are sufficiently self-aware, you can distinguish in your reading or hearing of poetry different qualities of experience which are distinct from basic emotions like sadness or humour, but clearly real in your psyche. For example, in reading or hearing the story of Jesus' Passion, emotions of regret or sorrow or joy may arise, but also, deeply moral responses are also triggered in people, and if you push this, you can see that the Passion can catalyse a deep inner response of faith; it is virtually impossible to say what faith is, but you can certainly feel it, even though it is not an emotion like anger or happiness (although it may entail such emotions). So the experience of faith can be expressed directly in sentences like "It's important to have faith," or "Faith is very powerful," but the feeling itself - beyond emotion - can actually be evoked through the story and figures in the Gospels. (similarly for the story of the Prophet and the hadith.) Words can catalyse deep inner sensibilities and experiences. This is what poetry is. This is why I say poetry is inherently mystical: because it aims to evoke and create deep inner experiences that can (and should?) culminate in spiritual experiences. All poetry has the potential to trigger spiritual experience.

What I have said is that one way poetry has its effect is through imagery and metaphor and the other way is through its sound, or really, its music. Nowadays, because of our reliance on print (and electronic) media, it takes a little work to grasp the fact that only in the last hundred years or less have people thought of poetry as primarily a private, silent reading experience. Before our time, poetry was spoken aloud, or more accurately, it was chanted or sung, in all

cultures. (There is an early recording of Tennyson reciting his poetry, and though very scratchy, the sound of it is astonishing: he chants, declaims the poems in a chilling, almost supernatural thunder of half singing, half saying.) The 'reasons' poetry was chanted or sung are manifold, all the way from the simple fact that when poetry was first composed there was no such thing as writing, till to the more complex observation that language has musical properties.

The important thing to observe here is the universal feeling that music is meaningful. Pure music, like a Mozart sonata or a Mevlevi arrangement of drums and instruments without voice, is meaningful to virtually everyone despite the fact that it conveys no rational message at all. In listening to music, one feels the rhythms and hears the sounds, the tones, chords and melodies and responds in one's own way. Language in its sonic form does the same thing as music. Words can be built up in powerful rhythm patterns; alliterations, assonances and rhyme sequences can be created that are not only pleasing to the ear, like melodies, but also powerful in ways that reach the body the same way instrumental music reaches through the body and touches the psyche. Music can be hypnotic and so can poetry. The sound of words is very powerful because it is musical.

So the music of poetry creates non-rational meanings in the same way as instrumental or vocal music does. Moreover, poetry uniquely combines music and imagery and can shape specific meanings, or experiences. At this point it is important to recall that we are speaking almost strictly of only non-rational meanings: poetry's primary shaping of meaning occurs at nonrational levels through music and imagery. And then, as a bonus, poetry also can utilise the aspects of language which reach for the rational mind as well.

Poetry's primary meanings are non-rational. This poses problems for discussions of poetry in college classrooms, because college lays almost all its emphasis on rational understanding. But on the other hand, poetry's unique ability to reach beyond the rational and into the nonrational lends itself directly to Sufi teaching.

Sufi teaching addresses the inner human being. One aspect of the inner human being is the rational mind and so in Sufism we find complex statements concerning metaphysics and cosmology and we find certain philosophical explanations and analyses. But these texts are clearly less important to Sufism than is poetry. And the reason must by now be clear: poetry

addresses or better, shapes the emotional, moral and spiritual faculties or elements of the inner person. The expressed aim of Sufi teaching is to help the individual align him or herself with the Divine, to 'perfect' himself, which means to purify his inner self (we can refer to terms like 'nafs' — the 'animal soul' — at this point) so it is worthy of 'the beloved,' or indeed simply capable of being there, so to speak.

There is a sentence in Wilhelm's translation of the I Ching which seems deeply Sufic to me; Wilhelm interprets "All that is visible must grow beyond itself into the realm of the invisible." In Sufism and most of the mystical tradition, there is a sense that every individual is in fact perpetually in touch with the Divine and his or her task is to find that spark or element of the Divine, which (in many forms of mystic expression) is to say, to find the true self, the self that is the Divine as opposed to the false, or worldly, or detached and apparently isolated self. In all mystical traditions, there is said to be a 'way' to do this; there is a path that can be followed back to our origin, a way from the visible to the realm of the invisible.

The 'way' varies in scope and detail from culture to culture, religion to religion. Some religions and mystical traditions prescribe the same purgative activities for all disciples, such as Buddhism, which in essence (apparently) trains everyone in the same methods of meditation. But in Sufism, the way is highly personal: the master assesses the needs of the individual and assigns the work appropriate to those particular needs. One might say the Sufi master shows the individual the right trail among many possible trails. The aim is to awaken (to use a classic mystic metaphor) the individual to his or her state or level and to help him find the right methods of purgation (the second step along the mystic way) that clear away the fogs of our material existence, the 'visible' world.

Somehow, in other words, the Sufi master has to make the student aware of his inner self, the self that is an element of, or is the Divine. Poetry and music touch the inner sensibilities: the emotional, intuitive, moral and spiritual parts of the inner self. They open the person living in the visible world to the realities of the invisible world.

Sufism places emphasis on metaphor as a key to understanding because it conveys or creates meanings that are beyond the visible world, which is also to say beyond the limits of logic, analysis, rationality and touches the emotional, intuitive, moral and spiritual worlds. Hence poetry.

Sufism places emphasis on music for the same reason: music's meaning lives at supra-rational levels. Again - hence poetry.

Poetry is an instrument of awakening and instruction. It is a way of opening the mind to the divine reality, a way of helping people to grow out of the visible into the realm of the invisible. To broaden the point a little, this is the reason religious liturgies are chanted and often seem filled with 'mystery': the liturgy, which is in fact a form of dramatic poetry, creates the emotional, moral and spiritual atmosphere for the Divine to be present; the sound and rhythm (or music) and in many cases the imagery of the liturgy open the worshipper's mind to the possibility of some sort of contact with the Divine.

Now there are a couple more basic points to be made about this. One is that the mystical traditions all focus their attention on the relation of the individual self to the Divine (in a very general sense, the 'true self'). In some versions of the Way, the activities necessary for the traveler to make his way back to the spiritual origin are generalised to all wayfarers (as in the example of Buddhism). But in Sufism there are many different kinds of training, and many different ways for many people with different spiritual needs. This aligns in a way with the inescapable fact that any given poem has multiple meanings; there are as many meanings of a poem, it has been said, as there are readers.

This is a way of saying that the individual shapes his or her own spiritual experience in the same way that he or she shapes the meaning of a poem. There is no poem acting in one way on all readers, giving one meaning and one meaning only and this is because the act of reading—or better, hearing—is not a subject-object activity, one thing acting on another; reading or hearing is a collaboration of a force of words and the listener's shaping imagination. Each person brings a different set of experiences, understandings, dispositions, interests to each poem and hence finds different meanings than other listeners.

But as with spiritual experience, which has a single source in the Divine, each hearer of a poem meets a single source—the poem, which if well-wrought has the capacity to create specific inner effects, open specific emotional, intuitive, moral, spiritual doors. Whatever is revealed in that opening will look different, or feel different, to different listeners, but if the poem is well-made it will be the same revelation. Sufism naturally uses poetry because the apprehension of a poem is an analogue for the apprehension of, or

maybe a glimpse of the actual contact of the Divine: that glimpse or apprehension or contact is the same for all and different for all.

To recall a maxim of Western mysticism, each person creates his own heaven or hell. The same varying apprehension of meaning is derived from music, naturally, music and poetry being similar if not essentially the same.

In Sufi poetry, there are a couple of metaphors which do not align immediately with the figures, and the categories of figures, in other mystical literature. To place this statement in a more specific context, most depictions of the Way, insist in one sense or another on the moral virtues, most clearly delineated for us, maybe, by Socrates, who named temperance, courage, justice, wisdom, honesty and piety, among others. I mention temperance first because it is a virtue (to retain the Platonic term) stressed repeatedly in the Socratic dialogues and also in Christianity and Islam. But in Sufi poetry, paradoxically, intemperance seems to be represented as a virtue; intoxication and erotic longing are metaphors of certain human relationships with the Divine.

Now there is a reason for this, and it is figured—or actually, embodied—in Sufi poetry. This article has been pointing at the fact that poetry and music are used to open the inner self to its own reality, and to its relation to the Divine. When I noted above that poetry and music can be ‘hypnotic,’ I meant in a general way that poetry and music can create an ‘altered state of consciousness’ (to use a phrase current a few decades ago) and that some form of altered consciousness is needed to awaken an individual to the reality of who he or she ‘really’ is and what that self consists in. This awakening and subsequent state of consciousness looks to the everyday world like insanity, and to the experiencer it is sometimes represented in Sufi poetry as a delicious bewilderment and seemingly the antithesis of Platonic, Christian or Islamic temperance.

Now paradoxically, this sense is not peculiar to Sufism, but is found in other mystical literature, the prime example being Socrates himself, perhaps, who in the Allegory of the Cave describes the mystic climbing out of the cave into enlightenment and then upon returning is thought to be insane by the cave dwellers because he tells them the shadows on the wall are unreal and urges the dwellers to unshackle themselves. The enlightened man is seen as “insane.”

The theme of divine madness is treated in more detail in Plato’s Phaedrus. Significantly, one of the kinds of madness Socrates questions there involves words, their power, and the use and misuse of that power. Although Socrates operated largely along very rational lines, it is significant that in the last hours of his life he began writing poetry, at least partly because he felt it was an obligation to the gods that he had not yet discharged, but we may also note that he deliberately chose to put himself in a poetic, nonrational frame of mind just as he was to pass on. In other words, he sought the madness, the “altered state,” or indeed the intoxication that poetry evokes, or creates.

Poetry can literally be intoxicating. A brief anecdote, one among many that might be told: years ago a couple of friends and I were reading poems of Robert Frost aloud in the living room, and although we were very temperately drinking black tea (not beer or wine as we well might have been), I began to feel quite tipsy, the early sweet fuzzy stages of drunkenness that incite one to intensify the pleasure by drinking more. Only a few moments after I silently noted this strange tipsiness in myself, one of my friends said with bewilderment, “Man, these poems are making me drunk.”

The Sufi metaphor of intoxication as a spiritual state is partly figurative but partly literal. Intoxication is a metaphor for madness, and madness is a metaphor for the spirit’s condition, or transformation, or unfolding into reality, in the presence of the Divine. But amazingly, where poetry and music are involved, intoxication is not only a poetic figure, but is also a literal condition of the body as well as the mind. Poetry’s music and imagery affect the body and the mind—the exterior and interior—alike, as if they were the same thing.

This is exactly what Sufism, and indeed all the mystical traditions (or all that are not strictly gnostic, let’s say), seek to reveal: that the cosmos is a unified whole, one, or One. The music of poetry and the images and metaphors of poetry intoxicate the body and mind, together they change the state of outer and inner awareness of the hearer. Poetry affects the whole human being. It’s not surprising that Sufis place so much emphasis on music and poetry in their Way to reunion with the Divine.

Dana Wilde

Dana Wilde is a passionate artist working on several levels for a total revoution in how adults live their lives, and how future children are educated and socialised.

Guru Nanak: In Search of a Post-Pluralistic Axiology

This is said to be the age of globalisation and pluralism. In response to the globalising tendencies hailing from the west, the pluralistic identities both in the west and the east are articulating and asserting themselves. From the 1980s, postmodern theory has come to celebrate the differences and plurality, and it has been taken as an informed entry on democratising the post-industrial society. It is during the same period, the proposal of globalisation too has come to stay in world politics. If not a conflict in the type of clash of civilizations proposed by Samuel Huntington, it comes out to be, in its better form, a negotiation between the globalising tendencies and pluralising trends. The grand negotiation needs working out a series of criteria in between the two trends. Sri Guru Granth Sahib, the Scripture of the Sikhs is an acknowledged text of multi-religious, multicultural and pluralistic vision and indeed, offers a paradigm of dialogue among the variety of religious and linguistic cultures ever known to the Indian subcontinent. It is a different type of interrelation between the themes of One and Many that has certain earlier formulations in Indian history and Indian philosophy. This paper is dedicated to the type of negotiation proposed by Guru Nanak among the pluralistic patterns existing in the Indian subcontinent and to address the experience of that age to the present context.

Starting from the fact of Plurality

Plurality is the biggest fact of life to Guru Nanak. Guru Nanak's Punjab was the meeting place of the most intensive interactions between three massive cultural and religious landscapes, being the Hindu culture, the Arabian-Islamic culture and the Buddhist-South Asian culture, although the third is not so visible in present day discussions. However, we intend to include the Buddhist culture in the discussion owing to its significance in the making of Indian culture itself and its place among Indian thought as the substratum of many of them.

Punjab's geographical location itself is prominent that it was at the centre of so many war routes starting from the period of Indus Valley through the ancient and medieval periods and also at the centre of so many commercial routes during the same period. Guru Nanak, if compared to Jesus Christ and Prophet Mohammed as the founders of two earlier religions, had the maximum amount of multi-religious and multicultural experiences. Guru Nanak's Punjab also had known Hinduism and its variations of Saivism and Vashnavism, Tantrism and Siddha-Yoga thoughts, Islam and Sufism with their inner denominations. This is not 'in any way' to exclude the rich folk religious cultures Punjab was having among its peasants and village people.

The linguistic variety of the Punjab region too is astounding. Apart from the most ancient Indus language groups, Punjab hosted the Aryan-Sanskrit and Arabio-Persian linguistic families. During the medieval period, Punjab became the melting pot of differing linguistic and cultural syntheses giving way even to the birth of new languages. It got registered in the multiple Punjabi language scripts available namely the scripts of Gurmukhi, Devanagiri and Urdu. The Sufi mystic Baba Farid is celebrated as the first poet of the Punjabi language, establishing a rich tradition of Punjabi poetry and music.

Interestingly Guru Nanak, the founder-Guru of Sikhism, did not limit himself with the given Punjabi culture. His Udasi Yatras are amazing episodes witnessing the Guru moving out of the boundaries of Punjabi culture. The Guru stretched out his hands to walk down the entire Indian subcontinent and much beyond. The *Janam Sakhis* are irreplaceably important to us (despite the rationalist denouncing of them by McLeod) in the present discussion that the Guru went and met with peoples and cultures in all four directions beyond the Punjab, crossing the Himalayas in the north, Assam, Bengal and Orissa in the east, the Dravidian lands and Sri Lanka in the south and Arabia

and Baghdad in the west. The Guru met with the Gorakhnath yogis, Saivite and Vaishnavite saints, Sufis and Islam law givers, the Sants and Bhaktas, Jains and Buddhists, Tantrics and Siddhas. Apart from the institutionalised religious groups. the Guru went and met with the *adivasis* and natives of unknown interior subaltern regions of the subcontinent, peasants and nomads, artisans, businessmen and common people. No doubt, experiences of the Guru are immense in terms of hundreds of castes and tribes India was housing. For sure, the Guru had encountered the forms of dominances and oppressions in practice in various regions of the country too. The variety of mystic cults and rituals the Guru met on his ways too are found recorded in the Janam Sakhis.

In view of the multicultural experiences of the

Guru, Sri Guru Granth Sahib truly embodies the pluralistic vision of the Great Guru. The Janam Sakhis and the Guru Granth Sahib can be organically combined, one contributing and throwing light upon the symptomatic reading of the other. Guru Granth Sahib celebrates multiplicity. The multiple authorship of the Sikh Scripture stands symbolising the democratic and pluralistic prudence of

the Sikh culture. The Guru celebrates nature as the boundless creation of God.

In the Asa-Di-War is written,

*Wonderful Thy world, wonderful Thy knowledge
Wonderful Thy creatures, wonderful their species
Wonderful their forms, wonderful their colours
Wonderful the animals that wander naked
Wonderful Thy wind, wonderful Thy water
Wonderful Thy fire which sporteth wonderously
Wonderful the earth, wonderful the source of production
Wonderful the pleasures to which mortals are attached
Wonderful is meeting, wonderful parting from Thee
Wonderful is hunger, wonderful repletion
Wonderful Thy praises, wonderful Thy eulogies*

*Wonderful the desert, wonderful the road
Wonderful Thy nearness, wonderful Thy remoteness
Wonderful to behold Thee presence
Beholding these wonderful things I remain wondering
Nanak, they who understand them are supremely fortunate.*

(Macauliffe, 1963. Vol 1, p. 221)

Sukhmani Sahib reiterates,

*So many birds that fly and reptiles that creep
So many stationary objects like trees and stones
So many elements like the air, water and fire
So many realms and earthly regions
So many suns and stars*

*So many gods and demons and so called crowned kings of heaven
All this infinite variety of creation is strung on Gods own will.*

(Translated by Teja Singh, SGPC, 1999. p.52)

The Guru sees the multiplicity of the natural world as the wonder and beatitude. Celebrating the multiplicity of' nature thickens the sense of reality of the world. In context of the earlier Indian philosophies that degraded the natural reality and its variety as *maya* or illusion, or treated it as the raw material of creation, Guru Nanak's celebration acquires primary significance. The Guru's festivity with nature when the suns, moons and stars perform the grand natural *Arathi* is also a fantastic celebration of the prosperity and fertility abound in nature. The Guru rejoices with the richness and plenitude of land. This may be characteristic of a culture that all through its history from the Indus Valley has oriented itself on land and waters. Guru Nanak's enchantment with plurality can be extended to the folk Punjabi delight upon music and dance, and the elementary pleasures of life. The fact that the Guru had not appreciated asceticism or world negation as a value or practice may be brought to notice here to get the total meaning of his celebration of multiplicity. In essence, the Guru was not against the simple pleasures of life.

*All the feelings are the effect of you, Oh Lord,
The passionate pleasures of men are all aesthetic*

(Macauliffe, 1963, Vol I, p.221)

The multiple authorship of the Sikh Scripture stands symbolising the democratic and pluralistic prudence of the Sikh culture.

Transcending Plurality

The present paper argues that the Guru did not stop at recognising the plurality and multiplicity. There is an inner logic embedded in all the hymns of Sri Guru Granth Sahib that multiplicity should be celebrated and it should also be transcended to construct a justified relationship among them. I am using the term transcendence not in a religious sense to pass into another world dismissing the temporal one. Such a meaning of transcendence is available ready hand in Indian philosophy in the pattern of Vyavaharika and Paramathika, for example, where one dismisses the reality of other. It is in such a dualistic mode Sankara perceived the metaphysical logic of either/or between snake and rope. Guru Nanak's logic is closer to the logic of Buddha that is dialectical when he declares that Samsara is Nirvana or Sunyata is Purnata. The transcendent in Guru Nanak absorbs the temporal multiplicity and concretises the unity without in any way nullifying the former.

The earlier philosophies of India looked at the multiplicity as a source of chaos and contradiction, and through metaphysical transcendence they tried to construct a realm of spirituality where an abstract unity may be achieved. The unity they conceived was without attributes, beyond all temporality. But Guru Nanak's perception of unity is concrete in the sense that he views the variety as the source of vitality, dynamism, energy and possibilities. Here lies the basic difference between Guru Nanak and the earlier thinkers. The Guru goes for transcendence not by negating the temporal moments stigmatising them as chaos and contradiction but by intensifying the temporal multiplicity. Intensification of temporality is undertaken to make rich and concretise the concept of unity. Even when it is contradictory, the attitude of the Guru towards the contradiction is going through the contradiction and not withdrawing from encountering it. Guru Nanak as the one who lived through tilling the land through hard work could not say that life was contradictory and he wanted to withdraw from it. His approach to life was not 'bookish'.

To understand the spirituality of Guru Nanak, one has to understand the Guru's attitude towards the natural and temporal life of earthliness. There is no iota of negation in Guru Nanak towards that life. The Guru's multiplicity is not the lifeless philosophical

atomism of the rationalist west. It is neither a formal pluralism for the sake of pluralism. It is not the difference and repetition mechanically advocated by the postmodernists. The basic model for the Guru's pluralism is the pristine nature and the environment. The Universe and the natural environment were not lifeless or jada or ajiva or maya as they were perceived in earlier Indian philosophies. For the Guru, the Universe is full of life and vitality and creativity.



*Thou art the Tree
All that is, is Thy flourishing branches
Thou the ocean, foam and bubbles
All that is visible, is Thyself.*

(SGGS, p.31)

In its vitality and dynamism and creativity, the natural multiplicity organically grows into transcendence and perfection if it is so, even through contradictions. Contradictions and conflicts not at all nullify growth but they guarantee growth and unfolding. They challenge the potencies inherent and invoke them for life. The creativity of nature assures the organic transcendence.

The Udasi Yatras of the Guru serve as the wonderful paradigm of going across the plurality of the Indian subcontinent. Udasi is a temporary going out of the routine life and not a complete abandonment of it. In other words, Udasi is not asceticism. The Guru, I dare to say, went to the people not to preach an already preconceived philosophy but to know and learn and to organically unite. He did not sit in his idle hamlet and opted for writing Mahabhasyas to the Prasthana trays. The Guru was a Shraman, a wanderer, a roaming saint. He was always in search, on the way. Going across life in all its multiplicity is the paradigm of the Guru to make out his transcendence.

The Ragas or the musical mode which the Guru preferred is another appropriate metaphor to understand his idea of transcendence. Music goes across the variety of life patterns or the passions


**To understand
the spirituality of
Guru Nanak, one
has to understand
the Guru's attitude
towards the natural
and temporal life
of earthliness.**


of human mind. Music does not dismiss them as chaos and contradictory. Music is repeated recitation of the contradictions and conflicts to mediate them. That which refuses to reconcile at one recitation gets mediated at another recitation. Music never rests as long as it reconciles the conflicting emotions.

The discussion conducted in Guru Granth Sahib on *haumain* is another interesting event to understand the idea of going through the multiplicity as per the Guru. Earlier philosophical schools had abruptly dismissed the concept of ego or *ahamghar* or individualism as an insurmountable barrier to reach the spiritual height. But the Guru Granth Sahib prefers another way around. On the one hand, it declares that *haumain* is the principle of differentiation and it is the source

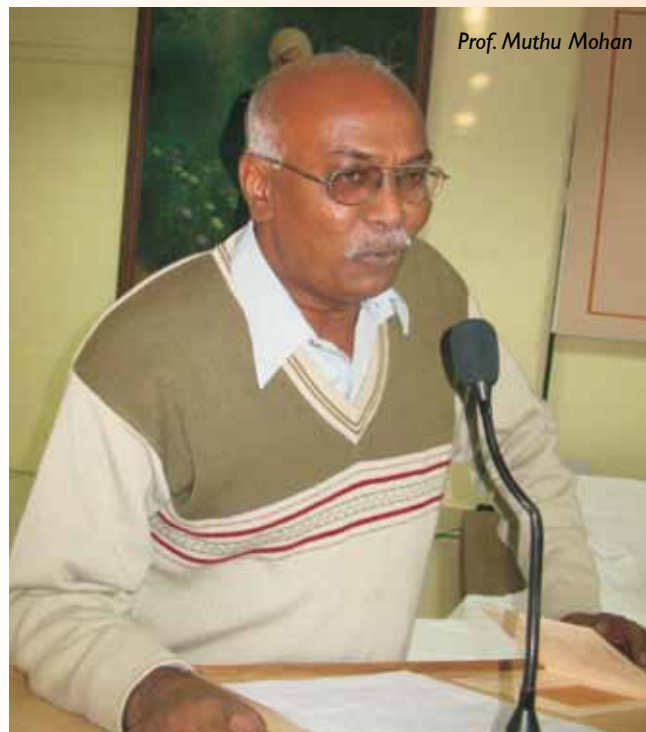
of creativity even. On the other hand, a *haumain* thoroughly separated from the natural and social environment is condemned as the malady that must be attended. *Haumain* as the moment of differentiation is organically united with other components of the system and when it loses the relatedness with the whole it becomes a moribund one.

The Guru identifies relatedness among the components of natural and social environment. The ideal system of relatedness is constructed in Guru Granth Sahib in terms of equality and as a result of a critical exercise. The Guru criticises the rituals of various religions which were artificially institutionalised by the priests of every religion that have nothing to do with the idea of God. The Guru has left a very authoritative corpus of critical literature addressed against Brahmanism, caste system, Islamic exclusivism and political despotism, unprecedented in medieval India. The Guru had the historical experience of the Bhakti movements and the Siddha criticism addressed to the institutionalisation of the devotional culture into temple culture. The Guru knew the positive achievements of Islam as well as he was aware

of the Sufi criticism of the feudalisation of Islam. Guru Nanak offers the best tools of deconstructing the caste hierarchy and its ideology. The Guru was equally aware of the moral crisis into which the medieval religions have plunged into. Criticism, ethical awareness and praxis as a programme for future action come together in Guru Nanak's thought. It is this essential standpoint of the Guru which makes him stop before mere celebration of plurality.

This article has delved into Guru Nanak's celebration of multiplicity as intensification of the moment of temporality and tilting the philosophical focus into it. It is further shown that the multiplicity seen by the Guru is also the source of dynamism, vitality and creativity. It opens up rich possibilities for relatedness and concretisation of the abstract. The Guru's idea of transcendence zigzags and moves among the plural entities and it is not afraid of contradictions. The paradigms of Udasi Yatra, musical mode of expression and dialectical handling of *haurnain* are exemplary events of the Guru's vision of a post plural dialogue. The Guru's commitment to equality, his effective critical spirit and ethical inclination make him move beyond mere celebration of plurality and to construct an axiology for praxis.

The Guru knew the positive achievements of Islam as well as he was aware of the Sufi criticism of the feudalisation of Islam.



Dr. N. Muthu Mohan

Professor & Head, Department of Guru Nanak Studies, Director, Directorate of Distance Education, Madurai Kamaraj University, Madurai, Tami Nadu.

A Truly Universal Religion

Sikhism and Interfaith Understanding

Paper presented at the International Seminar on 'Pluralistic Vision in Guru Granth Sahib'.

Religious people represent a vast majority of the peoples of the world. But unfortunately, we are a confused, divided and silent majority. The religious people of the world have been quite silent for long, and their silence has worked against human welfare. Our division, our timidity and our silence have left the mighty forces of terrorism, fanaticism, racism, poverty and war unchallenged. Our silence has been paid for by the suffering of millions, for whom we should have been the advocate, the friend and spokesperson. The time has come when religionists, instead of antagonising each other because of what we once thought was religious conviction, should cooperate with each other in order to contribute to the cause of peace for mankind.

Sikhism is a religion which was founded on the principles of interfaith understanding, mutual respect and harmony. From the very beginning the leaders and the followers of this tradition preached the principles of interfaith respect, dialogue and understanding. To be a Sikh it is mandatory that he/she must respect and accept all other religions of the world and at the same time must protect, guard and allow the free-practice of the customs and rituals of others. The *Guru Granth Sahib* teaches its followers to love all creation as God's own manifestation. Acceptance of all faiths, and interfaith tolerance and understanding are basic to the teachings of *Guru Granth Sahib*. History of the Sikh tradition shows remarkable consistency in the pursuit of these ideals and in the defence of the right to free worship by peoples of all faiths.

The Sikh Gurus perceived that there was lack of real love among the people and, therefore, they always laid great stress upon spiritual practices and preached the philosophy of one God, the Supreme

Reality. They understood that a new strength and vigour had to be imported into the field of religion and religious practices, it had to be brought home to the minds of the people that there really existed no differences in places of worship resorted to men of different faiths. That is why Guru Gobind Singh, the tenth and the last Guru, states: "The temple and the mosque are the same, the Hindu worship and the Muslim prayer are the same, all men are the same; it is through erroneous judgment they appear different ... all men have the same eyes, the same ears, the same body, the same build, a compound of earth, air, fire and water ... let no man, even by mistake, suppose there is a difference."

The Sikh Gurus systematised all the past Hindu and Islamic philosophies and brought a confluence in an organised manner for the temporal and spiritual uplift of all humanity, without any discrimination. Guru Nanak made friends with both Hindus and Muslims. He never discriminated against any one. He treated the whole world as his own family and all human beings as his brothers and sisters. He raised his voice against injustice anywhere. Like him, all other Gurus were large hearted. None of them were parochial or narrow-minded, communal or caste-ridden. They set out for the regeneration of mankind.

The *Guru Granth Sahib* is a unique sacred text in the history of world religions. The pattern of this text was conceived and worked out in such a way that it can integrate various religions and *varnas* of India, spiritually, religiously and emotionally. Guru Nanak gave the idea of this kind of scripture and his successor Gurus subscribed to it and worked to collect material for most of the *Granth*. Guru Arjan collected most of the materials and contributed a major portion of the *Granth* in the form of his *bani*

and completed editing this sacred text in 1604 C.E. Guru Gobind Singh added the hymns of Guru Tegh Bahadar to the *Guru Granth Sahib* and installed it as the Guru-Eternal in 1708 CE, so abolishing the personal guruship.

The unique catholicity and egalitarian approach of Guru Arjan is evident in the fact that, other than the hymns of the Sikh Gurus, he incorporated the compositions of as many as thirty men of God, belonging to various castes, creeds, religions and vocations. Among them were Jaidev of Bengal, Surdas of Awadh, Namadev, Pipa, Sain, Kabir, Ravidas and Bhikhan of Uttar Pradesh, Dhannu of Rajasthan and Farid of Multan. Kabir was a weaver, Sadhna was a butcher, Namdev a seamster, Dhana a farmer, Sain a barber, Ravidas a cobbler, Farid a Muslim Sufi and other mystic poets. It may be mentioned here that Guru Gobind Singh hosted fifty two poets in his court to translate various ancient texts of India with the object of unifying the people of the subcontinent through their own literature and culture. What a wonderful example of catholicity! What a wonderful instance of egalitarianism! And what a remarkable endeavour for interfaith understanding!! I humbly salute all those who made this possible.

Sikhism advocates four kinds of unity: unity of God, unity of mankind, unity of religions and unity of classes. In fact, the oneness of God and the essential oneness of humanity is the basic teaching of *Guru Granth Sahib*. Guru Nanak was an advocate for peace and unity. For all the religions of the world, he envisaged a fellowship of faiths. His efforts for creating an atmosphere for world-reconciliation and world-amity were so much ahead of his time.

The attitude of the Sikh Gurus towards the leaders or founders of other faiths and their sacred texts is unique and genuinely praiseworthy. For instance, the attitude of Guru Nanak towards Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) was one of unbounded love and respect. In a verse which is given in the *Janam Sakhi* of Bhai Bala, Guru Nanak is stated to have said:

*Dita nur muhammadi, ditha nabi rasool.
Nanak qudrat dekh ke, khudi ghei sab bhool.*

"I have seen the light of Muhammad (with my mind's eye). I have seen the prophet and the messenger of God, in other words, I have understood his message or imbibed his spirit. After contemplating the glory of God, my ego was completely eliminated."

In the same spirit Guru Gobind Singh said in his *Vichitra Nataka* that prophet Muhammad was a divine messenger and a great man of religion and faith. Guru Arjan Dev had profound respect for Mian Mir, a celebrated Muslim Sufi and had the foundation stone of the Golden Temple laid by him. This instance alone is enough to prove the magnanimity and catholicity of the Sikh Gurus.

It may be mentioned here that Muslim scholars had also tremendous appreciations for the Sikh Gurus. For instance, Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, founder of the Ahmadiya sect of Islam, observed in his *Sat Bachan* that Guru Nanak was a treasure house of divine knowledge and knower of all mysteries. The most famous poet-philosopher of this subcontinent, Dr. Mohammad Iqbal, in one of his immortal verses expressed that Guru Nanak was a perfect human being and awakened India from a dormant, dreamy condition to the realisation of God.

To the Muslims and Christians, Guru Nanak advises: "Practice within your heart the teachings of the Qur'an and the Bible; restrain the ten sensory organs for straining into evil. Tie up the demons of desire and restore faith, charity and contentment, and you shall be acceptable. Guru Nanak vehemently opposes those who criticise the holy books of other religions". He categorically asks his followers: "Do not say that the Vedas, the Bible and the Qur'an are false. Those who do not contemplate them are false".

Guru Arjan says :

*"Neither am I Hindu nor Musalman
This body and spirit is of Allah-Rama"*

He also asserts:

*"Says Nanak! The Guru removeth delusion,
Only Allah is Parbrahma."*

This indicates, he had tremendous respect for Allah, Rama and Parabrahma, in other words, he loved both the religious traditions in the same spirit.

The principle which underlies the pattern of *Guru Granth Sahib* is that every Sikh gives the same reverence to the Sikh Gurus which he gives to the other 30 holy writers of this sacred text. A Sikh bows to the *Guru Granth Sahib* and recites the *bani* of all the writers included with the same devotion and respect. It may be noted here that in the Golden Temple as well

as in all other historical or local *gurudwaras*, the hymns of all these saints, gurus and Sufis of India are sung. The followers of the *Guru Granth Sahib* pay homage to these Muslim and Hindu saints of India, recite their writings with equal amount of faith, reverence and devotion. This is not so and cannot be so in any other religion of the world.

Guru Nanak strongly pleaded for an egalitarian society where all people could be regarded as equals. In order to eradicate caste distinction and the social stratification based on caste system, he created two institutions: *Sangat* and *Pangat*. *Sangat* is the community congregation where all people sit together for divine contemplation and prayer and *Pangat* is the free kitchen where different people irrespective of their caste and creed sit at the same level and dine together. The distinction between poor and rich is forgotten, because all share the same food at the same place. This was, indeed, a revolution against the inegalitarian society. A successful revolution without a single drop of blood! These *Sangat* and *Pangat* not only promote egalitarianism but also promote and enhance interfaith understanding.

Let me give an example of the *gurdwara* inside Dhaka University campus. In Bangladesh there is not a single Sikh citizen. Even so, on every Friday in this *gurdwara*, hundreds of people belonging to different religious background attend *Sangat* and join *Pangat* and these are promoting interfaith understating in this country. Not only in Bangladesh where there is such a *gurdwara*, particularly in Europe and America, the *Sangat* and *Pangat* have enriched the prestige of the Sikh community and helped to promote inter-religious harmony.

Guru Nanak argues that if God is one, then all the souls coming from Him are same essence. The natural corollary of monotheism is oneness of humanity. All the Gurus regarded the whole of mankind as an organic unity and repudiated the distinction on a mundane plane. They held that the distinction of colour, language or territory cannot and should not form the ground for claims of superiority of one group over the other. Guru Nanak strongly emphasised the highest common factor in all the religions of his time which were existing side by side but, unfortunately clashing with one another. He conceived the idea of a new type of scripture, formed a wholesome approach and attitude towards fellow religions and philosophical schools.

He provided directions for religious co-existence, philosophical accommodation and social integration. As mentioned earlier, Guru Nanak did not believe in the false barriers of religions and rigidities of caste. Some scholars hold that he was an ideal Muslim among Muslims and a model Hindu among Hindus. He believed in the fatherhood of God and brotherhood of man and he not only propagated this philosophy but also practiced this vigorously in his life.

Universalism is a cardinal value of Sikhism. It is not bracketed with a particular ethnicity or a particular region. The whole earth has been revered by Guru Nanak as "mother earth" and as a result he did not believe in any Promised Land or Holy Land. Sikhism is universal because its primary essential concerns - social, political, cultural and economic - are of a universal nature, embracing humanity as a whole. Guru Gobind Singh held that God cannot be bound to a particular creed, place or era. He (God) cannot be bracketed with any particular ethnicity. Indeed, He is the Lord of all the peoples of the world. This makes Sikhism a truly universal religion.

In today's pluralistic world, the teachings of the *Guru Granth Sahib* can play a vital and constructive role. Sikhism not only acknowledges and appreciates other faiths but also accepts their validity and integrates worldly life with the idea of divinity. The *Guru Granth Sahib* seeks to unite people belonging to different faiths and holds that the object of religion is not to divide mankind, but to unite it, not to act like scissors and tear asunder the social fabric, but to act like a needle and sew it together. In today's world we must feel that we are all members of one great family of beings, having different forms of working. We must remember that we are all marching towards the spiritual realisations of truth and love. Some in ignorance say, 'My religion is the only one, my religion is the best'. But when his heart is illumined by true knowledge, he knows that above all these wars of sects and sectarians presides the one invisible eternal all-knowing bliss. In fact, the different faiths are like spokes of a wheel in which God forms the hub. Therefore, let us - all the religionists - radiate towards that hub and find peace and solace. *Guru Granth Sahib*, I am unequivocal in saying, is a guiding force in this regard.

Dr. Kazi Nurul Islam
Professor and Chairman
Department of World Religions and Culture
Dhaka University, Bangladesh

Brothers in Life



The Ghuman family of Sarwarpur, near Ludhiana, cannot understand what the fuss is about. Ever since Sajjan Singh Ghuman, an NRI Sikh living in England, rebuilt a mosque in his native village that was damaged during Partition, the shrine, as well as his family back home, have attracted the curiosity of outsiders. “We never imagined we would be on a Punjabi TV channel just because my elder brother rebuilt this small mosque for the poor Muslim families of our village. For him, it was just a gesture towards restoring the collective heritage of our village,” says Sajjan’s brother, Joga Singh, who manages the family’s lands in Sarwarpur. Sure. But what Joga and his family, or even the TV channel, do not know is that the sentiment that inspired his brother’s act is being manifested in scores of villages across the Punjab, with Sikhs and Hindus joining hands to either rebuild old and damaged mosques

or build new ones. Odd? Perhaps. But Punjab, as admirers of its unique religious synthesis say, has always defied stereotypes to do its own thing.

That spirit comes through clearly in the actions of a group of school and college boys from 600-year-old Ajitwal village near Moga. During Partition, when Muslims fled Ajitwal, just as they fled in waves from other parts of Punjab, an ancient village mosque was vandalised. As years passed, someone encroached on its grounds and the place became a village dumping ground. A neem tree on its compound became a hang-out for the village youth. One day, a bunch of boys decided to clear the muck. Within days, the entire village — now made up of Hindus and Sikhs — joined them. Says 20-year-old Laddi: “We were never short of money or material. Anyone who passed this way would contribute in cash or kind. Someone brought five bags of cement, another donated bricks and so

on....” This, when there were no permanent Muslim families left in the village. But, once repaired, the mosque began to be used. A few Muslim migrants from Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, labourers and petty tradespeople, began praying here. A maulvi from a neighbouring village now comes to conduct Friday namaaz. To the delight of 80-year-old Nachattar Kaur, who was born and brought up here, the sound of the *azaan* (call to prayer) is being heard again, after decades. “We have always believed in this shrine,”



Muslims at the Dhuri mosque; protected by the Khalsa

she says. “It is a house of God. God bless these boys for restoring the oldest relic of our village.”

In Malerkotla, the headquarters of the state unit of *Jamaat-e-Islami (Hind)*, publisher and Jamaat member Ramzan Sayeed, who has also translated the Quran into Punjabi, observes, “It is only in Punjab that Sikhs and Hindus are helping to build masjids with tractors, labour and money.” That this should happen at a time when Islamists are being reviled and resisted across the world makes it remarkable and that it should be happening in a land where the soil is soaked with the blood of Partition and stories of murder, rape and looting have been passed down the generations, renders it especially significant.

In the months after Partition, some 50,000 mosques across present day Punjab, Haryana and Himachal Pradesh were destroyed, burnt or converted into temples and gurdwaras — homes, even. Today, Muslims comprise just 1.5 per cent of Punjab’s population, mostly migrant labour from UP and Bihar and some Gujjar families from Jammu and Kashmir who have settled here, in addition to small pockets of Muslims, such as those belonging to Malerkotla, who did not go to Pakistan in 1947.



Students of Ajitwal village, near Moga, rebuilt this masjid in the picture.

However, in the last decade or so, the Jamaat has managed, with extraordinary village-level support, including money and material, to free and revive about 120 mosques. Scores of others, like the one at Ajitwal, have been revived or rebuilt purely by villagers themselves. Jamaat president Arshad Ali said, “We consciously involve Sikhs and Hindus whenever we help build a new mosque or repair an old one and every time, the community’s response is overwhelming.” He reels off the names of scores of villages where this has happened. One of them, Diwa Gandwan in Fatehgarh Sahib, has only 17 Muslim families, most of them poor labourers. Mohammed Jameel, a farm labourer who lives in the village, said “We never imagined we could have a masjid of our own, but we do now. It would not have been possible without the help of the Sikh landlords here, who filled up the low-lying area by bringing us earth in their tractor trollies.” The first brick of the mosque was laid by a Sikh priest from Fatehgarh Sahib, who also donated the money.

Arshad Ali contrasts this attitude with the one that prevailed when he began working for the Jamaat in Punjab some 30 years ago: “We used to face opposition whenever we tried to assert ourselves. But all that has changed now. Our effort to construct masjids is helping foster religious brotherhood in Punjab.” Hassan Mohammed, the imam of the Jama Masjid at Mandi Gobindgarh, recalls that last year, when he tried to mobilise Muslims of Jhampur village to rebuild their village mosque, they were afraid of even the suggestion. He then approached the sarpanch, a Jat Sikh, who immediately got a few boys to clear the overgrown area. Other villagers chipped in with contributions in cash and kind and, soon, what was once a crumbling ruin became a vibrant place of worship. Such stories abound in rural Punjab today.

There are no clear-cut answers as to why this is happening. It helps, clearly, that Muslims are only a tiny, largely poor, community here, no threat to anyone, and that sympathy for the underdog is a distinctive Punjabi — especially Jat Sikh — trait. But that's only a partial explanation, as is the other obvious one — that this is a manifestation of collective guilt over the atrocities committed by Sikhs and Hindus against Muslims during Partition.

Guilt could be a factor, acknowledges Sikh historian and writer Prof Gurdarshan Singh Dhillon, "There is no doubt," he says, "that the atrocities of Partition are a blot on the history of the Sikhs. We, as a martial race, are not supposed to attack the weak and unarmed, but it happened, and ever since then, there has been remorse." He recalls how a few years before his death, Gurcharan Singh Tohra, long-time president of the Shiromani Gurudwara Prabandhak Committee (SGPC), confessed that he too had killed a Muslim during the Partition riots and felt haunted by his act. Possibly to atone for the act, Tohra constructed a mosque in his native village and laid its first brick with his own hands.

On the other hand, much of the present effort to revive mosques is coming from a generation that does not have the blood of Partition on its hands one that has witnessed and endured, rather, the violent Sikh separatism during the '80s. That's why Pramod Kumar, director of the Chandigarh-based Institute of Development and Communications, feels this is "the collective reassertion of Punjab's unique cultural synthesis" and "an attempt to build a secular Punjabi identity, as opposed to a communal identity or religious one".

But predictably, radical Sikh scholar, Prof Gurtej Singh, takes a different line: "This is an instinctive manifestation of the Sikh's disillusionment with a Hindu-dominated Indian state that has done all it can to obliterate Sikh identity. During Partition, we were made to believe that Muslims were our enemies and we massacred them in large numbers. We have now realised that not Muslims, but Hindu-dominated parties like the BJP are the real threat to our identity." Pointing out that Sikhs and Muslims have gradually come to value each other, he relates an anecdote about Shia Muslims recently discovering how Sikhs protected one of their shrines in Samana in Punjab, and how they are returning the gesture by helping Sikhs build gurdwaras in the Gulf. He also

Shades of the old Punjab

- Around 200 mosques across Punjab have been repaired, rebuilt or built from scratch with the help of Sikhs and Hindus in the last 10 years
- Many destroyed during Partition riots are now being restored by village communities
- In some cases, the Jamaat-e-Islami is involved, but most are unorganised village-level efforts
- It's a reassertion, after decades, of Punjab's unique religious and cultural synthesis

lauds Pakistan for enacting a Sikh Marriage Act which he helped draft, whereas India is yet to do so. "These things," he says, "accumulate in the popular psyche, and manifest themselves in various ways".

But try telling 67-year-old Kesar Singh or 24-year-old Kamal Vohra that this is only a story of Sikh-Muslim bhaichara. Kesar, a Jat Sikh farmer from Ratia, some 15 km from Dhuri, a Hindu-dominated town in Sangrur district, and Kamal, a Hindu whose family migrated from Sialkot in Pakistan, have slogged shoulder to



Photographs by Tribhuvan Ttaori

Sikhs, Hindus and Muslims at the mosque site

shoulder for days to rebuild Dhuri's lone mosque. Kesar admits to a special bond with the mosque, which he visits every week, along with 20 other Sikhs of Ratia, for Friday namaaz. "The old imam has been my friend for the last 50 years and I enjoy his liberal interpretation of the Quran," says he. But when the old mosque was demolished to make a bigger structure, it wasn't just Sikhs but the entire Hindu mohalla that helped dig the foundations. Hindus and Sikhs from nearby villages, too, contributed with hefty donations.

As always, Punjab never fails to surprise.

*Chander Suta Dogra
(From Outlook)*



The US President's wife Michelle Obama interacts with underprivileged girls during her visit to the National Handicrafts and Handlooms (Crafts) Museum in New Delhi.

Michelle's day out with Nanhi Chhaan kids

On the sidelines of her shopping spree at the National Handicrafts and Handlooms Museum, US First Lady Michelle Obama kept her date with 17 underprivileged children. Eleven-year-old Ramanpreet, the only daughter of bonded labourers, was among them. She was accompanied by schoolmates Manpreet Kaur, Ankita and Apreet all from the NGO *Nanhi Chhaan*-affiliated schools at Amritsar and Ganganagar.

The NGO was chosen by US Embassy officials to meet Obama during his earlier scheduled visit to Amritsar. But Obama had to skip Amritsar, much to the disappointment of many, including the children.

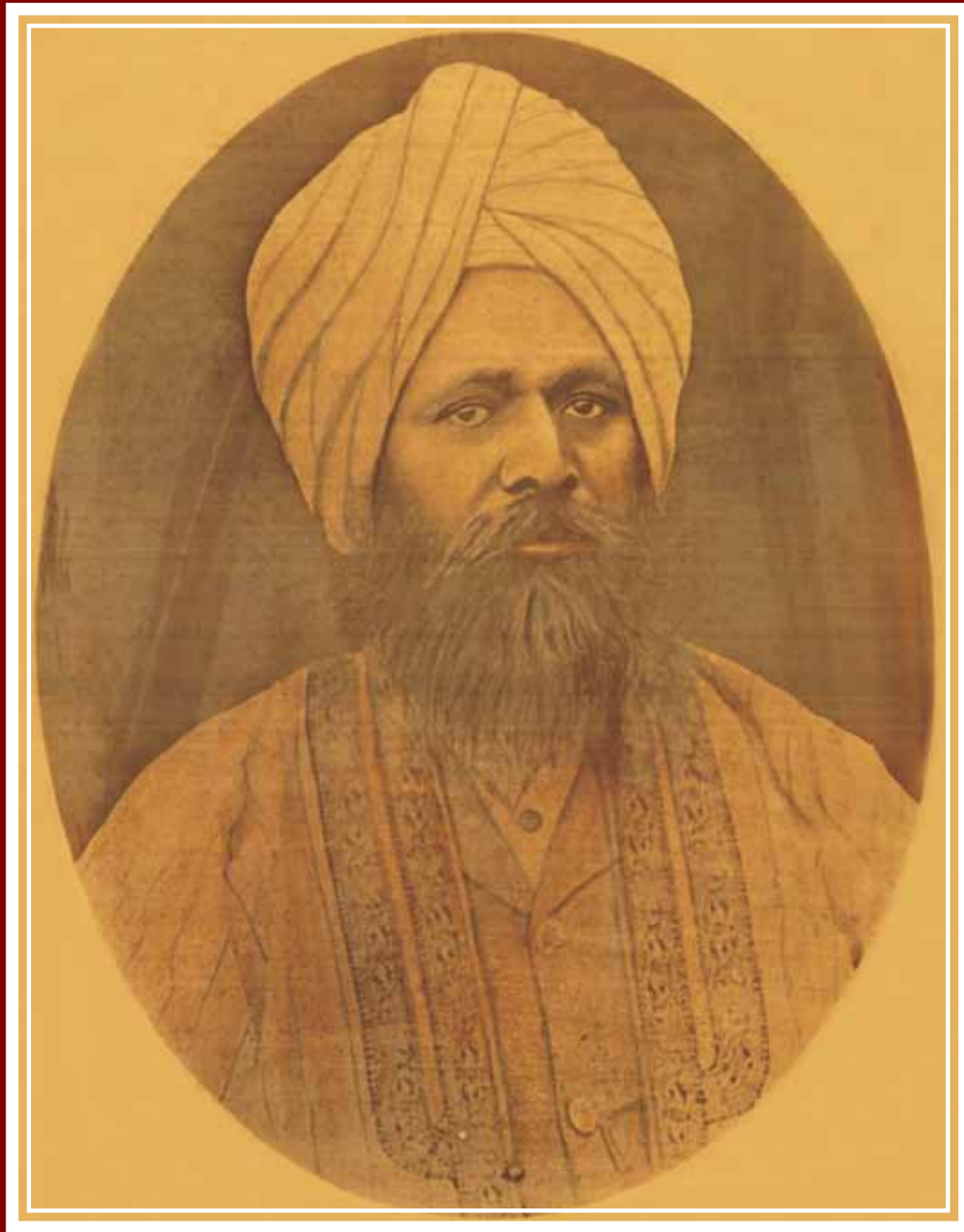
Ramanpreet Kaur quietly asked the First Lady, "Who takes the initiative to patch up when the two of you fight?" "It's usually Obama," replied Michelle Obama after a moment's thought! A student of Class VIII at the Elementary and Middle School in Amritsar, Manpreet (13) lost her mother during childbirth and lives with her mentally challenged father and uncles. But she does not allow that grief to cloud her ambition of becoming a teacher for street-children some day. "I want to teach children to rise above their problems through education and do some good for humanity in

the process," she told Michelle when she was asked what she aspired to become. Eleven year-old Apreet Buttar, a class VI student from Guru Harkrishan Public School in Sri Ganganagar, Rajasthan, wanted to know more about the USA. "I asked her if there is inequality among boys and girls in educational institutes in America. She said that there used to be disparity in some universities but now things had changed." Her classmate, Ankita Dhukia, wanted to know what Michelle Obama liked about her India trip. "Indian food and meeting children" was the answer!

"She waited till all the children had entered the museum and then came in. She spoke to all of us and asked our names," said Apreet. Manpreet Kaur and Ramanpreet Kaur had written a poem in Punjabi for her. "Our poem was about spreading peace and harmony in the world," said aspiring doctor Ramanpreet. Manpreet wanted to know when Barack and Michelle would come to the Golden Temple and the First Lady promised her, "the next time".

"Thanks to the US Embassy, these girls could meet someone like Michelle Obama. It was a great experience," commented Harpal Singh, Chairman of *Nanhi Chhaan*.

WHERE THE MIND IS WITHOUT FEAR Bhai Jawahir Singh's Many Splendoured Life



*B*hai Jawahir Singh Kapur was born in Amritsar in 1858. After passing through a successful school career, he entered service of the Sind-Punjab and Delhi Railway Company, Accounts Department, in 1876. In 1882 he attended the Law class of the Punjab University and in January 1886, he entered the Manager's office of the North-Western Railway. Making steady progress he eventually rose to position of Superintendent of the office, with more than 30 years' service to his credit. However, it is his great, and largely unsung, contribution to his own community that is recalled in this monograph, his views on Arya Samaj machinations and wily moves of the Indian National Congress, but mainly his promotion of the Chief Khalsa Diwan and foundation of the Khalsa College, Amritsar.

During all his years of service Bhai Jawahir Singh, a man of untiring energy and zeal, found time to devote himself to the moral and educational interests of his fellow-countrymen. In 1883 he was one of the promoters of the D.A.V. College, but shortly afterwards, he discovered that this was a mistake and at the request of his Sikh friends (notably Sardar Bikram Singh Ahluwalia of Jullundur and Sardar Sir Attar Singh of Bhadaur), who saw how valuable the services of such a man would be to their own community, he severed his connection with the Arya Samaj. Ever since then, he devoted himself heart and soul to the cause of his co-religionists, using without stint both his abilities and his leisure time to improve the educational and social status of his Sikh brethren.

In 1885 Bhai Jawahir Singh was appointed a Fellow of the *Anjuman-i-Punjab* in recognition of his services to Sikh literature and education. He appeared before the Public Services Commission on 21 December 1886, for his evidence which was published in extensor in the *Civil and Military Gazette* of 24 December 1886.

In December 1885, Bhai Jawahir Singh preferred his claims to the *Guddi* (Head Priestship) of the Golden Temple, Amritsar, to which post he was entitled. In this connection the following Editorial note from the *Tribune*, dated 12 December 1885, may be quoted:

“We are informed that among the candidates for the post is Bhai Jawahir Singh, grandson of late Bhai Mohar Singh, Granthi. This gentleman knows English, Persian and Sanskrit and is well up in Sikh literature. He can teach the Granth efficiently and is well-known among the whole educated Sikh community, holding an important office in Siri Guru Singh Sabha, Lahore. He is of gentle disposition, very modest and polite and likely to render real service if installed into the post. We press his claims strongly before the Committee.”

Another Editorial from the *Civil and Military Gazette*, dated 17th December 1886, is also quoted :

“The Head Granthship of the Golden Temple at Amritsar is still undecided, though the contest seems now to have narrowed down to two men: Bhai Harnam Singh and Bhai Jawahir Singh.”

Of the eight members of the General Committee of the Management of the Golden Temple who sat to decide the question, three members (who alone held honorific titles from Government) Sardar Attar Singh, C.I.E of Bhadaur, Sardar Jagat Singh, C.I.E. of Sangrur and Sardar Ajit Singh, C.I.E. of Attari, voted in favour of Bhai Jawahir Singh. In their long judgment these Sardars stated :

“Were the case to be decided merely on grounds of *Chela rights* and *Custom*, Bhai Jawahir Singh’s claims must be held

stronger than those of the other five candidates. But the Sikh religion also gives preference to the good moral character and abilities to merely outward relations in the selection of *Guddi Nashins*. We are to look closely into the internal lives of these candidates to find out if there is any one among them qualified to fill the vacant post. It is satisfactory to know that as the claims of Bhai Jawahir Singh appear stronger



Khalsa College Amritsar.

than others he is likewise superior in qualifications and merits. A perusal of his certificates will readily show that he possesses all the qualifications required of a Head Granthi of the Golden Temple. He is smart in Gurmukhi literature and well-versed in the Persian and Sanskrit languages. He knows English too and will therefore be useful in case any European official when paying a visit to the Temple desires to learn the contents of the Sikh Scriptures. He bears an excellent

character as is certified to by many eminent authorities. Bhai Kharak Singh objects that these certificates “are obtained only from the officers under whom Bhai Jawahir Singh has worked.” That is no objection at all! Bhai Harnam Singh raises an objection to the effect that Bhai Jawahir Singh’s certificates are obtained from Europeans only and not from Natives. That is wrong too! The Raja-dhi-Raj of Shahpura, Ajmere District, who granted him an excellent certificate, is not a European but a Native Prince. Besides this we think that certificates of European officers are often more trustworthy than those of interested Natives. Mr. M. Macaulife, C.S., the Divisional Judge of Ferozepur, who knows much of Gurmukhi literature thus wrote of Bhai Jawahir Singh:

Bhai Jawahir Singh, however, lost his claim and the rival candidate Bhai Harnam Singh succeeded on 27 November 1886. Long before this decision, the *Lahore Patrika* of 12 December 1885, in a long article had written :

“We are, however, sorry to learn that where merit and abilities ought to have carried the day, money is being employed to secure the sacred office of a spiritual teacher of the people for some ignorant and self-interested relative of the deceased Mohant.”

Shortly afterwards (in 1888) he did not hesitate to incur the pleasure of certain of his educated Sikh friends by his outspoken warnings to the community to abstain from any expression of sympathy with the so-called *Indian National Congress*.

The distinctive magnificence of Khalsa College Amritsar as is seen in this view of the central dome.

The agitation raised by the *Indian National Congress* was another matter in which Bhai Jawahir Singh played his part well. He had already suffered in Maharaja Duleep Singh’s affair, but was bold enough to exhort his co-religionists to keep themselves aloof from the Congress and its political agitation. In this matter he incurred the displeasure of even some of his educated Sikh friends. He commenced his work in this direction in 1888. The following extract from the Proceedings of the Executive Committee of Siri Guru Singh Sabha, Lahore, dated 13th September 1888, may be literally translated :

“Bhai Jawahir Singh moved that, from the Sikh community, there should be, for many reasons,

no expression of sympathy with the so-called *Indian National Congress* whose first, second and third annual gatherings have already been held at Bombay, Calcutta and Madras, in the Christmas vacations of 1885, 1886 and 1887, respectively, whose fourth annual gathering is proposed to be held next December at Allahabad and whose fifth gathering is expected in the following December at Lahore. It has also been made the subject matter of constant agitation in public prints. He strongly urged that this Sabha should at once adopt necessary and adequate means to warn the Sikhs in this matter. The Khalsa Diwan and all other Sikh Societies whether within or without the Punjab should be communicated with in order to make them understand our views about the Congress. The proposal was seconded by Bhai Sunder Singh and unanimously accepted by the Committee.”

“I know that besides possessing an acquaintance with English he is an accomplished Gurmukhi Scholar, possesses great influence among the Sikhs, is a very loyal subject, a young man of high character and a fluent and practised public speaker.

“The nature and untruthfulness of such objections which the rival candidates have set forth against the nomination of Bhai Jawahir Singh go to prove indirectly that he is a good man, for none has been able either to eradicate his claims, spot his character, or question his abilities, and we are therefore of opinion that Bhai Jawahir Singh Khatri, Chela of Bhai Bisakha Singh, Chela of Bhai Jussa Singh Granthi, be appointed to the post of the Granthi of the Golden Temple at Amritsar, lately vacated by the death of the late Bhai Jawahir Singh, Saini Jat.”

Another instance of Bhai Jawahir Singh's fearlessness and loyalty to his convictions is shown by his public rebuke to the Arya Samaj, on account of their uncalled-for attacks on the two Chief Gurus of the Sikhs.

On the 11th Anniversary of the Arya Samaj held on 25 November 1888, Pundit Guru Dutt, made certain uncalled for attacks on Guru Nanak and Guru Govind Singh which created a commotion in Lahore and other places. In defence a public meeting was organised and convened by Bhai Jawahir Singh in the premises of Baoli Sahib, Dabbi Bazar, Lahore, on 2 December 1888, in which he delivered a lecture against the attitude of the Arya Samaj :

"I exceedingly regret that the Arya Samaj has adopted this policy. What good do they hope to derive by putting such insulting words in the mouth of a graduate and compelling us to complain of them publicly ? I have had special relations with Pundit Daya Nand Saraswati on which account he was very kind to me and he used to place his reliance in me. His letters to me which are yet in my possession bear testimony to this. But personal considerations have given way to national interests and compelled me to speak in this gathering. If such things are said as the Aryas do not expect from me they should thank themselves for it, as it is due to their own improper proceedings that I and my friends here are obliged to make a reply to their attacks. Equity does not permit us to let the Founder of the Arya Samaj to be exalted at the expense of the Sikh Gurus."

This speech at a public meeting and the exposure of the policy of the Arya Samaj made the Samajists bitter against Bhai Jawahir Singh. The Bhai then published three books on the Arya Samaj and sent copies thereof to the Maharana of Oodeypur who was regarded as the head of all the Arya Samajes in India.

In 1889, he published several books of which two, "The Poverty of India", and "Thoughts on Duty", were favourably reviewed by English newspapers.

The following is a review by the *Homeward Mail*, dated 26 November 1889.

"The treatise in Urdu on the *Poverty of India* which has recently been published at Lahore by Bhai Jawahir Singh is the expansion of a lecture delivered last November to the Sikh community of that city. It is a serious and well reasoned argument based on solid facts, temperately surveyed and supplemented by prudent deductions which point the ways to the desired remedies. He has had the wisdom to see and



Students in front of the main building.

the boldness to declare that the remedy for much that is amiss, rests in the hands of the people of India themselves. He points out that all a people can ask of a Government is to allow a fair field for the enterprise of the inhabitants and that the British Government in India substantially secures that common right. He therefore counsels his countrymen to take advantage of the facilities they possess, by combining together in the formation of trading companies the capital for which, he points out, can readily be found by diverting to useful purposes, the money now squandered in foolish display, in the support of idle beggars and in the construction of useless buildings for ostentation. He tells his countrymen that the English secured their present eminence

by hard thought and hard work and Indians must rise to wealth by the same means.”

“In the course of his long treatise he argues many topics such as Currency, the Rate of Exchange, the Civil Service, Home Charges, &c., on some of which, we think, that extended enquiry will modify his views; but his main thesis is undoubtedly sound, and we are glad that an Indian has at last had the manliness to lay the matter clearly before his compatriots. He makes an appeal specially to the Sikh community and we earnestly hope that they will hearken to his words of wisdom. If the Sikhs will now seriously cultivate their minds as they have hitherto cultivated their martial qualities they will soon rise to an important and commanding position in India and according to their own prophecy extend their influence over Western Nations.”

The following is a Review by the *Homeward Mail*, dated 16 November 1889 :

“A really learned and prudent exposition of Sikh doctrine has been this year made by an earnest disciple (Bhai Jawahir Singh), which has been published for general information by the Society before whom it was laid. It is written in Urdu with numerous citations from the sacred books of the Sikhs written in Punjabi, which attests throughout the writer’s command of the literature he essays to expound. Unfortunately there are very few people who make the Punjabi language a serious study, and this has induced the author to supplement his citation from the sacred canon with a running commentary in Urdu.”

“He begins his book with a discussion of the attributes of the Deity as generally acknowledged and show how a belief and reliance on those attributes is inculcated in the Sikh Scriptures. He then tells the Sikh confession of faith and the expansions and explanations of that confession by the great masters of the faith. In the course of this it is incidentally shown that the adoration paid to the ‘Guru’ which Europeans generally ascribe to the early teachers of Sikhism is really intended for the Deity himself, he being the Sat Guru or ‘true Guru.’ It is in fact an expression used authentically to the Hindu use of the word Guru. The Hindus pay extravagant reverence to the private teacher, or Guru, who imparts to them the sacred mantra, or charm which is to console them in life and be their passport to future bliss. The adoration offered to those pampered creatures differed little from that offered to the Creator. It was the object of the Sikh teachers to point out that the ‘true Guru’ was the Deity himself, not that the true Guru was the head of the Sikh fraternity—and those among the Hindus were imposters. The author shows throughout

that Sikhism is an intellectual form of faith deserving the heartfelt devotion of its disciples, and the respect of mankind. In doing this he has done a good work, and is materially assisting in giving the Sikhs the high position they deserve both in India and the world”.

Colonel W.A.J. Wallace, R.E., Director, N.W. Railway tried several poets to prepare a chronogram in Persian to engrave it on a golden lock required at the opening ceremony of the Lansdowne Bridge over the Indus at Sukkur by Lord Reay, Governor of Bombay. Of all chronograms that prepared by Bhai Jawahir Singh was approved and accepted, and on 15 February 1889 he got a note which ran as follows : “Bhai Jawahir Singh, allow me to congratulate you as the best poet of all that we tried”.

Bhai Jawahir Singh availed himself of several opportunities in which he approached the Government with Addresses on behalf of the Sikh community.

“An event of considerable significance occurred at Lahore last November which appears inclined to slumber unobserved until its results force themselves on general attention. The event to which allusion is made is the presentation of the Farewell Address to Lord Dufferin by a Deputation from the Khalsa Diwan of the Punjab. This powerful Body represents the Sikh community of India, and both as a religion and as a nation. the gist of their demand is that they be no longer confounded with Hindus but treated in all respects as a separate community. They desire proper supply of village schools and that the language of the Punjab should be the basis of education, with due provision for the subsequent acquisition of English and high Scholarship. A fair proportion of official and military appointments is asked for Sikhs suited to fill them, and it is not unreasonably maintained that the natives of this large Province should have the lion’s share of their own loaves and fishes.”

He had similarly addressed Sir James Lyall five years before. “But it is very unfortunate for them (Sikhs) that they did not realise the full benefit of education and enlightenment which the Government provided for all classes of its subjects, one of the reasons being that the majority of them lived far from centres of education, and that primary education was not imparted through their mother-tongue. In other parts of India the vernaculars of the respective provinces are used as the media of instruction, but here in the Punjab the mother-tongue of the people is not sufficiently encouraged, and consequently the education of the masses is in a backward state.”

Bhai Jawahir Singh acted as a Sikh Secretary to the Committee of Reception to Field Marshal Lord Roberts at Lahore in December 1892. In April 1899 Bhai Jawahir Singh read the Khalsa Diwan address to Lord Curzon in the Government House, Lahore, in which the Government was asked to encourage publication of the new translation in English of the Sikh Scriptures.

Bhai Jawahir Singh was one of the original promoters of the Khalsa College. Article 16 of the Fundamental Rules of the Khalsa College records his name as the *first* among the original promoters of the institution.

Khalsa College, Amritsar

Bhai Jawahir Singh's great work in connection with the establishment of a National College for the Sikhs is noteworthy. He, in conjunction with two other Sikh gentlemen, was one of the original promoters of the scheme. After years of hard work and in the face of much opposition and intrigue, the funds were collected for the erection of the present magnificent College Boarding Houses, and he was fitly elected Honorary Secretary of the Khalsa College Council in December 1892 – a position which he held up to December 1906. His long and arduous services, given gratuitously for the benefit of his National Institution, won him appreciation of the highest officials and educational authorities in the Punjab, and whatever other causes of discord may exist among themselves, the Sikhs cannot but be unanimous in admitting that they owe him a great debt of gratitude for his endeavours to bring the advantages of education within the reach of all classes of their community.

He was considered as "Life and soul of the Khalsa Diwan" of which he was Chief Secretary and the Vice-President for several years, and one of its original promoters. The Diwan was established in 1883 and registered under Act XXI of 1860 in the year 1892. Among its patrons were Lords Roberts and White, Sir James Lyall, Sir Dennis FitzPatrick and Sir Macworth Young.

As the *Simla News* recorded in its editorial of 1 October 1890, we may say once for all that the movement originated with Sir Attar Singh of Bhadaur and Sardars Jawahir Singh and Gurmukh Singh. The future locality for this institution is now under consideration of Government."

At the annual meeting of the Khalsa College Council held on 6 March 1897 Bhai Jawahir Singh had asked the Council to accept his resignation and to appoint another person in his place, he having held the office for about five years. The resignation was not accepted.

"Sardar Dharm Singh suggested that since the Secretary's work was very important and laborious the Council may request the present Secretary to continue to act in his office. On this almost all the members present spoke with one voice and compelled the Secretary to withdraw his resignation. The President (Sir William H. Rattigan) also spoke favourably on the satisfactory way in which the present Secretary had done his work and expressed his hope that the Secretary will comply with the wishes of the Council and withdraw his resignation." Bhai Jawahir Singh then withdrew his resignation.

Sir William Battigan, the Life-President of the Khalsa College Council, wrote to Bhai Jawahir Singh from Otterburn Tower, Otterburn, on 30 August 1899 :



"I would thank you personally for the valuable help you have at all times given me. You have laboured, as I know, in the good cause from high patriotic motives, and I trust your services will not be lightly forgotten".

Bhai Jawahir Singh worked for about ten years as Honorary Secretary to the Khalsa College Council, but, as was characteristic of his life, and for well more than a century thereafter, his modesty was his talisman. Even his portrait did not feature in the Khalsa College, leaving it to his great grandson, Pushpindar Singh, to present this to the institution in November 2010 (seen above with Dr. Daljit Singh, the present Principal of Khalsa College Amritsar.)

Sidharth on Barahmasa

A conversation with Sushma Bahl

Your work over the last many years has been centered around the theme of Barahmasa. Could you please tell us a bit about the essence of Barahmasa and what it means to you? How did your interest in this subject begin and when?

For centuries, poets all over the world have been writing about the rhythmic changes and evolving patterns of the seasons. Besides our own literary masters, we find poets across the Orient from Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Thailand, China and the Zen Masters, attempting to describe in words, the constantly evolving seasons and the cosmological changes. For me however, 'Barahmaha' found its true meaning only around the 16th century, when it began to be seen as a key to self awareness, to Nirvana in the preaching of saints and gurus as they recreating the magic of the seasons in words. My search in this domain began around....when.....I attempt to portray it at various levels and in different forms through my art and imagination. To me, human awareness, human consciousness changes with seasons...it finds its own as the season evolves ... through ,my work, I search for that elusive peace, the awakening...a state where one is at peace with one's environment and with ones own self...a state where there is no joy...no pain...no anger...no hatred...no love...a state where one is free of 'self'...the 'Chait awastha'...A state of quiet acceptance and awareness.

Yes, the beauty and meditative essence of your work is fairly prominent. But I find a marked contrast in its omission of sagas of love that are at the centre of much of early Indian literature on the theme in classical texts such as Kalidasa's Ritusamhar or Jaidev's Geet Govind. How would you explain that?

A soul filled with devotion, can see love all around, sharing this boundless love, beyond the human.. Omnipresent. To love the self is the state of "Chayet" the awakening. In this awareness of self ,where is the dichotomy? The great poets, abundant, overflowing, perceive their beloved And immersed in that passion create sublime works. Sometimes becoming the lover sometimes exalting the beloved. Their symbols and

metaphors are of this world, the language of expression is of the people. There is not much difference. Only the answer varies, metaphors are different .The journey is the same on the path to realisation.

What I find central to much of your work is also your use of hand made materials specially the paper, canvas and mineral or vegetable pigments. It seems integral to your work ethos. Did your interest in the subject prompt the use of organic materials or was it your fascination and expertise in making your own colours and material that fuelled your interest in the theme?

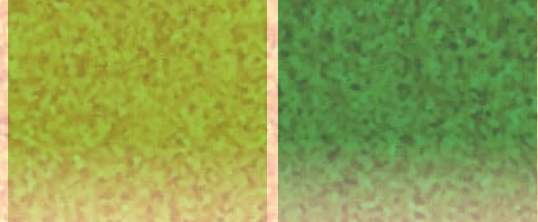
You have rightly said that I mostly use handmade materials and have been doing so since my early years .I have learned that to seek colours from nature is a meditative exercise in itself.

Nature is copious in its bounty. To take from nature what it so generously offers, to assimilate its richness and represent it via the medium of colours derived from it has been my artistic endeavor. The images and metaphors that I use originate form natural life forms. When an understanding of a colour and its source is attained, a bond ,an attachment to it is formed. It cannot then be disparaged or unjustly dealt with. To me ,art is an expression of peace and tranquility

While working on this theme of "Barah-Maha", it has been my aspiration to portray the life forms distinctive to each season – be it birds or flowers or indeed the whole world and it's changing landscape, the experiences and ebb and flow of life.In the rendition of each season, I have tried to source the colours from the flora and fauna peculiar to that time of the year and like an Ayurvedic doctor, perceive and gain awareness of their essence and transmute them pictorially.

Do you see any link or connectivity between your earlier work and the Barahmasa series? If so, what?

One grows in years, times change and awareness waxes and wanes. When one is constantly working through a medium, the medium itself becomes a guiding force. This has been my experience.



From embellishing stately homes in my early years to depiction of the serene Gurus, portraying the calmness of Buddha in Thangka paintings, then onto the maternal softness of Madonna. In my paintings, the human element is represented sometimes as standing solitary in a void, or part of a queue on a bus-stop, as a child playing hopscotch, skipping, dancing, bounding, playing cosmological games, Lively enduring forms or sometimes as a lifeless entity, chaos, terrorism- these are all part of my environment. To gain deeper awareness of this shifting worldscape, the "Barah Maha" series is crucial, there is a single unifying thread between previous and In my entire body of work- being one with nature –the search for peace and realization.


And what does Barahmasa mean to you? How would you like to describe its Rooh Rung Roop Rachna as reflected in your work?

For me, 'Barahmaha' has been a journey. One of seeing things in my environment that otherwise I may not have done, of comprehending and understanding the play of each season on nature...on life...my environment...and, myself. Its been a journey of self discovery...of knowing that just like that flower blooming in the spring, I am blooming too...in my full pristine glory today. Someday, I too shall produce seeds that would, perhaps, lay down the path of the seasons to come. I also see a tiny leaf falling off a tree, with the knowledge that someday, I too will fall...

I find your figuration more universal and less specific. Often located amidst natural surroundings in a sort of trance and dressed in long flowing robes. It looks amazing though always appears nose less. What is the take behind that?

History has witnessed much turbulence – enmity, violence, greed, hatred- man against man and against nature. It is an ongoing battle. To counteract these forces, man has tried to create countless devices to increase his comforts and make his surroundings pleasant- elegant homes, comfortable furniture, a variety of apparel, musical equipment, computers, ease giving drugs, aeroplanes and cars etc. Despite this, human nature being what it is, creates uncomfortable situations and tries to balance it by surrounding itself with a harmonious environment. In actuality, the only wish is for peace and survival.

My paintings deal with this most basic human aspiration. To portray serenity and the endurance of



the human spirit, at the same time to convey harmony with nature and create this awareness is my wish. Maybe, at a subconscious level, this is how I would like the world to be.

It is often seen that the ancient statues in rock temples have broken noses—maybe the ravages of nature and time or the result of vandalism. In life, man pokes his nose where it does not belong and is disfigured in the process, he cuts off his nose to spite his face or sometimes seeks to disfigure others in the same manner. Metaphorically speaking the injury caused is to the ego, to human arrogance. Keeping all these connotations in mind, I decided to do away with painting it altogether.

My work portrays the tranquil being, at one with his surroundings, assimilating his environment- swaying with the trees and undulating with the grass. Where there is human presence it is with complete egolessness. There is only one melody- a yearning for harmony.

And what is next on the horizon for you? Do you feel you have reached your peak? In what direction you see your work going in the next few years?

One is always standing at the peak of the present. From this vantage point, there is always another peak visible, a mountain that the human mind aspires to scale and which is seldom attainable because that lofty summit is beyond the scale of human endeavour

Nobody can foretell the future. What will be is unknown – one can only hope and yearn.

As in a mountain trek, traversing an unknown path, one chances suddenly upon a babbling brook, or a tranquil pond, a constricting track or open spaces, a snarling animal or placid herds, sometimes cooling showers or unrelenting sun.

The traveler progresses towards his destination, at least he knows where his journey ends, but in my work, nothing is certain. I only wish for my quest to proceed tirelessly and that I continue to create. Other than this,

I know nothing.

Sidharth has studied Fresco painting techniques from local artisans in Punjab; Tibetan thangka painting, from the Tibetan Monks in Dharamshala; has a Diploma in painting from college of art Chandigarh and has learnt Glass blowing in Oreforsh, Sweden along with techniques of Madhubani paintings and Kashmir paper Mache crafts from master crafts persons.

PAINTINGS by SidHARTH ON BARAHMASA



AASUN (September-October)
Asan au pira sadhan jhur mui

It's the month of Asan
O Master come to me
I waste and shall die.
If the Master wills,
I shall meet Him.
If He wills not,
In a deep well shall I be lost.

I strayed on to the paths of falsehood
And the Master forsook me.
Age hath greyed my locks
I have left many winters behind.
But the fires of hell still lie ahead.
Whither shall I turn?

The bough remaineth ever green
For the sap that moveth within day and night,
Night and day, renewth life.
If the name of the Lord courseth in thy veins,
Life and hope will forever be green.
That which cooketh best.

It is Asan, says Nanak,
It is trysting time. O Lord,
And we have waited long.

AASUN





KATAKE

KATAKE (October-November)

Katak kirat paiya jo prabh bhaia

**In the month of Katak
Will I get my due.
What pleases the Lord
Is all I merit.**

**The lamp of wisdom burneth
steadily**

**If the oil that feeds it
Be reality.**

**If the oil that feeds the lamp
Be love,**

**The beloved will meet the Lord
and be fulfilled.**

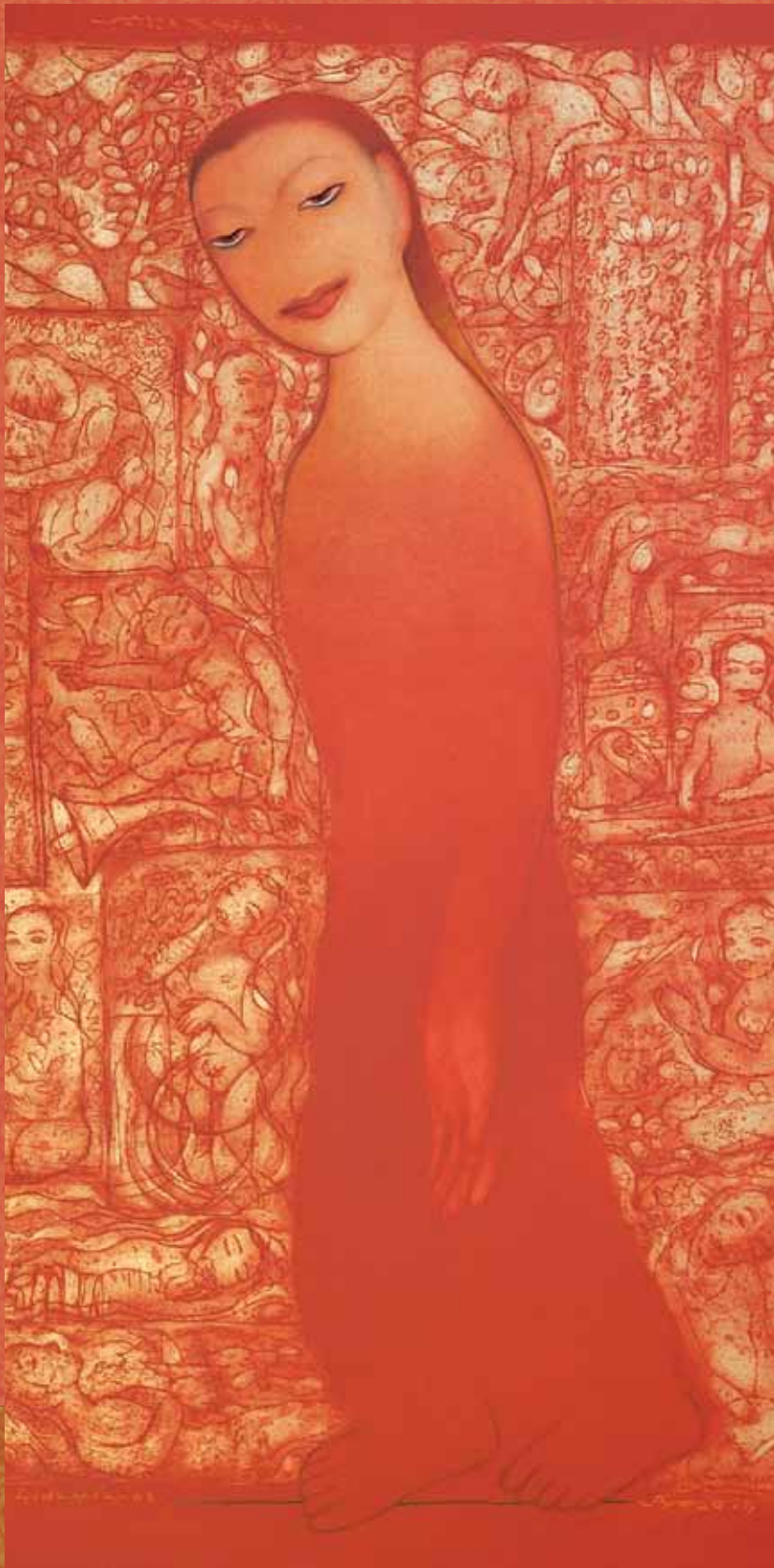
**Full of faults, she dies not
Nor gains release
It's death after virtuous life.
That doth the Lord please.**

**Those who are granted the
worship of Thy name
Merge in Thee, for Thou art then,
Their aim and end in life.**

**Nanak says: Lord, till Thou grant
vision**

**And burst the bonds of
superstition,**

**One watch of day will drag on
like half a year.**



MAGHAR

MAGHAR (November-December)

Maghar mah bhala hari gun ank samave

**The month of Maghar is bliss
For her who is lost in the Lord.
She singeth songs of joy and fulfilment.
Why not love the Lord who is eternal?**

**He who is eternal, wise, omniscient is
also the master of destiny.
The world is agitated because it hath lost
faith in Him.
She that hath knowledge and
contemplates
Loses herself in Him.
She loveth the Lord, the Lord loveth her.**

**In song and dance and verse, let it be the
name of Lord Rama
And sorrows will fly away.
Nanak says, only she is loved by her Lord
Who prayeth, not only with her lips
But worships Him with her soul.**

The Joy of Serving

I have a fascination for Gurdwaras. I had my early education in a Khalsa school attached to a Gurdwara. Though I moved to another school later, my childhood attachment with Gurdwaras did not lessen. Even today, I make it a point to visit a Gurdwara, whenever possible. Recently, I went to a Gurdwara in Noida, near the national Capital. There was a small congregation, and after the prayers the Granthi called for volunteers to help in the kitchen where langar was being prepared. My husband suggested we too should chip in.

We went to the kitchen area at the rear of the Gurdwara and mingled with teams of volunteers; some making dough, other rolling chapattis and still others baking chapattis on hot iron plates. I joined the band of women rolling chapattis while my husband, with whatever skills he could marshal, joined the volunteers baking chapattis. Anyway, his role was restricted to stacking up the cooked chapattis in a wicker basket. I must say, he acted his part well!

In due course, the appetising flavour of the dal being cooked by the regular volunteers, called sewadars, in a corner permeated the entire kitchen. The chapattis that came out of our assembly line of volunteers were not bad either. Meals ready, it was time to partake of the langar: an austere, tasty meal, chiefly because it was meant to be a sort of holy communion, a Prasad, and not food per se.

All this seems to have been inspired by the basic tenets of Sikhism, propounded by its founder, Guru Nanak Dev. His dictum, *kirat karo, wand chhako, naam japo*, that is to say, earn your bread with hard labour, share it with other unfortunate beings, and sing the praise of God, is the chief inspiration behind the langar served at several Gurdwaras across India throughout the year. The devotion of volunteers running the kitchen should be seen to be believed. Their enthusiasm and joy seem to be boundless.

It is the bliss of serving and sharing that sustains them, day after day.

Suman Kapoor

The Need to Believe

It is said, "Religion did not create man, man created religion". Religion is the spontaneous and innate urge of man towards ultimate freedom from the throes of existence, it is the outer manifestation of man's hunger for the Infinite.

Every discerning man knows that if his mundane happiness increases by arithmetic progression, his unhappiness multiplies by geometrical progression. He cannot find lasting joy in material pursuits, and so gets inclined to go beyond the confines of the finite to reach out the Infinite.

He is inwardly unhappy – today at least as much as ever before. Even though modern technology has placed immense power in his hands, he still feels quite helpless – so much that he feels impelled to pray to some higher power for help. This is not so much a confession of weakness as the proof of his *belief* in some power higher than his own. Prayers seeking divine help for mundane things are only crude prayers. Brave souls do not make selfish demands from the divine. They love God and seek His love. However, weak souls as well as brave ones, affirm through their prayers, that they are *believers*.

It appears that modern man has lost faith in traditional beliefs and institutionalised religions. Yet, his enhanced materialistic pursuits have landed him into an ever-worsening predicament. Though he seems to have discarded God in Heaven, his longing for heaven has not ceased.

He still receives 'intimations of immortality'. He still wonders, 'Is there a plan behind the daisy, the hummingbird, the whale, the world?' He still inquires, 'What is the grand mystery behind things, or beyond things?'

There is no doubt that modern science has fractured man's beliefs in traditional dogmas and institutionalised religions. It has also provided him with new questions about the grand mystery. He now wonders if the universe is bounded or unbounded; whether anything exists beyond the limits of knowledge where galaxies recede faster than light. It appears, the horizon of mystery is larger, farther and faster than the horizon of knowledge. This mystery is indefinable. There is nothing at all with which it can be compared. Language is utterly inadequate to express it. Our puny mind cannot comprehend even the cosmic finitude – how can it comprehend Infinitude? Yet, it is there – very much there!



Of all the disciplines of science, physics has pushed the frontiers of knowledge more strongly than any other branch in recent times. The physicist is much ahead of his other scientific fellows in accepting the all-encompassing mystery of the universe that people refer to as God.

Einstein declared that his most awe-inspiring experience was to see and contemplate the unknown which taught him "that which is impenetrable to us really exists, manifesting itself as the highest wisdom and the most radiant beauty..."

George Davis suggested that God cannot be avoided by the common atheistic assumption that nature somehow sprang unassisted out of nothing and continues to operate without any conscious guidance.

An episode in the life of Charles Boyle, the fourth Earl of Orrery provides an interesting anecdote. He had a working model of the Solar system built in his castle. This was perfect extraordinary clockwork. There was the brass sun in the middle and smaller globes representing the various planets revolving around it and the moons of the planets revolving around them. Lord Orrery had an atheist friend who thought that the universe sprang up on its own and was automatically maintaining itself without intelligence of any kind. One day Orrery brought him over to his castle to show him his wonderful

machine. When he saw the flawless operation of the model, the atheist was struck with wonder and asked, "Where has it come from? Who made it?" Orrery simply replied, "Nobody made it. It just happened". "How could that be?" asked the atheist, "How can such intricate machinery create itself?" Orrery said, "I will tell you who made this planetary system, if you will tell me who made the infinitely bigger, more wonderful and really exquisite solar system up in the heavens".

Around three decades ago a conference was organised in London by David Bohm, a professor of theoretical physics, in which several international scientists of diverse disciplines held a dialogue with J. Krishnamurthy, a well known mystic out of the deliberations of a series of conferences of that type arose a book *Mind in Nature*. What the scientist prefers to call 'mind in nature', the mystic would call 'immanence of God'.

Science, the great iconoclast, has lately tended to approximate belief in a maker. What it has threatened are the organised religions and mind cramping dogmas. What it has reinforced is the belief in a Creator.

Guru Nanak, the founder of the Sikh faith, over half a millennium ago, made a similar approach from the pulpit of a faith. He said:

A believer does not follow one given Path or another given Byway.

His concern is Dharma alone. - SGGS p.2

Dharma, here, stands for 'Cosmic Law' its other connotations such as 'innate nature', 'righteousness', 'duty', 'virtue' 'faith' and 'social law' are all subsumed under it. We cannot see *dharma*. But St. Augustine has said, "Faith is to believe what we don't see, and the reward of this faith is to see what we believe". In the realm of the natural, seeing is the basis of believing. In the realm of the supernatural, believing is the foundation of seeing.

The Chinese sage Lao Tzu has said:

*When the highest type of men hear Tao,
They diligently practice it.*

*When the average type of men hear Tao,
They half believe it.*

*When the lowest type of men hear Tao,
They heartily laugh at it.*

So, barring the lowest type of men, everyone is a believer, or at least half-believer. In believing rests the secret of worthwhile effort and valuable exertion. Man was not made to question, but to believe and adore. Faith is the subtle chain that binds him to the Infinite.

Why is it then, one might ask, that we believe so much and experience so little? Are our heads so

bloated and our hearts so empty? When love and belief combine, spiritual experiences begin to sprout. Believing is the gateway to spiritual ascent, and love is the unerring guide. Belief is above religious truth. It is a necessary precondition for the awakening of higher states of consciousness. Guru Nanak affirmed this when he said:

Believing causes mind to awaken to higher consciousness,

The knowledge of all spheres and realms it brings.

One who believes, never is slapped on the face,

No longer is he required to accompany the Messenger of Death. -SGGS p.2

Guru Angad Dev, the second Sikh Guru, assured us further:

All spiritual praxis, contemplation and austerity included,

Emerge out of believing.

All other activities are of no use - SGGS p. 954

Those who follow the path of faith do so not from any visionary plan. They do so from an innate irresistible impulsion pursued by them till the day they are able to attain their goal of getting fully in tune with the Infinite.

Such persons are endowed with high spiritual sensitivity. They can deliberately sacrifice their mundane attainments at the altar of their ideal.

No one can find happiness by hankering after it. Elusive like the blowing wind is vain, glorious and mundane accomplishment. A Napoleon flounders, a Kaiser is humbled, a Hitler commits suicide. Human wants have no value. There undoubtedly is some unknown power on whose sufferance we exist and function and survive – and without whose assent we cannot move even a step. So we consciously, or even in spite of ourselves, pray to this Power for help and strength. And we believe that we will be heard.

Pascal said, "It is natural for the mind to believe and for the will to love; so that, for want of true objects, they may attach themselves to false". Let us, then, beware of belief in counterfeit stuff, for the Bhagavat Gita says :

Man, is made of his belief

As he believes, so he is.

How wonderful it is then that every morning and evening, in every Sikh gurdwara, the Lord is petitioned for the gift, *inter alia*, of belief (*visah*) and trust (*bharosa*) for every Sikh individually, and for the whole Sikh community collectively.

Dr J. S. Neki

Sikh-Sufi Connection

That Hindu-Sikh mixings stem from the times of the first Guru and continue till today is beyond question. The connections remain familial, cultural as well as philosophical.

This remains true even though ten generations of Guru-Founders of Sikhi rejected much of Hindu religious practice and heritage. To an extent this was inevitable. Hindu culture even today defines the larger framework of the Indian subcontinent's population, its history and mythology. Though a constant thorn in one's side, it is not surprising then to find reputable Hindu scholars straining mightily to deny any original strands of thought in Sikh ideology so as to claim it as a refined offshoot of Hindu belief.

But some years ago, I was caught absolutely off balance when a Muslim in the audience loudly proclaimed that Guru Nanak, the founder of Sikhi, was a most wonderful exponent of Sufi Islam.

Sufis are Muslims and yet their place within Islam has always been insecure. Sufis are perhaps the mystical face of Islam.

History is not so clear but Ali, the son-in-law of Prophet Mohammed, may have been the one who grasped the need for mysticism and spiritualism in Islam and thus founded the movement that is now called Sufism. But Sufi perspective found its true colours and responsive soil in Persia where it grew under the light of great Sufi poets and teachers like Rumi, Jami, Hafez and others. Senai, perhaps one of the greatest Sufi teachers, was born in Afghanistan; thus along with trade and Muslim



This is the darbaar at the main gurdwara of Peshawar in the north-west frontier of Pakistan (taken in 2010).

warriors Sufism also entered India. Readers should note that in recent years Rumi's writings have captured the imagination of young Western readers in the multitudes.

Sufism's arrival and advent in India remains obscure but its spirit found a ready congruence in Vedanta and in the Indian "Sant tradition." The most successful blending of the Indo-Aryan Snatana-Dharma and the Arabic-Persian Islamic mysticism is a peculiarly Indian product that germinated and flowered in Sind and Punjab.

Keep in mind that Multan was the bridge between greater Punjab and Sind until 1947, so Punjab has produced some notable Sufis, such as Bullay Shah and Mian Bahu. Sufi influence extended as far as Kashmir. In time undivided Punjab (pre-1947) became the land of Sikhs and their Gurus and Sufis are less visible in that part of the world. Even though Sikhi came into regular and violent conflict with the Islamic rulers of state, there was never any conflict between Sikhi and Sufi-Islam. Sind, too,

came under Sikh influence and even today Sindhis revere Guru Nank's message but it remained relatively free of religious orthodoxy and Hindu-Muslim conflict and thus retained much more of Sufi influence that is clearly seen even today.

What Sufism brought to India was its core teaching of secularism and a simple message of the oneness of God. A pre-eminent exponent of Sufism in India was Sheikh Farid (1173-1265] who lived a full three centuries before Nanak, the Founder of Sikhism. Sheikh Farid (alt. Fareed) is rightly celebrated as the first poet of modern Punjabi. He wrote exclusively in Multani Punjabi, not in Arabic or Persian, the languages favoured by Quranic scholars. His base was in Pak-Pattan in Punjab.

Bhai Gurdas tells us that Guru Nanak and Mardana stayed with Sheikh Bahlol, a renowned Sufi of the time on their travels in Baghdad and engaged in interfaith dialogue.

There is a satisfying congruence between Sikh and Sufi perspectives. A fundamental basis of Sufism is that Truth is one. The alphanumeric *Ik-Oankar* constructed by Guru Nanak posits a similar Oneness.

To interested readers I would recommend a 1973 monograph in English published by Punjabi University "Baba Sheikh Farid - His life and Teachings."

Muslim Sufi mysticism differs markedly from what we find in Islamic orthodoxy. History tells us orthodox Islam has often bred intolerance, forced conversions, religious wars, hatred, discrimination, even banning of music, dance and musical instruments in religion. Sufi Islam, on the other hand celebrates religious reality as one of joy of life and worship. Given the culture of Punjab this has particularly resonated very successfully in Punjabi culture and its people.

Like Sufi practice, Sikh worship, too, revolves around music. Except for minor exceptions, the major body of the Guru Granth is set to the classical modality of Indian musicology.

The Fifth Nanak, Guru Arjan Dev, while compiling the Adi Granth included in it 112 *shalokas* (couplets) and 4 *shabads* (hymns) by Baba Farid. This is a rare recognition of the teachings of Farid who sparkled as a bright star in the age of dreadful

despotism, degrading social iniquity and debasing theological bigotry.

This is not to deny that significant differences in Sikh and Muslim fundamentals in belief and practice continue to exist.

Now perhaps the only available source of Farid's awesome poetry remains the Sikh scripture - Guru Granth.

Dana Wilde reminds us: "...all the mystical traditions seek to reveal is that the cosmos is a unified whole, one, or One. The music of poetry and the images and metaphors of poetry intoxicate the body and mind—together they change the state of outer and inner awareness of the hearer. Poetry affects the whole human being. It is where each person creates his own heaven or hell."

This is what I see when I encounter the poetry of the Guru Granth and of the Sufis.

But the ways of real politics are strange and no human activity is immune. Orthodox Islam, particularly in Pakistan has often denied Islamic identity to Sufis. And now there are reports of increasing violence against them by mobs that have been aroused by Muslim leaders in Karachi, Lahore and many regions of Pakistan. Many have been killed and their mosques destroyed. Evidently, the increasing Taliban activity in that country is responsible - these are Muslims who do not approve of singing and dancing in their faith.

I wonder if they are striving to recapture the times of Aurungzeb, the dedicated Muslim who ruled India in the 17th century in a time that saw the worst atrocities against Sikhs. His religious zeal took him to ban music from public places and ordered that musical instruments be buried.

Whether it is in families or in religions, the closer the kinship the more tragic is the consequence of internecine warfare. The Taliban are busy killing their own brethren in Islam.

Today I want to take note of the enduring Sikh-Sufi connection which lives in the writings of Sheikh Farid, the *keertan* of Guru Granth and in the music of such diverse artists as Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan and Rabi Sher Gill. I also want to draw your attention to the killing and targeting of Sufis in neighbouring Pakistan and elsewhere by Islamic clergy.

I.J. Singh



(C) Ritika S. Dharwal

Contemplations on Sikhism

Swami Nitya Nand (who lived till the age of 135 years) writes in his book *Guru Gyan*: “I, in the company of my Guru Swami Brahma Nanda, while on a pilgrimage tour, reached Punjab. There we met Swami Satya Nanda, Udaasi (a Hindu ascetic), who expounded Guru Nanak’s philosophy and religiosity so eloquently that Swami Brahma Nanda experienced spiritual bliss. During his visit to the Golden Temple in Amritsar his soul was so impressed that he became Guru’s devotee. After our sojourn in Punjab we went to Hardwar. One day I saw tears in his eyes, though he was healthy. When asked about it he answered, “I have sifted sand all my life. The truth dwells in the house of Guru Nanak. I have to take another birth in that house then only I will attain *mukti* (salvation). As he said that his spirit passed away.

“I too contemplate incessantly on *Wahéguru* (wonderous God) as manifested by Guru Nanak. For many years I practiced Yoga Aasnas taught by yogis, but the rapture and serenity I feel now was never attained before.”

Swami Nitya Nand used to practice Yoga in order to attain God. But he couldn’t attain him with his yogic lessons. He writes at one place that when he meditated according to the principles of Sri Guru Granth Sahib Ji he

was able to achieve God. As he remembered God as told in Gurbani, he was able to attain spiritual peace which yoga was not able to provide. He too became a follower of Guru Granth Sahib Ji which was the ultimate source of delight for him. It gave tranquility to his mind and soul.

Pearl S. Buck, Nobel Laureate, while giving her comments on the English translation of the Guru Granth Sahib (from the foreword to the English translation of Guru Granth Sahib by Gopal Singh Dardi) wrote: “I have studied the scriptures of the great religions, but I do not find elsewhere the same power of appeal to the heart and mind as I find here in these volumes. They are compact in spite of their length and are a revelation of the concept of God to the recognition and indeed the insistence upon the practical needs of the human body. There is something strangely modern about these scriptures and this puzzled me until I learned that they are in fact comparatively modern, compiled as late as the 16th century when explorers were beginning to discover the globe upon which we all live is a single entity divided only by arbitrary lines of our making. Perhaps this sense of unity is the source of power I find in these volumes. They speak to a person of any religion or of none. They speak for the human heart and the searching mind.

The hymns in Guru Granth are an expression of man's loneliness, his aspirations, his longings, his cry to God and his hunger for communication with that being. It speaks to me of life and death; of time and eternity; of temporal human body and its needs; of the mystic human soul and its longing to be fulfilled; of God and the indissoluble bond between them."

Max Arthur Macauliffe, the eminent scholar has written six books on Sikh history. He feels that there is no place to pretence and hypocritical in this religion. Alcohol, tobacco and other drugs are prohibited in it. Sikhism not only teaches kindness, love, honesty but also encourages its followers to accept all human beings as one thus diminishing all racial differences.

Teachings of Buddha and other religious were written when their founders were no more in this world. But teachings of Sikh Gurus have been written and edited by themselves and are thus found in their original forms.

Battles fought by Sikh Gurus were not against any communalism and orthodoxy but they fought for the betterment of society, to protect people from tyranny and for the upliftment of their souls.

In his book, *The Sikh Religion*, Macauliffe writes: "Unlike the scriptures of other creeds, they do not contain love stories or accounts of wars waged for selfish considerations. They contain sublime truths, the study of which cannot but elevate the reader spiritually, morally and socially. There is not the least tinge of sectarianism in them. They teach the highest and purest principle that serve to bind man to man and inspire the believer with an ambition to serve his fellow men, to sacrifice all and die for their sake."

Macauliffe deems it necessary to draw the reader's attention to another significant feature of Sikhism which distinguishes it and separates it from other philosophical and religious systems of thought:

"The Sikh religion differs as regards the authenticity of its dogmas from most other great theological systems. Many of the great teachers the world has known have not left a line of their own composition and we only know what they taught through tradition or second-hand information. If Pythagoras wrote any of tenets, his writings have not descended to us. We know the teachings of Socrates only through the writings of Plato and Xenophon. Buddha has left no written memorials of his teaching. Kungfu-tze, known to Europeans as Confucious, left no documents in which he detailed the principles of his moral and social systems. The Founder of Christianity did not reduce his doctrines to writing

and for them we are obliged to trust to the Gospels according to Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.

The Arabian Prophet did not himself reduce to writing the chapters of the Quran. They were written or compiled by his adherents and followers. But the compositions of the Sikh Gurus are preserved and we know first hand what they taught. They employed the vehicle of verse, which is generally unalterable by copyist, and we even become in time familiar with their different styles. No spurious compositions or extraneous dogmas can therefore be represented as theirs.

The author of the *Vie de Jesus* was a great admirer of Jesus Christ. Greatly impressed as he was of the spiritual message delivered by Christ and those of the Semitic thinkers that preceded him, he posed the question: "Whether great originality will again arise or the world be content to follow the paths opened by the daring creators of the ancient ages?" Bearing Sikhism in mind, Macauliffe answers the above question in the following words: "Now here is a religion totally unaffected by Semite or Christian influences. Based on the concept of the unity of God, it rejected Hindu formalities and adopted an independent ethical system, ritual, and standards, which were totally opposed to the theological beliefs of Guru Nanak's age and country. As we shall see hereafter, it would be difficult to point to a religion of greater originality or a more comprehensive ethical system."

Macauliffe continues: "Guru Nanak was not a priest either by birth or education, but a man who soared to the loftiest heights of divine emotionalism, and exalted his mental vision to an ethical ideal beyond the concept of Hinduism or Mohammadanism. It (Sikhism) prohibits idolatry, hypocrisy, caste exclusiveness, con-cremation (Satti) of widows, the immurement (confinement) of women (like Muslims), the use of wine and other intoxicants, tobacco smoking, infanticide, slander, pilgrimage to the sacred rivers and tanks of the Hindus. It inculcates loyalty, justice, impartiality, truth, honesty and all the moral and domestic virtues to holiest citizens of any country."

Bertrand Russell (Philosopher, Mathematician 1872-1970) believed that if some lucky men survive the onslaught of the third world war of atomic and hydrogen bombs, then the Sikh religion will be the only means of guiding them. When asked, isn't this religion capable of guiding mankind before the third world war? He said, 'Yes it has the capability, but the Sikhs haven't expressed the splendid doctrines of this religion, which has come into existence for the benefit of the entire mankind. This is their greatest sin and the Sikhs cannot be freed of it.'

Contributed by Colonel Harinder Singh Bedi

Preserving the 'Jooras' tradition In Sports

Following is the extract of a conversation between world renowned artist and journalist Sardar Sukhpreet Singh and Gursikh Cricket Coach, former Punjab Ranji Trophy and National player Amrik Singh Nagra.

Sukhpreet: Who inspired you to be a cricket coach? I mean who are your ideals ?

ASN: I felt motivated when I read history of our ancestors. Also I learnt a lot from Bishan Singh Bedi in particular.

Sukhpreet: Any obstacles to starting a centre in cricket ?

ASN: In the beginning yes, but not anymore. I would like to extend my thank to V.C., P.A.U. Director, Deputy Director Cricket Association and School Federation for accepting my trained players in various categories.

Sukhpreet: Many Sikh youngsters disobey religious symbols like 'Jooras' by cutting their tresses. Do you have to say something to inspire blooming players?

ASN: Because they are not motivated enough in their respected schools, academies, playing centres and their teachers whom we called 'ideals' fail to maintain discipline and decorum, they cut their 'kesh'. Names like B.S. Bedi, Monty Panesar, Navjot Singh Sidhu, Present Hockey Captain Prabhjot Singh Shooter and Olympian Raja Randhir Singh

continue to motivate and inspire us all in sport.

Sukhpreet: Do you think your profession of coaching is also your favourite hobby ?

ASN: I have no hobby except passion for cricket, it is not just passion but a religion.

Sukhpreet: Are you sure that there will be new Sikh sports stars with 'jooras'?

ASN: At P.A.U. I would say 10-12 boys from Sikh families with 'jooras' are under my training system. And three of them are blessed with natural ability and only need a platform at national and international levels. Their names are Gurjot Singh, Harkunwar Singh Makkar and Gurkaran Singh.

Sukhpreet: Any future plans ?

ASN: I think print and television media can contribute lot more if they promote people like us with limited resources and are working in remote areas. I wish to take my all trainees for tours to U.K, Australia and New Zealand where they can practise their cricket with international players.

Sukhpreet: Do you have any message for Sikhs living abroad ?

ASN: My only expectation from them is that whenever they come to Punjab, they should plan a visit to the nursery of cricket P.A.U and help us to participate at International Tournaments at junior level.



Sukhpreet: You are a school teacher, physiotherapist, father and coach. Which is the most interesting role ?

ASN: I think they all are the same with different names. When I am teaching, my student wants guidance. As a physiotherapist, my only aim is to make my trainees injury free by guiding them with



right posture. In family as a father, I have to attend to my household duties properly. As a coach, it is my job to enable students to face the competitiveness of cricket at various levels.

I would like to mention here that people from Canada, U.K. and USA had their children trained from the Nursery of Cricket Centre

and are impressed by the quality of standard and discipline we practice.

Sukhpreet: Is it a one man show or do you have any support from any organisation ?

ASN: No it is absolutely a one man show, but I always like to welcome those having the same attitude.

Sukhpreet: Anybody special you want to thank ?

ASN: I have always been indebted to my parents for their faith in me and above all for the blessings of Akalpurakh.

After reading this I hope Sikhs from all over the world will come forward to support our cause.

F a i t h





An Australian celebrates the Sikhi swaroop

'Faith' is a visual art project created by Australian artist, Daniel Connell, in collaboration with five Punjabi Sikh students currently studying in Australia.

These portraits seek to emphasise the individual and his work, honouring the essential teaching of Guru Nanak that work is central to an expression of faith. They are larger than life trying to capture the element of heroism in the subject. The works are created with an urgency reflecting a desire to establish a human connection and an empathy between artist and subject.

Constructed from multiple paper sheets and masking tape, the picture plane is interrupted, a direct reference to the experience of foreign students, reminding viewers of the documents, letters, study and holy texts that both destabilise and secure their lives. The oil paintings are vigorously and roughly executed for the same effect.



The Sikh community of Adelaide, the capital city of the State of South Australia where the works originate, have enthusiastically welcomed the drawings as a celebration of their local history and as an example of cross cultural friendship. Individuals from this community have embraced the project coming forward to participate in further portraits to expand recognition of their community.

DASTAAR BANDHI

The Why & The Wherefore



Tying the turban on Sikh youngsters at an event in New Delhi.

Just days ago, a Sikh of my acquaintance went through the ceremony of *Dastaar Bandhi* wherein a young Sikh lad dons a turban for the first time. We know, as do many of our neighbours, that a turban commonly defines a Sikh male.

The event was held in the local gurdwara and in the congregation (*sangat*) were many non-Sikh friends and neighbours of the nearly 16-year-old Hartaig Singh. In the gurdwara, they were obviously on unfamiliar territory; it fell on me to put the rite in some context by providing information that might be helpful.

The name 'Hartaig,' caught my attention; literally, as the sword of God that cleaves ignorance from knowledge, justice from injustice, as in one line from many in *gurbani*, "*Gur gyan kharag lae maaray*" (*Guru Granth*, page 983). One finds similar references to the sword of divine knowledge in both the Old and New Testaments.

First there was the completion of a sequential reading by the family of the entire *Guru Granth* – the 1430 pages. That is the core of most Sikh religious

observances anywhere and anytime. Then we all enjoyed the singing of the liturgy by professionals, the last hymn by Hartaig's sister, Sahiba Kaur, a remarkably accomplished vocalist absolutely at home with the intricacies of a *parhtaal*.

My brief explanation came between Sahiba's melodious rendering and the tying of the turban. Hartaig had identified his favorite uncle, Anoop Singh, and his style of turban. So Anoop Singh tied the turban on Hartaig's head.

It was very special day for Hartaig Singh: a young lad who was now joining the ranks of young men.

All over the world and throughout time and history, people – including the most primitive and tribal – from the Native Americans (and they are not primitive) to those who assuredly see themselves as uniquely suited to the times today—recognise the significance when a child is no longer that but surely on his or her path to adult responsibility. So, such celebrations of coming of age are common to all communities and societies -- religious or non-religious.

Now his friends and family were taking note and celebrating Hartaig's transformation by tying a turban on his head. This head covering speaks of many a milestone in the journey of a Sikh and Hartaig's connection to an old tradition in the Indian culture, but with a uniquely singular and profound meaning in Sikh practice that was bestowed to us over 300 years ago.

Head coverings are not unique to Sikhs. Keep in mind that Judaism and Christianity, two rich and historically connected traditions, value head coverings though they differ on its meaning. Present day Christianity asks that men, in order to show respect to God, remove their head coverings, while their women have historically worn some head coverings, including a veil – directed to similar reverence. Even today, the Bishop's and Cardinal's miter is a reminder of head coverings, as is the nun's habit.

On the Internet one can view and explore turbans in their many styles in different cultures through history. I look at the conventional style of turbans worn by Sikhs worldwide. There are few, only minor variations on the theme — the style in East Africa is somewhat different but only minimally so.

The Sikh turban is radically different from the turban that you see in Islamic culture, although during these days of heightened tension, the average American remains largely clueless about the difference between a Sikh and a Muslim follower of Osama bin Laden. In fact, very few Muslims wear a turban and it is of a very different style from that worn by Sikhs. The Muslim turban, rare as it is, is mostly ceremonial and usually wrapped over a *kulla*, or skullcap. It would be good to remember that not even one of the terrorists who attacked us on 9/11 wore one; in that context, a turban is perhaps worn only by Osama bin Laden himself and his chief deputy Zwahiri.

But I refer here to the urbanised Sikh turban. In the villages, Sikhs wear a more informal, rounder turban. These days I see some urbanised young people also wearing it, more so in North America than in India.

The style of the Sikh turban has perhaps changed over time. This is obvious from a perusal of old paintings and photographs of Sikhs in the 18th and 19th centuries. It is also clear that in those times as now, Sikhs always wrapped their turbans; they certainly did not prefer a preformed turban and never a hat. (These two variations seem to be making significant inroads in our practice these days.)



Indian-origin and American Sikhs in New York.

In the Indian and the Middle-Eastern cultures, history tells us that for a man of substance, a turban was a necessary accoutrement to his clothes.

Hindus, too, used to value a turban, but not anymore. The irony is that even now in the 21st century, at least when they are getting married, most high-caste Hindu males also don a turban, even if only for an hour; and then perhaps again at their death one is put on their heads. In their daily lives, one would hardly ever see a turban on a Hindu head, most would not have one in their wardrobe. They gave up that privilege and right during the Islamic domination of India and later when they came to ape the Western model of a male.

Yet, the people of Punjab have always treasured a turban and the men have always flaunted the wild colours that mark Punjabi festivals.

The turban became a fundamental historical marker in Sikh heritage when in 1699 Guru Gobind Singh declared the long unshorn hair (*kesh*) an article of faith. History tells us of the many, many Sikhs who have fought and died for their right to wear one.

Now a turban means the “*coming of age*” for a young Sikh. I look at it as the uniform of a Sikh.

We know that uniforms carry a message. A uniformed soldier, we know, has taken an oath to risk his or her own life in our service.

I am not naïve. I know that soldiers can turn bad and plunder instead of protecting us. They can break the law, erasing the line between the police and criminals.

When convicted of behaviour unbecoming the oath and uniform, society demands that he surrender his gun, badge and uniform; from them emerge his power and authority.

The son and daughter of a police officer or soldier in the army are not automatically entitled to their own uniform, badge and gun just because their parent had one. The uniform is not inherited; it must be earned. There are requirements, qualifications and intensive training.

A uniform makes a statement that is both strong and eloquent. We instinctively and intuitively draw conclusions; our expectations of that person stem from such inferences. I can safely assume that someone with a stethoscope is a health professional, just as I presume that a person in a certain sort of uniform and wearing a badge is a police officer. Rarely would there be any need to question the credentials of someone in the uniform of his or her profession.

Similarly, a man with a collar is a priest and a woman wearing a habit is a nun. This was the intention when Pope Gregory mandated a uniform for the clergy in the Roman Catholic Church. He was creating an “*Army of Christ*” in service to the church. No matter what the mission or occupation, a uniform proclaims the specialised training, discipline and dedication of a professional.

For a Sikh the turban is a similar marker of his faith and its discipline. But this army of God (that is how I view the meaning of Khalsa) was not created to wage aggressive war, conquer territory or subjugate others, but with a single mission — to discipline the mind. The battlefield of the mind was its domain, and Guru Gobind Singh recommended that his Khalsa engage in this battle every day.

Being or becoming a soldier, like signing up for a cause, is not a hereditary vocation or avocation. Each individual must take his or her own risks and earn his or her own stripes. It is not a business that a parent may leave to a child. The emphasis, then, rightly shifts from being a Sikh to becoming one.

What is my expectation when I see a Sikh in uniform? Indeed, it should be no different from what I expect when I see another professional in uniform. Even though I am prepared for occasional disappointment, from a professional person in uniform I expect training, discipline, dedication, honesty and integrity to his or her cause. Out of uniform, a professional is neither held to the same standards nor accorded the same consideration or deference.

I hasten to add that a professional’s training doesn’t end with a person’s investiture. Continuing education is a lifelong process and a never-ending requirement. In this matter my views of a police officer, scholar, scientist, banker, baker or Sikh are the same.

What does a Sikh’s uniform proclaim to the world? Is his word his bond? Is he the man who has taken an oath that attaches him to the Guru’s Word and who strives mightily to live by it?

The word “*Sikh*” derivatively means a student. Hence, Sikhs by definition are lifelong students of the Sikh way of life.

One way then is to look at the turban is as a *crown* on a Sikh’s head. History teaches us that Sikhs would rather lose a head than part with the turban and the unshorn hair (*kesh*) under it. From that viewpoint, then, it is not just a cultural eccentricity but the cornerstone of a Sikh’s existence, essential to the definition of self.

Donning a turban for the first time then is no longer an ordinary event but a rite of passage.

The fact that a turban historically belongs on a Sikh head was not easily acknowledged worldwide; many battles still remain.

Many countries of the world, including Britain, Canada, Malaysia, Singapore, India, Pakistan and



many more, recognise the right of Sikhs to serve in the armed forces with their long hair intact and covered by a turban.

The American armed services still remain a bastion of intransigence even though they allow turbaned, long-haired Sikhs to serve on an individual basis via special dispensation. After years of stonewalling, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police came around in 1995; recognisable Sikhs now serve in it. In California and Washington, D.C., the police have publicly announced their willingness to recruit turbaned Sikhs. Perhaps a state-by-state campaign to admit Sikhs into the police and army lies ahead. Our battle in France to freely wear a turban in public space continues today.

I believe the logic of the Sikh stance on turbans is unassailable and progress inevitable.

So now it is a rite of passage for a Sikh. A milestone in one's journey through life.

I look at history and I see that for Christians the comparable rites of passage vary because of the many sects and denominations; the age at Confirmation, too, varies – anywhere from 8 or 9 years and upwards. In the Jews it is *Bar Mitzvah* for boys and *Bas* (or *Bat Mitzvah*) for girls.

Guys take note!

The Jews understand that girls mature earlier, hence the *Mitzvah* comes a year earlier at age 12 for girls and at age 13 for boys. The novitiate who is the honoree on that day reads from the Torah and that is a meaningful display of coming of age.

This reminds me that not so many years ago, it was common for Sikh families to take note of a child's maturity by a rite aptly named *Guru Charnee Lagna*. Literally, it means attaching the novitiate to the Guru's feet but I would translate it as connecting the child with the Guru's message. And the novitiate would then demonstrate his/her willingness, ability and proficiency by reading a hymn or two from the *Guru Granth*.



To me this becomes a most meaningful rite: it is equally open to both boys and girls; it clearly impresses the novitiate with the idea that Sikhi lies in connecting with the message; and finally demonstrates the meaningful commitment of both the novitiate and the family. Certainly, it takes more than a few hours and a wild bash to learn, communicate and read even a few lines of *gurbani*. And the expression *charni lagna* speaks clearly of the mindset and the approach necessary in a process that is totally free of any gender bias.

This last point is important. I wish to take note of this one critically important detail. We now have *Dastaar Bandhi*, or donning a turban for boys but we have not evolved a similarly meaningful rite for a Sikh girl to mark her maturity. It is time we did. In fact we have written women out of our history and ignored their primary role in the preservation and transmission of our heritage.

This is a matter that deserves serious note—and now. I add that men, but more particularly women need to weigh in on this.

In the past three decades or so, as equal partners in the experience of being Sikh many young women in North America have also opted to wear a turban or *keski*: Cynthia Mahmood and Stacy Brady have documented this trend with remarkable sensitivity in a recent monograph. Notably, the women converts to Sikhism that I have seen over the past 50 years in this country, all seem to wear turbans or *dastaars*.

Clearly, Hartaig, his parents Simran and Mankanwal, and his grandparents on both sides can be justifiably proud.

To Hartaig Singh I say: “Welcome to living history”.

I.J. Singh

(Based in part on two previously published essays by I.J. Singh: “Patkas And Hats With Turbans as a Rite of Passage,” and “The Power of a Uniform.”)

Book Review

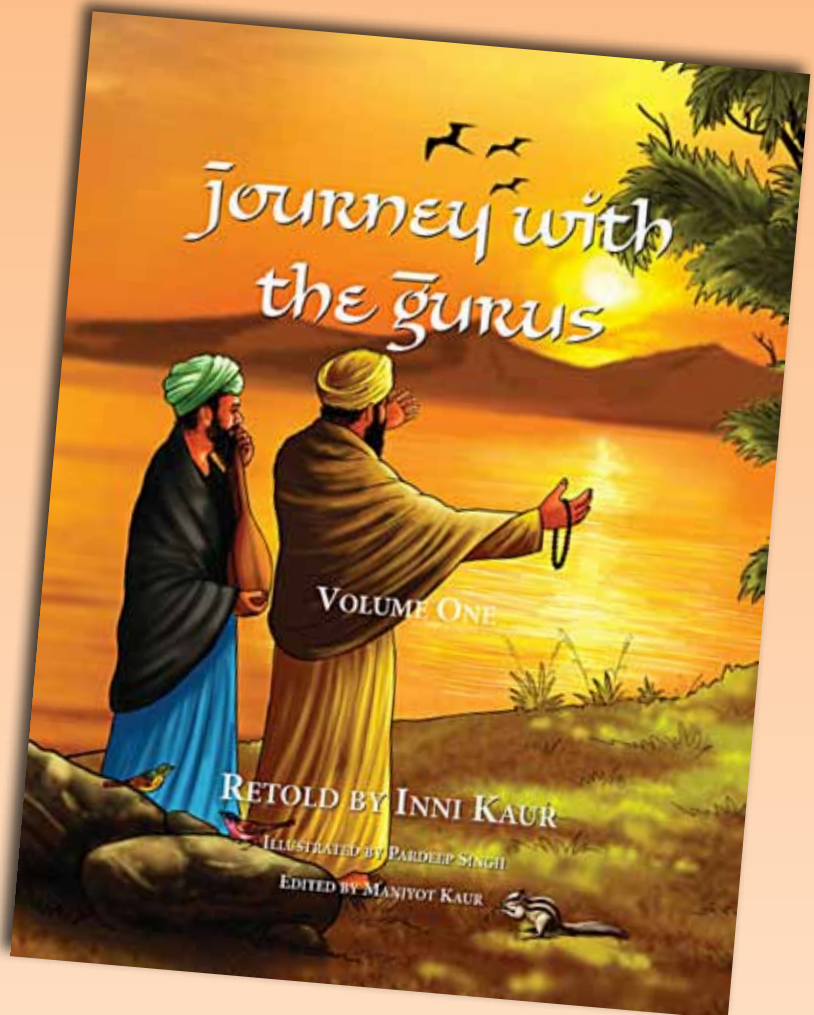
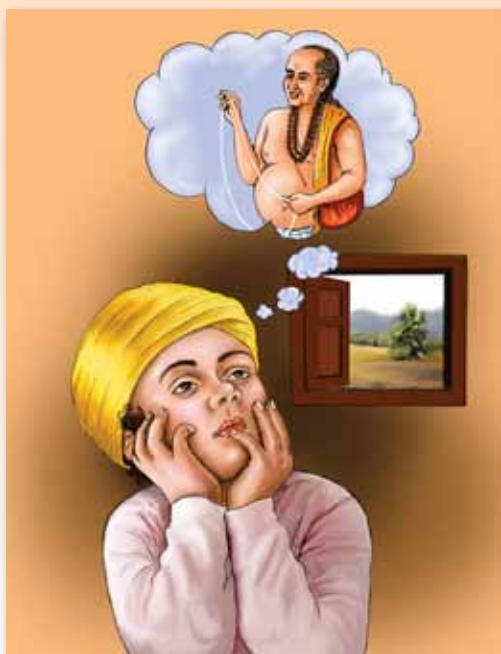
Inni Kaur's Journey with The Gurus

A Book Review by Rubin Paul Singh

I've always been a history buff ... a Sikh history buff, that is!

I would take every opportunity I could to listen to a *saakhi* about our rich history. But as a child growing up in the US, I rarely found books that could truly reflect the wonder and beauty of the Gurus' lives. The history books I read were published in the early 70s, and although now I can appreciate what hard work it must have taken to translate Sikh history for children into a foreign language, at the time, I had no interest in reading these books. The stories were hard to understand, the dialogue seemed unrealistic, and for whatever reason... they didn't speak to me.

Inni Kaur's *Journey with the Gurus* is a series of short stories about Guru Nanak's



life, followed by discussion points where the author suggests ideas and principles to emphasise while reading with your child.

I've been blessed with an opportunity to preview *Journey with the Gurus* along with my family and I can say for all of us ... this is a book that speaks to us!

It only took me a couple of stories until I began to notice what was different about this book. Although the major events in these short stories have been told for centuries, the author however transports us to the time of the Guru, and lets us into the dialogue in between these events, as though we were sitting as witnesses, watching history unfold.

For example, we all know the *saakhi* where young Nanak refused to wear the Hindu *janeu* - a string band worn diagonally by Brahmins from the shoulder down - but what was going through his mind that morning while family and friends were gathering for the event to initiate him into the *janeu*?

We know the *saakhi* of Guru Nanak's disappearance for three days in the River Bein, but what were the locals thinking during those three days? How did Bebe Nanaki feel? Where did Bhai Mardana think his friend had gone?

And what was the mood like that early morning when Guru Sahib and Bhai Mardana left for their first *udaasi* (great journey)?

Journey with the Gurus takes us there and lets us experience history.

These stories introduce me to personalities I had heard of but never fully appreciated - the chief of Talwandi, Rai Bular; the Governor of Sultanpur, Nawab Daulat Khan Lodhi and the close friendship Guru Nanak had with his brother-in-law, Jairam.

But of all these relationships, it was the one with his older sister, Bebe Nanaki, that I connected with the most. I've always heard that Guru Sahib and Bebe Nanaki were very close and she was a supporting and loving sister. And as per tradition, she is proudly known as the first Sikh of the Guru, but as much as she was an influence in his life, very little is written about her.

Journey with the Gurus does justice to this very special relationship by including her throughout the book. I especially enjoyed the dialogue they shared shortly after Guru Sahib came to stay with Nanaki and Jairam in Sultanpur, reminiscing about their childhood:

"Vir, do you remember the hopscotch game we always played?"

"Hopscotch game?" asked Jairam.

"*Bhrraa ji*, you don't want to know all the things that she made me do. And to top it off, she always won at hopscotch," said Nanak, laughing and shaking his head.

In another conversation, Nanaki expresses concern over Guru Sahib going to the river by himself early in the mornings. After Jairam kindly suggests that Nanak should decide these things for himself, she replies:

"Yes, dearest, you are right. I sometimes forget that my little brother is all grown up now."

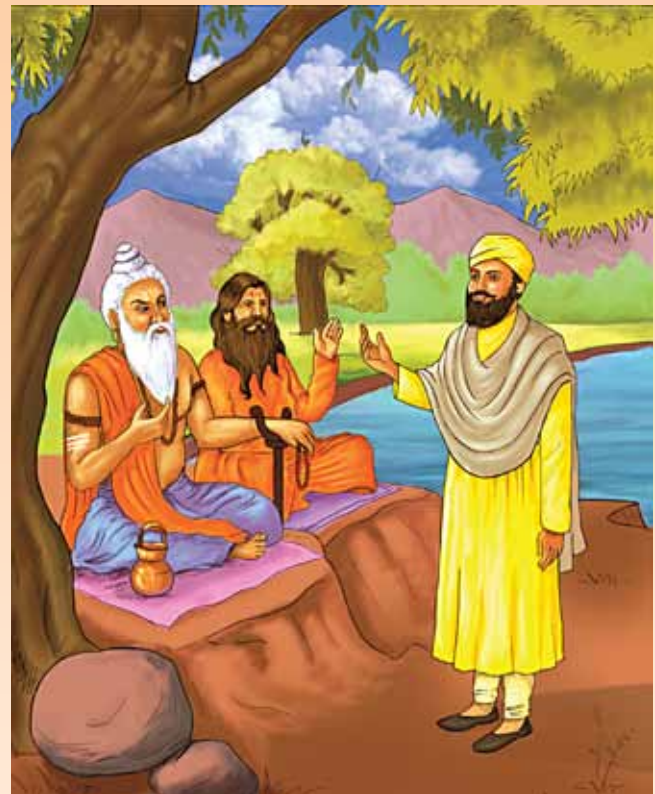
It was amazing to hear Guru Sahib and Bebe Nanaki interact in a way that a younger brother and protective older sister typically would ... something so many of us can relate to.

There were some other subtle messages I found quite powerful. Like when Lakhmi Das was born, Guru Nanak and Mata Sulakhani ji's second child, the author mentions how: "Sulakhani's parents came as quickly as they could to see their new grandson." And how Mehta Kalu ji speaks so gently about his daughter-in-law, referring to her as a "kind and loving wife", and Mata Tripta ji chiming in: "I am so glad to see that Sulakhani is looking after her children very well."

I found the tone of these conversations refreshing and quite different from what I've read before or would have expected, given the cultural norms of the time.

Some may feel that Inni Kaur has taken some creative liberty with these stories, and may ask, "How do we know this all really happened?" To that, my response would be, "How do we know it did not?"

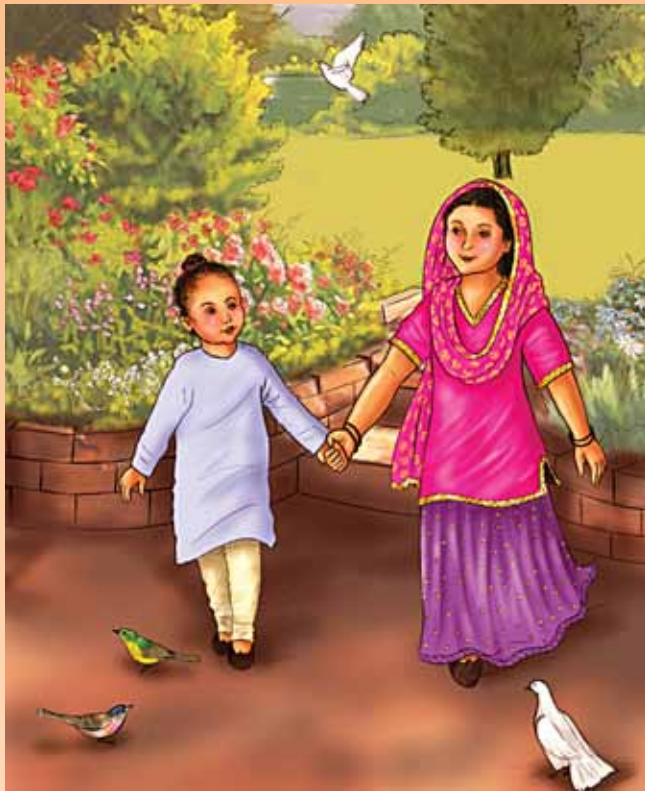
The major events in the stories have been retold in a creative way in modern language, but the facts as we traditionally know them are still intact. As for all the dialogue in between, I wonder why wouldn't Guru Sahib and Bebe Nanaki converse like any other brother and sister would? Why wouldn't Jairam facilitate Guru Sahib's move to Sultanpur to help his in-laws out, and re-unite his wife with her brother? And why wouldn't Mehta Kalu ji and Mata Tripta ji admire their daughter-in-law for being a good wife and mother?



I mean ... Guru Sahib was such a progressive thinker and way ahead of his time; he preached equality, kindness, compassion - and influenced the masses by doing so - why couldn't such conversations take place?

Reading such a different perspective to these *saakhis* is like reading Sikh history for the first time. I'm glad to see the book is labeled Volume One, because I can't wait to read the discourse between Guru Nanak and Bhai Lehna, or the conversations between Bhai Gurdas and Guru Arjan on the bank of Ramsar while scribing the Guru Granth Sahib.

And, of course, the precious dialogue between Mata Gujri ji and her four grandsons.



What I appreciate most about this book is how engaged our children were while reading it - whether it was the beautiful illustrations that kept our little ones sneaking a peek into the next page or the discussions we had afterwards that would go on past bedtime.

It was that little personal connection they created with Guru Nanak that I found so special.

And for that, I am truly grateful.

Thank you, Inni Kaur, for introducing us to the simple unfolding of our beautiful history. My children and I eagerly look forward to the next volume so we can continue our Journey with the Gurus ...

JOURNEY WITH THE GURUS,
by Inni Kaur.

Illustrated by Pardeep Singh,
Edited by Manjot Kaur.
Sikh Educational & Cultural
Foundation, Norwalk, CT,
U.S.A., 2010.

Full-page colour illustrations,
hard cover, pp. 172, \$28.95.
ISBN # 978-0-9827224-0-4.

Inni Kaur in conversation with Geetanjali Singh Chanda

Seva is one of the principle tenets of Sikhism. It ranges from dusting the shoes of worshippers in the gurdwara to cleaning the premises to serving food and a whole host of other chores. The basic quality it seeks to instill in an individual is that of service with love and humility. Inni Kaur's book *Journey with the Gurus* is a unique example of seva - of piety and devotion - to the Sikh community.

The stories recount familiar tales about the life of Guru Nanak - the founder of Sikhism - from his childhood to the revelation when he disappeared for three days in the river Bein. These are stories derived from the Janam Sakhis and Inni has drawn from Bhai Vir Singh's *Balam Sakhis* and *Guru Nanak Chamatkar*. Most of us are familiar with these stories because they have often been orally recounted in homes by the older generations.

The task of telling these stories anew however, was daunting on at least two levels; one, how to translate the idiom of these oral narratives into a written form while yet retaining the ease and fluency of a told story and two, how to communicate 'out of context' stories that were so deeply rooted in a specific regional, linguistic and cultural milieu.

The target audience of this book is the diaspora Indian, and probably largely a Sikh audience, although there is no reason why others would not find it interesting too. They stand on their own as easy to read and well written stories and, in fact, one of the chief merits of the text is that one does not need any previous knowledge of Guru Nanak or Sikhism. The target audience is children who have grown up in the west. Inni was addressing these stories to second or third generation Sikhs who continue to maintain religious or cultural links with Sikhism but are more familiar with the everyday context of an American world view. Indian children, even non-Sikhs - pick up an ambient knowledge and familiarity with religions practiced in India, almost by osmosis because plurality of religions is part of the fabric of

India. In an American context the author has to negotiate a tricky interface between two quite different linguistic and contextual idioms.

Inni says that her first readers were the children themselves for whom these stories have been told. They were children of friends, children whom she taught at the gurdwara in Connecticut and children who attended Sikh camps that she was involved with. It was their questions about specific characters, dress, conversations and food that guided her forward. One of the main differences she notes is that Indian children are more willing to accept the 'miracle' aspect in the stories whereas children brought up in America are more questioning and seek the moral lessons in the stories.

The inclusion of the discussion points at the end of each story shows the pedagogic intent of the collection. Initially, Inni says there were no discussion points. These were added later at the behest of parents and teachers, Inni became convinced that these were essential to create the space for talking about Sikhi and various other issues raised in the stories. They became the vehicle for cross generational conversations. Parents and grandparents finally found a common ground where they could discuss the stories and the moral lessons contained therein. They provide a way for cultural and religious connections which is especially important where the dominant mainstream culture tends to submerge minority identities.

The question of identity becomes most urgent when one's identity is under threat. And although it may be erroneous to cling to notions of a monolithic, unchanging identity there is a need to know where one comes from especially when that past is quickly being erased by a pervasive and insistent call to become part of the American melting pot. The young especially want nothing more than to merge and not stand out. But, Inni says, even to reject this aspect of one's identity and past, one has to at least know it. If one does not know what Sikhism is, for instance, then how can one reject it? Inni's own experience growing up was one of gradually finding Sikhi for herself. As a young convent educated school girl she wanted to be anything but a Sikh. She was always spiritually inclined and so dabbled in finding out more about Hinduism, Buddhism and Sufism. Her interest in Sikhism was inspired by her grandfather. "The fragrance he carried in his life" seduced her to try and follow in his footsteps. And in a way this is how she presents Guru Nanak in the stories. He is not a God to be feared or respected; rather he is presented as a friend. His relationship with his sister Nanaki, the descriptions of the games they played, their walks

where she points out different flowers and birds to him all conjure up a very ordinary childhood, one that will resonate with most children.

Inni's questioning about the purpose of life - birth, marriage, children and death - is that all there is to life - made her realise that something was missing. And like the *Azan* calling the faithful to prayer she heard the voice within instruct her "*Simran kar*". And her *simran* led her to creative writing which began with poetry. She says poetry came easiest to her because she just heard it in the air and merely "reproduced" it. She hesitates to call it "original" or claim ownership of it as her work because it's just there and she does not have to 'work' to create it. We see her own poem *The Child* included in the collection as well as a poem by Bhai Vir Singh and a *Shabad*. Similarly with the stories she does not claim to be the 'author' because after all the stories are not her original creations - she is merely retelling what exists in the Janam Sakhis and in common lore.

What made her write this book? Inni says she was dissatisfied with the materials available to her to teach children so she decided to fill the gap and write it herself. Every detail of this handsomely produced book has her signature on it. She had a certain vision of the kind of book she wanted and then went about creating it. She says, "I have treated every page in the book as a jewel." She wanted a classic, a handsome volume on fine paper with illustrations that carried a certain gravitas. It would be a book that children would cherish, handle with care and proudly take to class for 'share and tell' sessions. She wanted the illustrations to be realistic but not real and so settled on a calendar style art with vibrant colours and rich in details of nature, birds, animals, foods and clothes and the sixty illustrations were ably executed by the Chandigarh-based artist Pradeep Singh.

Skilled storytelling and illustrations are what attract a child to a book. Inni draws the reader, both young and old, in with a clear, limpid and compelling style. Her easy, conversational approach and nonjudgmental or moralising tone allows the imagination to roam and to journey with the guru.

Dr. Geetanjali Singh Chanda is Senior Lecturer in the Women's, Gender & Sexuality Studies Programme at Yale University. Her earlier work *Sikh Masculinity, Religion and Diaspora* in Shauna Singh Baldwin's *The English Lesson and Other Stories* was published in the journal *Men and Masculinities* in February 2009.