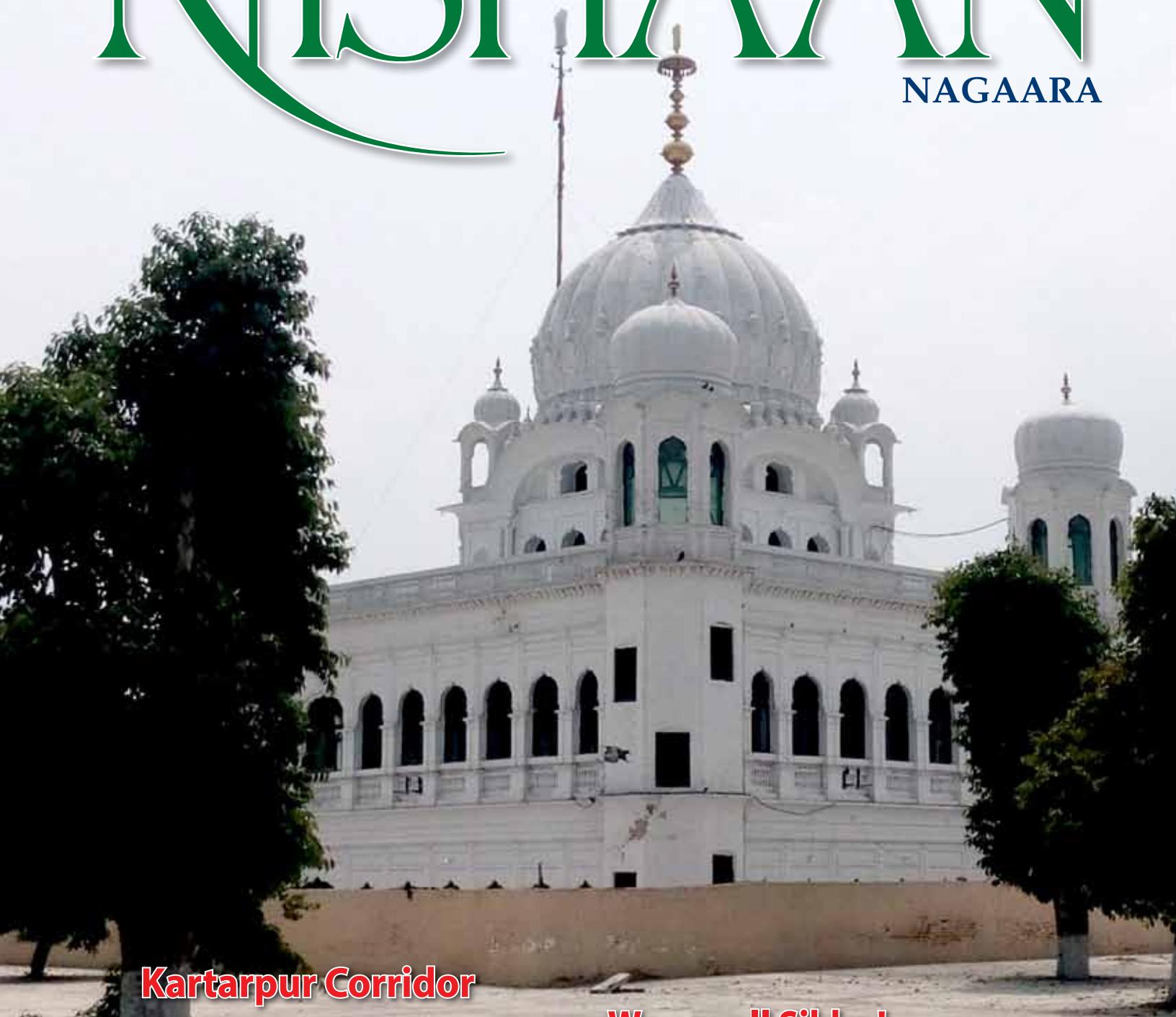


IV/2018

NISHAAN

NAGAARA



Kartarpur Corridor

**2018 Parliament of
World Religions**

Interfaith at New Delhi

We are all Sikhs !

Canadians deserve better

1984 : some justice ?



The Fifth Annual Conference on the Sikh scripture, Guru Granth Sahib, jointly hosted by the Chardi Kalaa Foundation and the San Jose Gurdwara, took place on 19 August 2017 at San Jose in California, USA. One of the largest and arguably most beautiful gurdwaras in North America, the Gurdwara Sahib at San Jose was founded in San Jose, California, USA in 1985 by members of the then-rapidly growing Sikh community in the Santa Clara Valley



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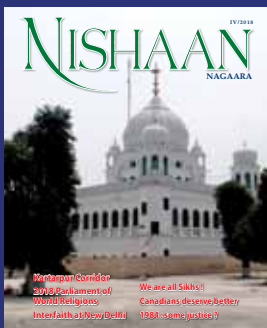
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On Building Bridges

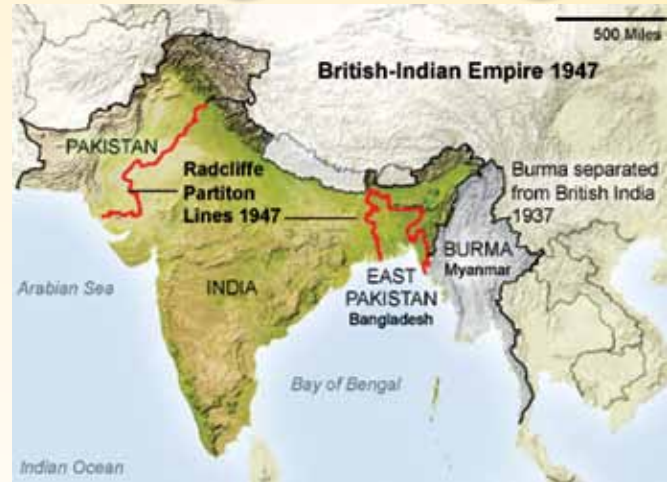
India and Pakistan remind me of a couple that have lived together for a lifetime and more. But they have also grown weary of each other. When the British left the Indian subcontinent the main body of land (largely the northwest territory of Punjab, also Bengal in the East) was divided into India and Pakistan. This fragmentation 71 years ago of a people with shared ethos – land, language culture, cuisine and music – was cataclysmic. They plundered and killed each other in 1947 as perhaps only Biblical brothers do, and they have waged war on each other thrice along with many a smaller skirmish to sustain their hatred of each other. Keep in mind also that both India and Pakistan are now nuclear powers.

Yet, these neighbors love each other; their ties antedate time and continue to bind them. Occasionally they are nice to each other, but mostly they bicker and vilify the other. The religious reality of Sikhi took birth in what is now Pakistan; that is necessarily where we look for the early history, traditions and markers of Sikhi.

I know of what I speak. I was born and attended primary school in what is now Pakistan. I remember the rioting and killings of 1947, spent the next 13 years in India and the rest of my life in America.

Not surprising, therefore, that caravans of Sikh pilgrims from across the world, and more so from neighboring India, are anxious to visit Pakistan and reconnect with their history. This has not always been popular with India's political bureaucracy. They see these visitors (largely Sikh) as possible enemies of India fraternising with Pakistan – the enemy *du jour*. The ethos, cuisine, and language that collectively define all Punjabis, Sikhs, Muslims or Hindus, stoke the politically-driven suspicious mind and spills out onto society.

But this year is super-special. It's 550 years since the birth of Guru Nanak, the founder of the Sikh faith. The yearly pilgrimage of Sikhs is no longer a trickle but a raging flood.



From the internet

For years, Sikhs in India and across the world have been clamoring for easing the process to let Sikhs visit their historical and religious sites in Pakistan, particularly Kartarpur, a town that Guru Nanak founded, where he started the mission of Sikhi and spent his last years. It lies only a short bus ride across the border into Pakistan. Only the span of the river Ravi separates the two countries at that point.

Sometimes, like a bolt of lightning, good sense strikes and jolts us up to the possibilities. Sparks arose in Punjab, and around the world in the Sikh community that perhaps a *Guru Nanak Peace Bridge or Corridor of Peace* – a walkway – be demarcated running from the India-Pakistan border in Amritsar (India) to Kartarpur in Pakistan. This tribute to Guru Nanak, the *Prince of Peace*, could bring a people together - separated just 71 years ago, like long lost siblings.

The movement quickly became a rare but raging fire. For success it required governmental and political vision with will and wisdom in both nations. Such qualities are often in short supply but ultimately will emerge in response to a people's determined will and vision.

That's exactly what happened.

At a celebratory meeting in November 2018 movers and shakers along with governmental personnel from both India and Pakistan were in full throated support of the endeavour for this corridor of peace. The most notable voices were two prominent former cricketers who had respectively represented their national teams– Imran Khan of Pakistan and Navjot Singh Sidhu of India. Both are active politicians in their respective countries Imran is the current Prime Minister of Pakistan.

Whether you owe loyalty to India, Pakistan or somewhere else in the world this surely is a matter to celebrate. We welcome it wholeheartedly not for the Sikhs alone who are and will remain a minority no matter where in the world they live, but for the entire globe. I repeat that India and Pakistan, are both nuclear armed nations, and committed enemies who have fought many wars

But political constraints often trump common sense. Much of the Indian Press remains suspicious and dismissive of such peace overtures as a workable goal. Their attitudes and reactions remain disappointing. For instance, the Indian Press castigated Navjot Singh Sidhu when he and Imran Khan embraced at the ceremony. The Press is ignoring the place of Sikhs and Punjab during the Freedom Struggle of India as well. This closed mindedness makes me wonder! Have they never seen boxers shaking hands before a fight? Have they never seen dedicated competitors greet each other most cordially in life and death competitions or losers honestly compliment the winners even after a bitter fight? What a pity that they have never encountered or learned such spiritual moral values.

For naysayers I submit some parallels to think about: During the cold war, the Berlin Wall, that was erected in 1961 dividing Germany into two nations, was demolished 28 years later in 1989. Was that being disloyal to existing realities or was it a progressive humanitarian act? And now in 2018, a new initiative occupies us: South Korea and North Korea, two independent nations that fought a brutal war from 1950 to 1953 are reaching out to each other peacefully to jointly develop the North Korean Railroad system into a modern facility.



Remember Vietnam? North and South Vietnam had been at war since the early 1950's; that America entered after 1954. This historic conflict divided a people and ended in 1973. Vietnam is now a single unified nation at peace with America and its treasured trading partner. Not that I am recommending or even remotely suggesting it, but sometimes I wonder if some political activists dream of the golden past of a greater Bengal as a collaborative entity?

Some final thoughts:

A popular American idea: “Keep your friends close and your enemies closer.” War and cruelty are human realities but peace and goodwill, too, are supreme human traits and aspirations. Perpetuating a zero-sum game – a losing proposition – ultimately helps no one. The idea here is to evolve in a direction such that enemies become participants and partners in progress.

Building bridges across a political divide is never easy but it is so necessary.

I.J. Singh

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Understanding the Kartarpur Corridor



'Darshan' of Kartarpur Sahib : Sikhs at Dera Baba Nanak, paying obeisance through binoculars



Looking beyond the River Ravi, towards Narowal District of Pakistan

The Kartarpur Corridor is a proposed border land link between India and Pakistan, connecting the holy Sikh shrines of Dera Baba Nanak Sahib (located in the Punjab, India) and Gurdwara Darbar Sahib Kartarpur (in the Punjab, Pakistan). Currently under planning, the corridor is intended to allow religious devotees from India to visit the Gurdwara at Kartarpur, 4.7 kilometres (2.9 miles)

from the Pakistan-India border, without obtaining a visa, the corridor planned to be ready by the 550th birth anniversary of Guru Nanak Dev in November 2019. The prime minister of India, Narendra Modi, compared the decision to go ahead with the corridor by the two countries to “the fall of the Berlin Wall”, saying that the project “may help in easing tensions between the two countries.”

After over half a century, in 2000, Pakistan proposed to allow Sikh pilgrims from India to visit the shrine without the need to present a visa by constructing a bridge from the Indian side of the border to the shrine. Later, in August 2018, Punjab minister and former member of parliament Navjot Singh Sidhu revealed that the Pakistan Army chief, General Qamar Javed Bajwa, had told him that Pakistan would open the Dera Baba Nanak–Kartarpur corridor before Guru Nanak’s 550th birth anniversary. On 26 November 2018, Indian vice president, Venkaiah Naidu, laid the foundation stone of the Dera Baba Nanak–Kartarpur Sahib Corridor at Mann, a village in the Gurdaspur district of Punjab, India.



Guru Nanak founded Kartarpur in 1504 on right bank of the River Ravi and established the first Sikh commune there. Following his passing in 1539, Hindus and Muslims both claimed him as their own, and raised mausoleums in his memory with a common wall between them. The changing course of the River Ravi eventually washed away the mausoleums. A new habitation was formed, representing the present day Dera Baba Nanak on left bank of the river Ravi. During the 1947 partition of India, the region was divided between India and Pakistan. The Radcliffe Line awarded the Shakargarh tehsil on the right bank of the Ravi river, including Kartarpur, to Pakistan, and the Gurdaspur tehsil on the left bank of Ravi to India.



On 28 November 2018, the prime minister of Pakistan Imran Khan, laid the foundation stone for the Kartarpur corridor in the Narowal district of Punjab, Pakistan. Two central ministers of India, Harsimrat Kaur Badal and Hardeep Singh Puri were present at the event in Pakistan, in addition to Navjot Singh Sidhu and member of the Parliament from Amritsar, Gurjeet Singh Aujla (*picture above*).

Lahore-based historian Fakir S Aijazuddin characterised this it as a “unique experient” in cross-border ties between India and Pakistan. “The universality symbolised by Guru Nanak can bring the people of all religions together.”

According to a presentation given by a US firm, survey for the corridor has been completed by the Pakistan government. The design and land acquisition are to take place in December, construction of the corridor is expected to be completed by 1 November 2019, in time for the birth anniversary of Guru Nanak on 12 November 2019.

Even though the place where the corridor will cross the border has not yet been decided, there is expected to be an 800 metre-long bridge over the Ravi river. The construction includes a ‘boarding terminal’ from where shuttle buses will take the pilgrims from India to Kartarpur. There will be temporary accommodations and tents for the pilgrims. There are expectations that the pilgrims will need to obtain special permits, although not visas, for making the trip, and they will need to undergo biometric checks.

Vinay Lal on The Kartarpur Corridor Sikhism and the Power of In-Betweenness

The proposed establishment of a land corridor that would link Dera Babak Nanak, an important Sikh pilgrimage site on the Indian side which nearly straddles the border, to Kartarpur Sahib, which is about 3 kilometres into Pakistan from the border and one of the principal sites associated with Sikhism, is not merely a step in the right direction. The critical significance of such a gesture cannot be overestimated, but the reasons for this are more complex than is commonly imagined. It has always been a struggle for the two countries to find openings for dialogues, and the Kartarpur Corridor, if it comes to fruition, would likely be one of the greatest measures taken to bring some semblance of peace and civility in the relations between these two nations. In this respect, the Kartarpur Corridor may seem to take its place alongside Indo-Pak Bus Diplomacy, the Samjhauta Express, and various so-called “confidence-building measures.”



To gauge the vital importance of this proposed measure, it is best to begin with a brief narrative of the place of Kartarpur in Guru Nanak’s life and the onerous burdens that, centuries later, partition placed particularly on Sikhs of the Punjab. The extensive travels of Nanak, an itinerant preacher, over a period of nearly three decades

ceased when he settled down at a place on the Ravi north of Lahore. Here, as elsewhere, so the tradition says, Nanak first met with opposition from a wealthy





a *Protocol on Visits to Religious Shrines* to facilitate the granting of visas to pilgrims, but the brute fact remains that the draconian visa regime followed by both countries has made sites such as Kartarpur all but out of bounds for most pilgrims. Though Dera Nanak Sahib is, as I have pointed out, important in Sikh history in its own right, nothing could be more poignant than the fact that pilgrims also visit here, since from its precincts they can see the Gurdwara at Kartarpur, the final resting place of Guru Nanak, and thereby also get a darshan of the great founder of their faith: so close and yet so far!

landlord, Karoria, who after some mishaps came to the awareness that Nanak was a divine being. Karoria offered to build a village for Nanak and his disciples and it is at Nanak's urging that this village became known as Kartarpur, after the word 'Kartar' meaning the creator. The township flourished as Nanak acquired an ever greater following and it is here that, eighteen years later, he passed away in September 1539. The Gurdwara Darbar Sahib Kartarpur that stands there presently is said to have been built at the site where Guru Nanak breathed his last.

It is sign of the pettiness of the governments of both India and Pakistan, and their sheer incapacity to understand the extraordinary and distinct significance of the Sikh faith, that both countries are now squabbling about who first initiated this idea of the Kartarpur Corridor and should thus be able to claim political mileage. The Modi Government timed the announcement to coincide with the 550th birth anniversary celebrations of Guru Nanak, who

Whatever the Sikh aspirations for their own homeland, the partition of 1947 was particularly hard on the Sikhs, the vast majority of whom then opted to settle in India. Kartarpur is one among many vitally important sites of Sikh religion and history, among them Nankana Sahib, the birthplace of Nanak, the shrine of Guru Arjan Dev in Lahore, and the samadhi of Ranjit Singh, that became largely inaccessible to India's Sikhs. In 1974, Pakistan and India signed



... and Pakistani troops at Katarpur Sahib.



Bridge over the River Ravi which was destroyed during the Indo-Pak conflict of December 1971

was born on 23 November 1469. The government of India, the announcement has it, “approached and urged the Pakistan government to recognise the sentiments of Sikh community and build a corridor with suitable facilities in their territory to facilitate easy and smooth visits of pilgrims from India”, but Pakistan’s Information & Broadcasting Minister Chaudhry Fawad Hussain tweeted that “this proposal was initiated by Pakistan.” Indeed, Mr. Hussain has argued that it was the Pakistan’s Army Chief who “spoke about the opening of the Kartarpur border for the first time. It’s a matter of record.”

Though it is predictable that each government should attempt to lay claim to this initiative, by far its greater import is that Sikhism occupies a space of in-betweenness with respect to Hinduism and Islam. At his passing, Hindus and Muslims quarreled over the performance of the last rites, thus furnishing testimony that they had barely understood his teachings. They may have acknowledged him as a saint—“To the Hindu a Guru, to the Mussulman a Pir”—but to the end they insisted on viewing him from the perspective of their faiths. Thus the Hindus sought a cremation for Nanak, while the Muslims a burial: when they tugged at the sheet that covered his body, they instead found a heap of flowers. The Guru Granth Sahib, the holy book of

Sikhism, draws upon elements from both Islam and the worldview of Hinduism.

For students of “religion”, one of the perennially interesting questions is to ponder over what is common and what is distinct in each faith. The distinctiveness of Sikhism resides in its quality of in-betweenness, in the particular manner in which Sikhs straddle several worlds both in the material and spiritual domains. As a people, Sikhs are energetic, generous, and marvelously receptive and adaptive to new cultures. Any political initiative that holds out the promise of improving relations between Pakistan and India, and strengthening the ties between the peoples of the two countries, is to be welcomed. But in all such measures, Sikhs have a special role to play, if only they-and the governments of the two countries-would recognise that. One hopes that the Kartarpur Corridor, if at all it should become a reality, will push the Sikhs to play a greater role in mediating peace between India and Pakistan.



Vinay Lal is a writer, blogger, cultural critic, and Professor of History at UCLA

A Pakistani view on

The Kartarpur Dream

For over seventy years the Sikhs of India have yearned for an access to Kartarpur, just across the Indo-Pak border, with the River Ravi flowing in between and dividing the two countries.



Kartarpur Sahib, the sacred place of Sikh pilgrimage, even on an ordinary day, is quite spectacular. Its pearl-white domes and minarets

shine brightly pitted against the emerald green fields of the Punjab and presenting a surreal look. Wreathed in white spiritual glow of its marbled splendour the shrine is as much an architectural marvel as it is a place of worship. For over seventy years since the partition of 1947, the Sikh community had yearned for an access to their revered religious shrine. Cleaved away from East Punjab in the cataclysm of partition the shrine had lain cutoff from any semblance of communication from

In their daily *Ardaas*, invocation to the Lord, Sikhs pray for *khule darshan didar* (free access) of gurdwaras left in Pakistan after the partition of India. Some 173 gurdwaras remained in the new country of Pakistan which came into existence on 14 August, 1947. The most historic ones include Nankana Sahib, birth place of the founder of Sikhism Guru Nanak Dev, Gurdwara Kartarpur Sahib, where Guru Nanak spent his last years, Gurdwara Panja Sahib at Hasan Abdal and Gurdwara Dera Sahib at Lahore.



Navjot Singh Sidhu doing 'darshan' of Kartarpur Sahib via high-powered binoculars from the Indian side



Indian Punjab. What has happened suddenly in Indo-Pak relations that has prompted such a munificent gesture of opening the corridor for Sikh devotees?

The answer perhaps might lie in the changing security perceptions of Pakistani civil-military leadership that after very long, they are finally “on one page”. At a time when the indigenous discomfiture with Indian hauteur in Kashmir is reaching a crescendo, the Pakistani leadership’s decision to offer an olive branch to India is regarded as a positive development for regional peace and security.

As the larger and stronger protagonist in the subcontinental conflict equation, greater responsibility devolves on India to integrate the disparate interests of smaller nations by displaying magnanimity and statesmanship.

Instead, displayed has been an increasing socio-cultural xenophobia, which was obvious when

responding to the Pakistani offer of opening a corridor for Sikh pilgrims to the holy shrine at Kartarpur. While Pakistan’s prime minister and army chief were present on the ground breaking ceremony along with high ranking cabinet members, the “other side” displayed an almost indifferent attitude to such effusiveness. Perhaps any concessions to the Sikh community conjures up fear scenarios of Pakistani involvement on the so-called Khalistan issue? Whatever, this that was a display of diplomatic naiveté and lack of strategic vision that hamstrung diplomatic instincts.

The Kartarpur Corridor initiative, as a stepping stone to further diplomatic thaw unfortunately has been viewed with guarded pessimism by India, actions which are louder than words. A joint statement by BJP and Congress leadership has shown unanimity of views in downplaying enthusiasm. The refusal of Sushma Swaraj and East Punjab Chief Minister Captain Amrinder Singh to attend the foundation stone laying

of the corridor can be seen as a lack of trust in the sincerity of the Pakistani offer

The Kartarpur Corridor has the potential to bridge the chasm of distrust between the two countries, but like all the jinxed peace initiatives in the past, this too appears foundering on the rocks of power politics. As Johan Galtung said “negative peace is mere absence of war whereas positive peace is the absence of causes of war.” It is time that both countries embraced Galtung’s positive peace concept. To achieve this, greater

responsibility devolves upon India which needs to give peace a chance. India and Pakistan’s ultimate survival as responsible nuclear powers lies in turning swords into ploughshares and in seeking a regional security consensus upon which the edifice of subcontinental peace and cooperation could be erected.

The Kartarpur dream is a sub-continental yearning for peace which could be shaped into reality through a sea change in thinking..

Raashid Wali Janjua

“The Berlin Wall and the Kartarpur Corridor”



On 25 November 2018, Prime Minister Narendra Modi compared the Kartarpur Sahib corridor with the Berlin Wall that divided East and West Germany before it was pulled down in 1989. He said if the

Wall could fall, the proposed corridor could act as a bridge between the people of India and Pakistan. The comparison comes, a day after the union cabinet announced the development of the Kartarpur Sahib corridor.

"Had anyone ever thought that the Berlin Wall would fall. May be with the blessings of Guru Nanak Devji, this Kartarpur corridor will not just remain a corridor, but act as a bridge between the peoples of the two countries," PM Modi said at a Gurupurab function. Built in 1961, the Berlin Wall was pulled down on November 9, 1989. The fall of the wall marked the beginning of the German unification, which was completed in 1990.



An unequal love

Fakir S Aijazuddin whose ancestors were important ministers in the court of Maharaja Ranjit Singh writes about :

If only PM Imran Khan had been less ardent and PM Narendra Modi not so coy, the ceremony at Kartarpur might have been an occasion to really celebrate. Mr Khan's green government and Mr Modi's autumnal administration could have exhibited faith in each other and fulfilled the sub-surface aspirations of their peoples. Instead Kartarpur has erupted into a slanging match between India and Pakistan, two septuagenarian states with nuclear weapons in place of dentures.



Kartarpur Shih—sacred to the Sikhs as being the final resting place of Guru Nanak — is located on Pakistani side of the river Ravi, two miles from the Indian border. Had Cyril Radcliffe been adequately tutored before he came to well subcontinent in 1947, he might have been more sensitive to the feelings of the various religious communities whose lives he was to damage so irreparably. But what could be expected of a lawyer who confessed later to Kuldip Nayar that following the line of the river Ravi, he had included

Lahore first in India because it lay on the eastern side of the river? He re-drew the line after being told by a more intelligent subordinate that his mistake would result in the infant Pakistan having no major city in the Punjab.

The recent agreement on Kartarpur, initiated decades ago, would allow Indian pilgrims visa-free access to a site located within Pakistani territory. Conceived as a corridor of peace, its opening ceremony was anything but that. The two governments bickered in an unseemly replay of the argument after Guru Nanak's death in 1539 on whether his body should be buried or cremated.

Two foundation stones were laid on different dates, on 26 November by the Indian Vice-President on one side of the Ravi and two days later by Pakistani prime minister on the other. PM Imran Khan had hoped that his presence at Kartarpur would attract his counterpart. Instead, Mr Modi looked the other way.





Imran Khan brought with him his Foreign Minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi. Indian External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj pleaded a prior commitment and stayed away. Hidden in Imran Khan's baggage was his Chief Minister Punjab Buzdar. Indian Punjab's CM Capt Amarinder Singh absented himself with an uncharacteristic, uncivil rejection. Pakistan's COAS General Bajwa appeared long enough to hug Punjab MP Navjot Sindhu yet again, in public. At this, Indian army chief General Rawat retaliated from New Delhi by pouting advice, not that Pakistan should de-nuclearise or demilitarise, but that it should "develop itself into a secular state". Clearly, they all thought diplomacy was too serious a business to be left to diplomats.

At Kartarpur Sahib, the marigolds offered in Guru Nanak's name have wilted, the prasad gone stale, the langar become cold. Its sanctity stands diminished by warring politicians who have turned it into

yet another Kurukshetra, yet another field of sub-continental fratricide. Five hundred years ago, Guru Nanak had left this message for both governments: A man of faith can battle but 'in open field./with his mind perfectly in control, and with his heart poised in love'.

Hopefully, the two governments will find an equal love by 1 November 2019, the target date for the completion of the Kartarpur project. The corridor envisages a 800 ft. bridge across the river Ravi, wide enough for a pilgrim bus but too narrow for an armored fighting valuate.



In 1994, the British and the French thought the Chunnel link would bring their countries closer together. Brexit put paid to that. It is up to our two governments to ensure that Kartarpur does not degenerate into a corridor of dissent.

Fakir Syed Aijazuddin

Haroon Khalid looks

Beyond Kartarpur Sahib

Five other Gurdwaras that could be ‘opened up’



Heavily militarised on both sides, the India-Pakistan border is completely fenced, with high-powered floodlights (*see image above, taken from space*). On late flights from Lahore to Karachi, when the weather is clear, one can see these lights run deep into the night. Every day, thousands of visitors gather at the Wagah border between Lahore and Amritsar for the flag-lowering ceremony, which sees Indian and Pakistan put on an elaborate and aggressive show, with pumping chests and flying boots.

Further north, on the Line of Control in J&K, both armies frequently exchange fire, with unarmed civilians caught in the middle. Here, and also in other parts of the border, these villagers are looked at with suspicion amid a perennial fear of cross-border infiltration.

Occasionally, an uninformed visitor mistakenly crosses the border and finds himself languishing in jail on the other side for years.

But sometimes, the same border can be a site of reconciliation, of peace. Standing about four kilometres from the India-Pakistan border, the Gurdwara Kartarpur Sahib, has managed to do just that. With construction of the planned peace corridor, the gurdwara would become a remarkable anomaly in the otherwise hostile context of the India-Pakistan border.

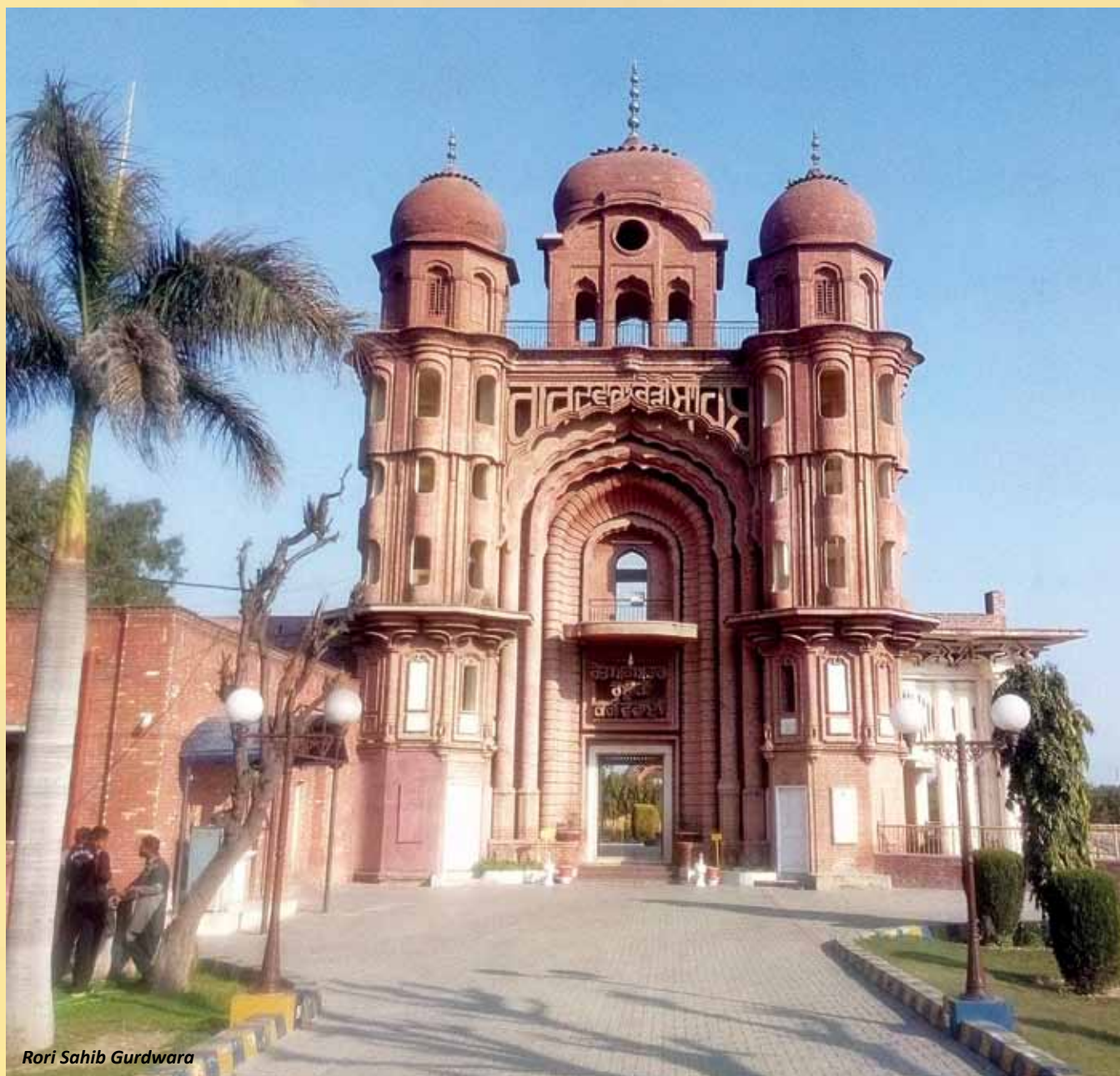
This ‘peace corridor’ will connect the holy Gurdwara in Pakistan’s Punjab province, which is the final resting place of Guru Nanak, to Dera Baba Nanak on the side of India’s Punjab.

While the Kartarpur Corridor itself is a much-needed move, this should serve as the starting point for several other such initiatives. There are at least five other gurdwaras in Pakistan's Punjab all historically significant and associated with Guru Nanak and other Sikh gurus, situated almost on the border that could well be incorporated into the 'peace corridor' discussions.

About 25km from Lahore is the historical village of Jahman, which came into existence in the 13th century. Just a little outside the village is Gurdwara Rori Sahib,

a lone structure atop a small mound. A sacred pool that was once constructed next to this shrine has been neglected. The 'Rori' in the shrine's name comes from shards of pottery that were found in abundance on this archaeological mound.

It is believed that Guru Nanak often came to Jahman, which was not far from his maternal village of Dera Chahal, with his Muslim companion Bhai Mardana. The two would often sit, singing odes to the Lord and here the gurdwara was built to commemorate them.

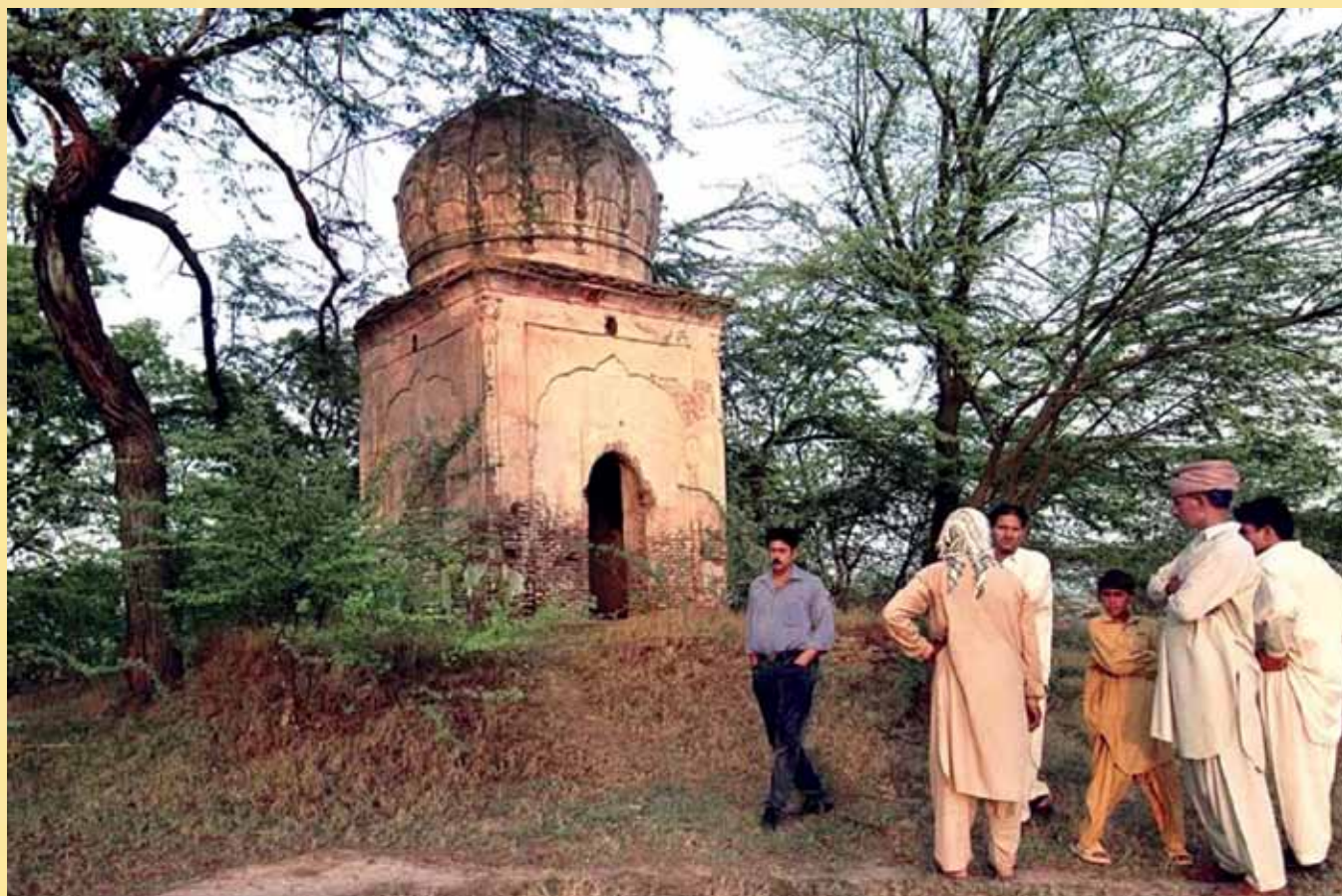


Rori Sahib Gurdwara

I first visited the gurdwara in 2008, a few days after the Mumbai terror attacks. India-Pakistan relations were at their lowest then and there was a real fear that actual war might break out. As I stood inside the gurdwara, observing the remains of the frescoes depicting the ten Sikh gurus inside the dome of the shrine, I heard sounds of some fighter jets in the sky. We later found out these were Indian warplanes which had briefly entered Pakistani airspace. The border is only a few kilometres from here, and standing on roof of the gurdwara, I could see buildings on the Indian side.

There are two platforms for sitting, the higher one representing Guru Nanak and the other, slightly lower, representing Bhai Mardana. Straw and salt had been placed on the platforms, perhaps by villagers, to whom the shrine still held spiritual significance. The most dangerous border in the world is just a kilometre from here.

South of Jahman and Ghavindi, in Kasur district, lie the remains of two historical gurdwaras associated with the third Sikh guru, Amar Das, the only



A short distance from here, along the border, is Ghavindi, another historical village believed to have been frequently visited by Guru Nanak and Bhai Mardana on their journeys from Dera Chahal to Sultanpur Lodhi, where Guru Nanak first found employment. Outside the village, the Guru is said to have found refuge under a grove of lahura (desert teak) trees. The gurdwara that came up at this site is a modest structure, with a single room and a small dome, hidden in the trees.

gurdwaras associated with the Guru in Pakistan. The first of the abandoned gurdwaras is located in Tergay village, a few kilometres from the border. A long structure with a white dome, it stands on an empty ground.

It is believed that the Guru was on his way to Kasur when he was welcomed by the people of this village, who requested him to stay with them. Tying his horse to a tree, the guru is believed to have

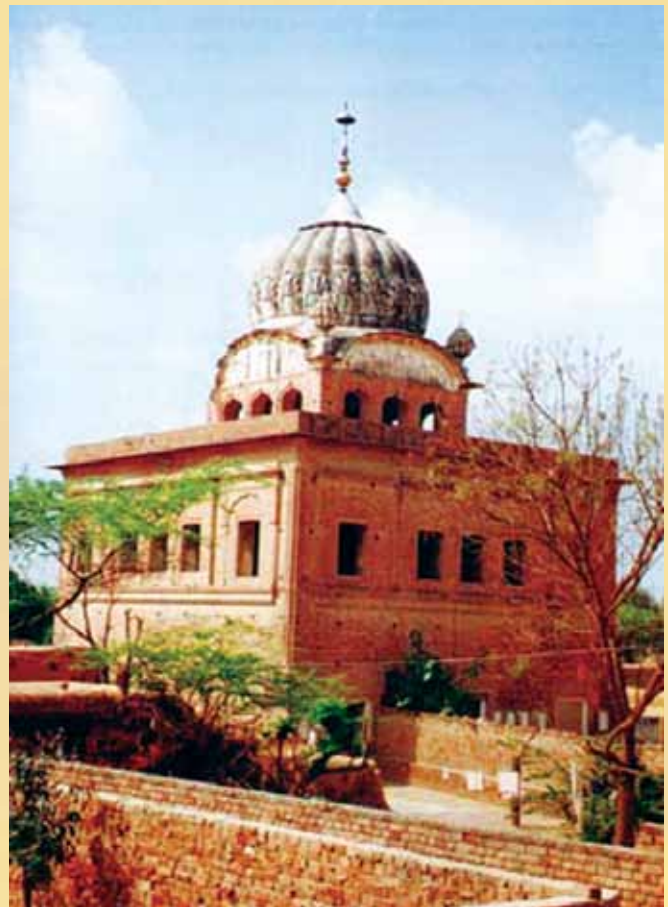
accompanied the villagers. The gurdwara was later built at the place where the guru reportedly tied his horse. A short distance from this gurdwara, in the village of Qadiwind, are the remains of Gurdwara Bhai Bahlol, named after a devotee of Guru Amar Das who is said to have built a water tank here to commemorate the visit.

Travelling further north along the border, one comes across the historical village of Padhana, where the first settlers can be traced to the 11th century, according to British land survey reports. Here, right at the entrance of the village, are remains of what once was a splendid gurdwara. A spacious structure with a vast vacant ground around it, there was a giant lock at the entrance to the complex the day I visited the village.

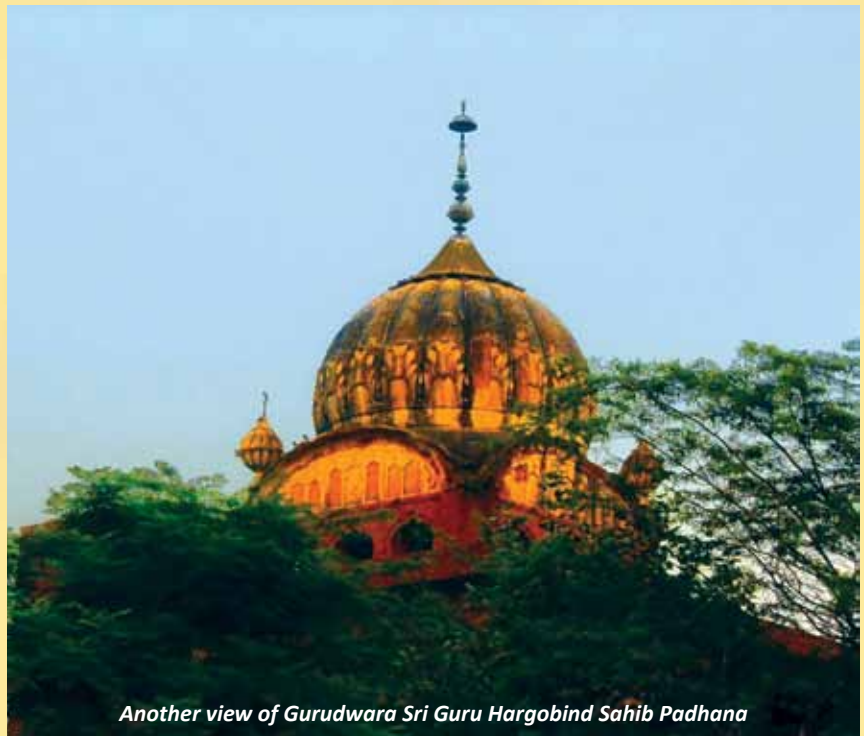
This is one of several Gurdwaras in Pakistani Punjab associated with the sixth Sikh guru, Guru Hargobind. The guru is believed to have arrived in Padhana, a prominent village, on the exhortation of its residents. Later, his devotees constructed a gurdwara in his name.

Barely a kilometre from the Indo-Pakistan border, this shrine is now a pitiful sight compared to the freshly painted gurdwara that stands on the other side of the Radcliffe Line.

The fate of these Gurdwaras would have been amazingly different had Cyril Radcliffe, the architect of the India-Pakistan boundary, changed the lines on his page by a centimetre or so. Instead of being part of a thriving pilgrimage, as they were meant to be, they are today a sad reminder of the division of history that that Partition ensured. With the Kartarpur Sahib Corridor, however, there is some hope that perhaps one day, these other Gurdwaras too can have similar corridors, allowing thousands of devotees to connect, once again, with heritage of the Gurus.



Gurudwara Chhevin Patshahi, Padhana in Lahore District



Another view of Gurudwara Sri Guru Hargobind Sahib Padhana



An Air Bridge to Nanded

Just a week before the emotional event which marked an important step towards establishing the 'Kartarpur Corridor', which had Pakistan's Prime Minister Imran Khan laying the foundation

stone to begin formal process at Narowal district of Pakistan (*see article*), was a far less publicised event, many hundreds of kilometers away in south east of the sub-continent, when an 'air bridge' was inaugurated.



Commander of Air India's inaugural flight to Nanded was Captain Deepinder Singh Gill whose co-pilot was Captain JS Walia



..... Seen paying obeisance on the tarmac at Sri Guru Gobind Singh airport, Nanded



Aerial view of Sachkhand Sri Hazoor Sahib Gurdwara at Nanded

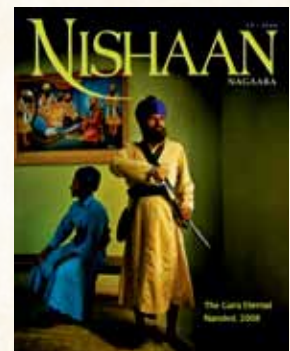
Exemplifying the impact of Sikhi throughout the sub-continent, the town of Nanded in Maharashtra, close to Hazoor Sahib, was formally air linked with India's capital New Delhi on 19 November 2018.

On this day, Maharashtra's former chief minister Ashok Chavan inaugurated Air India's flight from Delhi to Nanded's Sri Guru Gobind Singh airport. Mr Chavan lauded importance of the service particularly for Sikhs worldwide to facilitate *darshan* at Hazoor Sahib. Air India's scheduled flight which takes off at 3.20 pm from Delhi arrives at Nanded airport just after 5 pm, returning to Delhi at 7.30 pm. From 8 January 2019, Nanded will also be air linked with Chandigarh, Air India operating two flights a week.

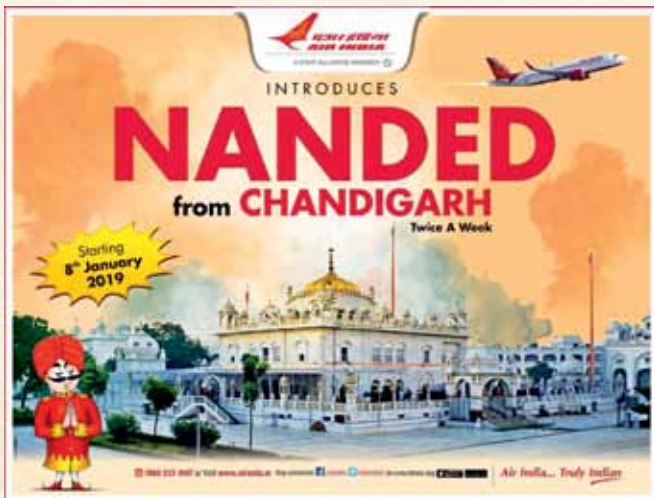


Gurdwara Hazoor Sahib

Nishaan's Issue IV/2008 cover story was on 'The Guru Eternal : Nanded 2008', the editorial evocatively put together by the venerable Dr Jaswant Singh Neki, the article being lavishly illustrated.



To quote from the lead, *"since time immemorial, religion and faith have been key drivers in the evolution of cities and their growth. The Temple Mount in Jerusalem, Vatican City in Rome, Mecca and Medina in Saudi Arabia, Golden Temple at Amritsar and Balaji Temple Tirupati in South India are few examples of the flourishing cities whose development was driven by the presence of monuments of religious significance"*.



American Sikhs participate “with faith and joy”



The American Sikh Council (ASC) along with several other Sikh organisations participated with much faith and joy at the Parliament of World's Religions (PoWR) held The Metro Toronto Convention Centre (MTCC), Toronto, Canada 1-7 November, 2018. This event, now regularly held every 3-4 years, was attended by over 10,000 people of various faiths from over 50 different religious and peace organisations, from more than 80 countries.

It was spontaneously agreed that one of the highlights at the Parliament was ‘Guru Ka Langar’, a

combined effort of the Sikhs across Canada, particularly the Ontario Sikhs and Gurdwara Council (OSGC) who led this sewa, the organisers, the sewadars the local sangat and many unnamed individuals who took the initiative to lead and take this enormous responsibility along with World Sikh Organization (WSO).

The OSGC also did an excellent job in planning the large stand-alone displays which covered the entire gamut of contemporary Sikh history – from the 1984 Sikh Genocide to efforts of the *Khalsa Aid* and much



organisations for providing financial support for the ‘Guru Ka Langar’, which made such lasting imprint in all the attendees from across the world.

The American Sikh Council (ASC) was represented by Dr.Gurdas Singh, S.Jagjit Kaur, Dr. Surinder Singh, S.Narinder Kaur, S.Ajit Singh, S.Manjit Kaur, Dr.Manbir Singh, S.Taranjeet Kaur, S.Balmeet Singh, S.Jasbir Kaur, S.Kirpal Singh, S.Sutinder Singh, S.Savraj Singh and S.Shamsher Singh.

As Dr Manbir Singh observed, “People were drawn to the ASC exhibit; some out of curiosity and many others who simply wanted to meet and talk. But everyone walked away with a smile in gaining

more, “the phenomenal sewa by all volunteers from the gurdwaras of greater Toronto area being simply amazing.”

The OSGC co-ordinated and prepared ‘Guru Ka Langar’ at the Gurdwara Sahib and, overall provided outstanding sewa. The langar would continue from 11:30 am to 2:30 am every day, over the seven days. Thanks to all the ‘panthic’



American Sikh Council delegates with many visitors in turbans at the ASC exhibit



new knowledge and understanding, while many got turbans tied to get a feeling of what it feels to be a practicing Sikh.”

As a matter of record, there were over 75 seminars, panel discussions and presentations made by Sikh organisations over the seven days, covering an array of topics, from the 1984 ‘Sikh Genocide’ to global peace efforts and much more. Sikh speakers spoke about their faith, their history and their traditions. There was also focus on pressing issues and the problems that Sikhs have had in



Dr Gurdas Singh, Dr Kanwaljit Kaur and Mrs Jagjit Kaur

the recent past, especially since 9/11. Some speakers talked on current matters such as discrimination, hate crimes, bullying and harassment in the USA. A key personality was Lady Dr.Kanwaljit Kaur from the UK while a majority of other Sikhs were from the USA and Canada.



Mrs.Taranjeet Kaur with visitors at the ASC exhibit



Sikh delegates from several organizations in North America at the POWER

Perhaps the most underrepresented group on previous such occasions have been the ‘Dalits’ but who had a reasonably good presence this time, not only participating but speaking candidly about tolerating the daily indignities in their lives.

Unfortunately, some ‘upper caste’ types complained about ‘the large presence’ of Sikhs at the very start of the Parliament and actually had the audacity to put this in writing to the organisers. It was disconcerting

to observe as to how so many of these ‘upper caste Hindus’, largely citizens of America and Canada get exercised when the subject ‘Sustained Sikh Genocide 1984-1998’ is raised. Whenever Sikhs speak out, they are immediately vilified as ‘secessionists’ which unfortunately displays their own weakness as also paranoia. At the 2018 Conference the Sikhs not only stole the show but made a powerful impact on the global stage while sections of the Hindus present were visibly unnerved, feeling,



Dr Manbir Singh and Mrs Taranjeet Kaur with a visitor at the exhibit

Programme included kirtan by the Sikh Youth Alliance of North America (SYANA), with the young youth organisations putting up an excellent display and presentations in the ‘Sacred Space’ room.

The American Sikh Council (ASC) had a stand-alone exhibit where they handed out various educational materials which included brochures on the *Sikh Faith, Sikh Scriptures, History of Sikh Americans, Bullying of Sikh American Children, Sikh Genocide*. Several books published by ASC on Sikh Heritage were on display at the exhibit.

Over the week-long event ASC volunteers tied over 400 turbans. While tying turbans, ASC members had a one-on-one contact with guests and the undivided attention, which ranged from a few minutes to long discussions to explain their faith, heritage and identity was very humbling. It was freely acknowledged that after the ‘Guru ka Langar’, turban tying of delegates was the most popular and memorable part of this Parliament.

And, incredibly one day, almost every delegate had a *dastaar* or

turban on their heads. Many came back the next day to retie their turbans or request a different colour ! Some of the attendees even confessed that they had slept with their turbans in case they were unable to put it on next day. Some went to the airport on their way home with turbans on their heads as they wanted experience the ‘special treatment’ that most male Sikhs experience when they travel by air, particularly in the United States of America.

As ASC President Dr.Gurdas Singh and Vice-President S.Jasbir Kaur recalled “Many of the people we tied turbans on would either smile or get emotional as it opened their eyes to something unique and educational, transforming their preconceived notions in a positive manner.”

Sikh participation at this year’s Parliament of World’s Religions was a monumental success, all owed to the collective effort of Sikhs across the USA, Canada and beyond.

A common comment by attendees on the final day was, “The Sikhs have completely stolen the show!”

Dr.Kanwaljit Kaur, President of the Global Sikh Council (GSC) spoke at the closing ceremony, giving a very positive and uplifting message on behalf of the Sikhs.

The next Parliament of World Religions has been scheduled two years from now, with the host country’s name to be announced soon.



Reports from POWER, Toronto

Ragini Sharma of Toronto laments “The shocking exclusion of Hindus”



As a Hindu I was deeply dismayed at the exclusion of Hindus at opening ceremony of the Parliament of World’s Religions. I sat for four hours for the event, till after 10 pm waiting to a Hindu presenter. Not a single Hindu speaker came up. The slogan ‘The Promise of Inclusion and the Power of Love’ rings hollow to me. Hinduism is the world’s third largest religion, after Christianity and Islam and the opening ceremony felt like a big slap on the collective face of Hindus.

I actually went up to front of the stage after the closing prayers to express my dismay in public. After that Veena Howard, co-MC came over to tell me that there was a mix-up with the speaker who had not shown up nor answered calls. But another staff person, standing beside her, said that actually the speaker was present but he forgot to inform the MC. “Co-chair came over to give me this ‘excuse’ she told me and that my getting upset at the situation was an indication that I was “not listening”. Why was an announcement not made about the cancellation of the Hindu speaker as a way to inform Hindus that they were not being excluded?”

Hindus have experienced over 800 years of colonisation during which an estimated 80 million Hindus were killed and millions more were humiliated, raped, converted and so on. However, Hindus mostly refrain from talking about their historical genocide, and attempted cultural genocide. Instead Hindus talk about their immense contribution to world peace through their ideas of Oneness of the whole universe, Ahimsa or non-violence, Self as divine consciousness, Yoga, meditation, vegetarianism, Ayurveda etc.

The 2018 Parliament actually marked the 125 Anniversary of Swami Vivekananda’s famous speech at the first Parliament of World Religions in Chicago in 1893. He gave a beautiful speech, to thunderous applause, which opened the floodgates of the world seeking to learn more about Hindu philosophy. It is indeed horrible for this failure to commemorate that important historical event. The Parliament of World Religions, in my view, is already a huge failure and disappointment – already failed in its stated mission of “inclusion and love.”

Prominence of Women in Sikhism



Sikhism emphasises the equal status of women and men. Guru Nanak emphasised:

*It is in a woman, that man is conceived,
It is from a woman that we are born
How can we say woman inferior?
When it is woman that gives birth to royalty.*

In Sikhism there is only but one God who is the creator of everything known or unknown. God is neither male nor a female, has no image, shape or colour, is immortal and is transcendent as well as immanent.

(In Caodaism God is a male and His Deputy is Pope and no woman can occupy that post).

There is no hierarchy in the Sikh faith and all men and women are required to equally work for God-realisation through service to humanity and sharing of responsibilities. Guru Nanak emphasised the equality of women with men 550 years ago, in a society where women had occupied a demeaning, derogatory and continuing deteriorating position. This was a very revolutionary idea, a challenge to the society of the day. Guru Nanak felt the need was to rehabilitate

woman to a place of honour. He asserted that men and women share the Grace of God equally and are responsible for their deeds.

(In Caodaism, woman cannot reach God, have to come as a man in the next life to attain God).

Guru Nanak's teaching on women's equality, is a challenge for us to make it happen. Women from generations have had a lower status than men and needed the access to equality. We have to learn from Sikh Gurus who took many practical steps to move society to accept and respect full gender equality. Sikh Gurus encouraged women to attend religious services along with men. They not only were allowed to join religious services with men but were free to lead and conduct services at all religious ceremonies. Women



felt for the first time that they were an integral part of community.

In further moves, the Gurus condemned social customs that gave women an inferior status in society. Sikhs were forbidden to indulge in customs such as purdah, sati, female infanticide, girl child marriage. The Gurus encouraged widows to marry again and not spend the rest of their lives in misery as assigned to them by society.

The Sikh Gurus gave great importance to the langar system, where men and women worked together preparing food, distributing and eating together as one family of God. Men were encouraged to take full part in the langar in which manner the Gurus gave dignity to household work and broke the myth that cooking, and cleaning was a menial task only fit for women. Gurus emphasised that the Sikhs give food and shelter to the needy in their homes as well in Gurdwaras. By involving both men and women, the Gurus emphasised the importance of women's contribution to the welfare of society. Women work side by side with men in the Langar and all other religious, social and cultural activities in the home and the Gurdwara.

Gurus wanted to build a society of self respecting men and women with equal dignity: they considered that without the active participation of women in all walks of life, the social structure would be not only weak but incomplete. Bhai Gurdas, the Sikh scholar wrote that woman are one half of an equal partnership with man, and entitled to a have secular and spiritual knowledge equally. The Gurus rejected the then religious belief that a woman had to wait for another life as a man to achieve salvation and stressed that she could attain unity with God as a woman.

The Gurus exalted the status of women by regarding her as indispensable for spiritual growth and morality and assigned the highest status to married life. They were critical of the notion that man's path to salvation required those pursuing spirituality to keep themselves aloof from women. Woman, far from being a hinderance is a positive asset to the achievement of salvation.

While ascetics have usually played the role of religious teachers, guiding their disciples from a distance, the Sikh Gurus showed that the the Guru and the disciples both men and women, form an integrated society.

The Gurus taught that the so-called holy men who renounce the world, should actually return to their families, for it is there that they will find God. This was a significant rejection of the then Indian religious tradition.

Sikh Gurus advocated family life as opposed to renunciation and celibacy. The Guru says, “Living within the family life, one obtains salvation.” The



Gurus, by preaching equal partnership of man and woman in married life gave a higher value to renunciation which as the real renouncement of selfish motives, which would produce actions of self denial, love and sacrifice. Instead, they advocated the renunciation of lust, anger, attachment, ego and greed.

Sikh Gurus firmly advocated monogamy which elevated the status of women. Whereas woman was told to be *Patibarat*, meaning be true to the vows of marriage being sincere respectful to her husband, the Sikh Gurus talked about *Istribarat*, meaning that man must be true to his marriage vows and similarly show respect sincerity to his wife.

Whereas a woman had been contemptuously called “a child-bearing machine”, the Gurus respected and

valued her creativity and said, “Blessed is the woman who creates life.” The Sikh Gurus advocated marriage of two equal partners. The Guru says that “they are only truly wedded who have one spirit in two bodies.” The Gurus redefined celibacy in the framework of chastity - “he is celibate, who is married to one wife—”, so taught the value of conjugal fidelity.

The Sikh Gurus enhanced the status of women by idealising the love of wife for her husband holding it as an example for a devotee of God. The Socially accepted ideal relationship between a man and a woman, described the idea of relationship with God.

Guru Gobind Singh, the Tenth and final human Guru, blessed men and women alike with *amrit*, at which moment, women were bestowed the name Kaur meaning princess, to enhance the position of women. A Sikh woman is an individual in her own right, she does not have to take her father’s name when born or her husband’s after marriage,

she is a Kaur from birth to death. I personally had lots of difficulties after marriage with being called Kaur, and my husband a Singh. We could not have a joint bank account, I was told that ‘you might have these primitive customs in your country, but we civilised people stick to Mr and Mrs Singh!!!’

During times of war, women suffered immensely as they were often treated as commodities to be sold in foreign countries as slaves and prostitutes. The Guru commanded his Sikhs to treat women with respect, a young girl as his daughter or sister and an older as his mother.

The Gurus knew that there could not be any equality till women received education and for this the third Guru Amardas, made arrangements to educate women by starting 52 study circles. Once



given equality, women soon achieved leadership and management roles. Guru Amardas divided his Sangats into 22 areas for easy management. Women held three manjis out of 22 and fulfilled the leadership roles very competently.

suffered atrocities during the persecution period but kept the faith. There were many women rulers before the great Maharaja Ranjit Singh, and leaders such as Rani Sada Kaur, Rani Sahib Kaur and Rani Jindan helped to expand their kingdoms.

Women achieved leadership roles by dint of their hard work. Mata Khivi the wife of the second Guru's work in the Sikh important institutions of langar was hugely respected and her praises are recorded in the Guru Granth Sahib.

Having got equality, Sikh women excelled in all walks of life worked as Leaders of the community (exemplified by Mata Gujri and Mata Sundri). Sikh Women



From 1893 to 2018

The
Global
Interfaith
Movement



Genesis of the 'Parliament of World's Religions' was the 'World's Parliament of Religions' of 1893, which was an attempt to create a global dialogue of faiths. Its centennial was celebrated by another conference on in 1993, which then led to a new series of conferences under the title 'Parliament of the World's Religions'.

The Council for a Parliament of the World's Religions is headquartered in Chicago, its board of trustees elected from various faith communities.



Swami Vivekananda on platform of the Parliament of Religions in September 1893. Also seen (left to right are) Virchand Gandhi, Anagarika Dharmapala, Swami Vivekananda and G Bonet Maury

In 1893, the city of Chicago in America hosted the World Columbian Exposition, an early world's fair. As very many people were coming to Chicago from all over the world, many smaller conferences, called 'Congresses and Parliaments', were organised to take advantage of this unprecedented gathering. One of these was the World's Parliament of Religions, an initiative of Swedenborgian layman (and judge) Charles Carroll Bonney. The Parliament of Religions became by far the largest of the Congresses held in conjunction with the Exposition. John Henry Barrows, a clergyman, was appointed as the first chairman of the General Committee of the 1893 Parliament by Charles Bonney. The Parliament of Religions opened on 11 September 1893 at the World's Congress Auxiliary Building which is now The Art Institute of Chicago, and ran from 11 to 27 September, making it the first organised interfaith gathering. Today it is recognised as of the birth of formal interreligious dialogue worldwide, with representatives of a wide number of religions and new religious movements, including:

Swami Vivekananda belonged to the Bengali Kayastha community and represented Hinduism as a delegate, introducing Hinduism at the opening session of the Parliament on 11 September. Though initially nervous, he bowed to Saraswati, then began his speech with salutation, "Sisters and brothers of America!". To these words he got a standing ovation from a crowd of seven thousand.

100 years later, in 1993, the Parliament convened at the Palmer House Hotel in Chicago. Over 8,000 people from all over the world, from many diverse religions, gathered to celebrate, discuss and explore how religious traditions can work together on the critical issues which confront the world. A document, *Towards a Global Ethic: An Initial Declaration*, mainly drafted by Hans Küng, set the tone for the subsequent ten days of discussion. This global ethic was endorsed by many of the attending religious and spiritual leaders who were part of the parliament assembly.

Also released at the 1993 parliament was, *A Sourcebook for the Community of Religions*, by Joel Beversluis, which has become a standard textbook in religion classes.

The keynote address was given by His Holiness Dalai Lama on closing day of the assembly when Cardinal Joseph Bernardin also participated.

In 1999 more than 7,000 individuals from over 80 countries attended the Parliament in Cape Town, South Africa. The Parliament began with a showing of the international AIDS Memorial Quilt to highlight the epidemic and of the role that religious and spiritual traditions must play in facing the critical issues that face the world. The event and hundreds of panels, symposia and workshops, offerings of prayer and meditation, plenaries and performances. The programmes emphasised issues of religious, spiritual, and cultural identity, approaches to interreligious dialogue, and the role of religion in response to the critical issues facing the world.

The Parliament Assembly considered a document called *A Call to Our Guiding Institutions*, addressed to religions, government, business, education, and media inviting these institutions to reflect on and transform their roles at the threshold of the next century.

In addition to the *Call*, the Parliament staff had created a book, *Gifts of Service to the World*, showcasing over 300 projects considered to be making a difference in the world. The Assembly members also deliberated about Gifts of Service which they could offer or could pledge to support among those projects gathered in the *Gifts* document.

In 2004 the parliament was celebrated on the Universal Forum of Cultures in Barcelona, Spain. Having created the declaration *Towards a Global Ethic* at the 1993 Parliament and attempted to engage guiding institutions at the 1999 Parliament, the 2004 Parliament concentrated on four pressing issues: mitigating religiously motivated violence; access to safe water; the fate of refugees worldwide; and the elimination of external debt in developing countries. Those attending were asked to make a commitment to a "simple and profound act" to work on one of these issues.

In July 2004, during the Parliament of World Religions held at Barcelona in Spain, there was a virtual 'Sikh Parliament by the Sea', when Bhai



Mohinder Singh of the *Guru Nanak Nishkan Sewa Jatha* of Birmingham, England created a Darbar Hall, Kirtan pandal, exhibition halls, kitchen and langar area.

As recorded in *Nishaan's Issue IV/2004*, "Against an awesome vista of the shining sea, over a hundred Sikh scholars interacted with 8000 delegates from 75 countries representing over a hundred spiritual and religious traditions. Several hundred other Sikh devotees were at the meeting to register their solidarity and make themselves known on the global scene. They were there in record numbers, colourful and dignified and offering an inspiring gamut of programmes and presentations. Amongst those from India included Dr Jaswant Singh Neki, Bibi Inderjit Kaur and S Hardev Singh whose massive enlargement of Darbar Sahib provided the backdrop in the main hall".

Melbourne, Australia, hosted the 2009 Parliament of the World's Religions with 6000 people attending.

The Melbourne parliament addressed issues of Aboriginal reconciliation. The issues of sustainability and global climate change were explored through the lens of indigenous spiritualities. Environmental issues and the spirituality of youth were also key areas of dialogue.

The Council suggested that the Melbourne parliament would "educate participants for global peace and justice" through exploring religious conflict and globalisation, creating community and cross-cultural networks and addressing issues of religious violence. It supported "strengthening religious and spiritual communities" by providing a special focus on indigenous and Aboriginal spiritualities; facilitating cooperation between Pagan, Jewish, Christian, Bahá'í, Jain, Muslim, Buddhist, Sikh and Hindu communities; crafting new responses to religious extremism and confronting homegrown terrorism and violence.

The 2015 Parliament took place at the Salt Palace Convention Centre in Salt Lake City, Utah where over 9800 attendees, performers, and volunteers from 73 countries, 30 major religions and 548 sub-traditions participated in the Parliament. During the closing ceremony, Imam Abdul Malik Mujahid announced that the Parliament would henceforth be held every two years, with the next gathering scheduled for 2017, later changed to 2018, and then held in Toronto 1-7 November 2018.



At the 2016 Parliament of the world's Religion

The 2018 Parliament of the World's Religions



The 2018 Parliament of the World's Religions was hosted by the city of Toronto from 1 November through 7 November, 2018 at The Metro Toronto Convention Centre (MTCC) located at 222 Bremner Blvd, Toronto, Canada, which “in its distinction as home of the world's most diverse city, showcased its unique values, achievements, and aspirations as the 7th host of the Parliament of the World's Religions”.

For the 2018 theme, the Parliament drew from movements of goodwill and cross-cultural respect



that are embodied in the spirit of the interfaith movements as above :

The 7th Parliament of the World's Religions featured more than 500 programmes and events across six major tracks:

- ◆ *The Women's Track: The Dignity of Women Across the World's Wisdom Traditions*
- ◆ *Countering War, Hate & Violence Track: Peace and Love: Not War, Hate & Violence*
- ◆ *Climate Action Track: Care for Our Earth, Responsibility for Our Future*
- ◆ *The Indigenous Peoples' Track: The Spiritual Evolution of Humanity & Healing Our Mother Earth*
- ◆ *The Next Generations Track: Interfaith Has No Age, Youth Voices for Change*
- ◆ *Justice: Advancing Concrete Change Toward a Just, Peaceful, and Sustainable World*

Hardeep Singh's talk on

“Addressing Prejudice and Hate Crime”



I have been truly humbled to hear about the incredible efforts of Jasvir Kaur and her colleagues in the *Sikh Healing Collective* in the aftermath of ‘Wisconsin’ and their selfless support to victims and their families ever since then. The prejudice that led to that tragic event, and how we address it as a faith community is the topic that I am attempting to navigate through.

As way of background, my interest in this area stems from my personal experiences growing up in Britain, as well as my co-authorship of a forthcoming volume titled *Racialisation, Islamophobia and Mistaken Identity: The Sikh Experience*. This is a subject I have written about in the mainstream media, and it’s an area of government policy I have been trying to influence

with colleagues of the *Network of Sikh Organisations* (NSO) including our Director, Lord (Indarjit) Singh of Wimbledon.

Whilst growing up in London the word ‘Paki’ (which ironically means ‘pure’) was routinely used by racists to describe those from the Indian subcontinent – be they Hindus, Muslims or Sikhs – and something I unfortunately became accustomed to while growing up. Having attended a session which Gian Singh Sandhu presented, I understand it’s a term Canadian Sikhs need no introduction to either. When my father’s generation initially settled in the UK in the 1960s, fascists like the National Front used to look for people to beat up, ‘Paki-bashing’ as they would “eloquently” put it. In the



Sikhs are now well integrated in the United Kingdom, and increasing numbers serve with the British Army

1980s the leader of a group called the British National Party, openly talked of the voluntary repatriation of Sikhs to India, so [quote unquote] “West London wouldn’t be so crowded at rush hour”. We have faced the ugly head of racism for many decades.

However, like the television crime drama *Miami Vice*, things have of course moved on since then. As we all know, the narrative dramatically changed in the aftermath of 9/11 – this narrative applies as much to Sikhs in the US, Canada as well as those in the UK, or wherever they have settled. For turbaned Sikhs, we saw the transformation of the turban and beard from sacred symbols representing equality and justice, to those (in the eyes of the ignorant) deserving antipathy and vilification – in what are often described as ‘mistaken identity’ attacks. As we know, this transformation was in part facilitated by post 9/11 media images of a turbaned and bearded Osama bin Laden and his deputy Ayman al-Zawahiri. However, it’s important to acknowledge that this perception has its roots in the 1979 Iranian revolution, when images of a beturbaned, black-clad Ayatollah Khomeini were perceived in the West as the epitome of all things evil.

We must also acknowledge that non-orthodox Sikhs have also faced prejudice with a phenomenon we describe in our book as the ‘racialisation of Islamophobia’: an example of this is a former British minister, Parmjit Singh Dhanda who had a pig’s head thrown in his drive (next to his car) shortly after he lost

his seat in the 2010 election, and a BBC journalist of Sikh heritage who had pork scratchings surreptitiously placed in her supermarket basket one afternoon. From a British perspective, probably the worst example of this post 9/11 backlash is the attempted beheading of a Sikh dentist in Wales in ‘revenge’ for the murder of Fusilier Lee Rigby – a British soldier who was murdered on the streets of London by Muslim extremists. Clearly these incidents and the current polarised global political climate, with a rise in populism across Europe and anti-immigrant sentiment being ratcheted up in places like the US, presents a significant challenge for all minority communities including our own moving forwards.



Tom Dhesi, first turbaned M.P. in the UK House of Commons

The question is then, how we address this as a collective – what lessons can we learn and are there exemplars out there to help us combat ignorance and prejudice? I’ve been in sessions this week hearing about some of the trailblazing work of North American organisations like *The Sikh Coalition* and the *World Sikh Organisation* : there is much to learn from their efforts. We can have discussions about reporting and recording incidents of hate crime, and there certainly is a conversation to be had, as in some instances Sikhs are incorrectly recorded under ‘Islamophobic hate crime’ categories by police forces owing to the nature of perception-based reporting. However, I think most of us would agree tackling the root cause of prejudice is where we must focus our efforts. Improving religious literacy must be an area of priority and of course

this starts with education in schools and making sure Sikhism stays on the curriculum agenda. The expertise here lies with the likes of Lady Singh (Dr Kanwaljit Kaur), who has written 20 books, many focusing on Sikhism for schools. In Britain certain secularist groups are pushing to relegate religion—and there is a drive to teach children about other beliefs like Humanism, Atheism and Agnosticism – this may well relegate some religions, so we need to make sure Sikhism remains relevant, so watch this space carefully.

One of the most egregious examples of religious illiteracy I have come across in recent years, is post Wisconsin when Mitt Romney, the Republican candidate referred to those terrible events having occurred in the ‘Sheikh temple’ and the ‘Sheikh people’ – confusing an honorific title for Arab men with the word Sikh. After Wisconsin we also witnessed the elevated stupidity of a Fox News host, who asked Sikhs [quote unquote] “Have there been any prior acts of violence against members of the temple? Any anti-Semitic acts?” In Britain we recently had a senior civil servant in the Foreign Office remarkably refer to Harmandir Sahib, colloquially known as the Golden Temple, as the ‘Golden Mosque’. We have a responsibility to educate people about who we are and what we represent. The truth is not everyone knows, and clearly given the examples I’ve used to illustrate, it is not just about the working class, there’s a job to be done across the higher echelons of society as well.

We should not however lose heart. This conference is a great example of how Sikhs are working to improve recognition of who they are and what they stand for. I have lost count of the number of people who’ve approached me about the *langar* and how they have been humbled by this aspect of Sikh ethos. We have also seen others this week using innovative methods to educate, namely Vishavjit Singh, also known as the *Sikh Captain America*. He is tackling prejudice and misunderstanding head on by dressing up as Marvel’s First Avenger and speaking to people directly on the streets and in events like this. We need more Vishavjit Singhs who are innovative and not afraid to dress up in colourful leotards to boot.

Of course, ultimately all boils down to how we engage with the media because many people get their

information from the news. To illustrate, according to a survey highlighted by Dr Chris Allen from the University of Birmingham, when it comes to Islam, 74% knew “nothing or next to nothing about Islam”, whilst 64% said what they did know had been knowledge “acquired through the media.”

I am sure the latter figure is not too different as concerns Sikhism. As SALDEF’s (2013) post 9/11 ‘turban myths’ survey highlighted, a staggering 70 per cent of Americans couldn’t identify a Sikh man in a turban as a Sikh, and almost half believed that ‘Sikh was a sect of Islam.’ There is obviously much work to do.

It follows then that how Sikhs or Sikhism is represented by journalists is of paramount importance for moving forwards: we saw a fantastic campaign in Canada #AskCanadianSikhs to tackle generalisations about Sikhs in the media, and these are exactly the kind of initiatives that will be critical in the future. We see the likes of Professor Simran Jeet Singh and Valarie Kaur write excellent opinion editorials in prestigious publications like the *New York Times*. In Britain we hear Lord Indarjit Singh beautifully articulate Sikh teachings on ‘Thought for the Day’ on BBC Radio 4 to millions of listeners: there’s good reason he has been referred to as the ‘man who brought Guru Nanak to the breakfast tables of Britain’. The reality is this responsibility to educate and improve religious literacy lies with us all be it a conversation at a bus stop, a FB or Twitter post, or a discussion with a colleague at work. We must all step-up: after all, we are all the modern-day custodians of Sikhism.



Lord Indarjit Singh of Wimbledon, whose familiar voice has been heard for decades all over Britain

Dr. Tarunjit Singh Butalia on

“Sharing Joy and Pain in Toronto”



Langar at the 2018 Parliament – Courtesy: United Religions Initiative

As someone who has been involved for about two years with the planning of the Toronto Parliament of the World’s Religions, while driving to Toronto. I felt like a student the night before final exam week. However, as soon as I walked into the Metro Toronto Convention Centre and the hugs and handshakes began, all felt so very good again. I was at the reunion of the largest and most diverse interfaith event in the world! It was a joy to be with about 8,000 persons of faith and conscience from all over the world to share our hope for a better future for our children and grandchildren through our individual and collective faith commitments.

The Joy of Giving

The local Sikh community – led by the Ontario Sikh and Gurdwara Council – worked with other Canadian and international Sikhs to serve langar daily at lunchtime during the Toronto Parliament. Langar is the Sikh’s ‘open kitchen,’ started by the first Sikh Guru, Nanak Sahib, and evokes the principle of equality among all



People attending the morning kirtan at the PWR Conference

people regardless of religion, caste, colour, creed, age, gender, or social status. Additionally, the tradition of Langar expresses the ethics of sharing, community, inclusiveness, and oneness of all humankind. Regardless of who provides funds for the food and its distribution, this is called ‘Guru ka Langar.’ The Langar institution represents “sharing” and not “charity” and is a simple meal, not a feast.

It was heartwarming to see hundreds of attendees lined up outside the Langar Hall during lunchtime, removing shoes and covering their heads with scarves, and then sitting cross-legged in rows, eating the same South Asian food while talking with people from other parts of the world and different religions. Only vegetarian food was offered to ensure that all people, regardless of their dietary restrictions, could partake food as equals and no one went hungry. Over the five days, Sikhs served over 20,000 meals in the spirit of sharing with others. The volunteers worked seamlessly, like water flowing in a river passing through a flat meadow. I was particularly impressed with the langar being served without anyone being visibly in charge.

At the closing ceremony I was asked which Sikh individuals to recognise for the langar. My response was that focus on Sikh individual personalities ended with our Tenth Guru, so no one person or organisation needs recognition, but thanks be offered to all the volunteers who helped with the ‘Guru ka Langar.’ And so we celebrated another Parliament with a langar dedicated to all the volunteers who joined their heads, hearts, and hands to share a meal with fellow human beings.

However, a Bitter Edge

So much for the joys of Toronto. The first week of November every year is a time of reflection and a painful reminder for the Sikh community the world over as it is anniversary of the Genocide of Sikhs in November 1984, during which over 3,000 Sikhs were killed



Swami Agnivesh

in India’s capital alone by ravaging mobs with support from the then government. The accused went scot free and impunity continues 34 years later. Some of the Sikh plenary speakers chose to share this pain in the space created at the Parliament. Among them was Swami Agnivesh, who raised the issue in the opening remarks of his plenary address.

But not everyone understood the depth of pain that the Sikh community experiences during this time of year and therefore why it was important to express it during the Parliament. A Jain friend approached me towards the end of the Parliament asking why 34 years later,





Dr Tarunjit Singh is one of the Trustees of the PWR organised 75 Sikh programmes and organised the commemoration of 1984 in the Conference Centre. He is seen here with Dr. Kanwaljit Kaur, President of the Global Sikh Council

Sikhs were raising the pain of November 1984 during this gathering. In response, I said that I wonder why around this time of the year, Hindus still burn the effigy of Ravana centuries later and why the Jewish community still commemorates the *Kristallnacht*. My Jain friend apologized graciously.

November 1984 was the *Kristallnacht* of the Sikh community. One of the Sikh survivors of that genocide was at the World Parliament and received a standing ovation when introduced at the opening plenary.

Let there be no doubt that peace without justice is a peace of the graveyard. Expecting religious minorities to self-censor themselves at public forums such as their Parliament in the interest of any nation state is unacceptable. The Sikh community stepped out of its anguish to share its story with compassion at the event. We need our friends in faith to stand with us while we stand with them to confront bigotry, hate, and dehumanisation – irrespective of where it raises its ugly head. As Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. reminded us: “In the end, we will remember not the words of our enemies, but the silence of our friends.”

This was a bitter-sweet Parliament for me. Bitter because this time of the year reminds me and the Sikh community of the continuing raw pain of the November 1984 massacres in India. The sweetness of the hugs, the musical concert, the compassion of the attendees, the smiles of children, the dedication of the staff, and the promise of love as well as hope for the future however will be cherished by me for a long time – till we meet again in a few years half way across the world for the next Parliament of the World’s Religions. Till then we are now back home – doing the real work of being instruments of God in making our world a more peaceful and just place for all.

*Dr. Tarunjit Singh Butalia is a Board Trustee of Sikh Council for Interfaith Relations, Parliament of the World’s Religions, and North American Interfaith Network and serves as Special Advisor with Religions for Peace – USA. He has served on board of National Religious Coalition Against Torture and World Sikh Council – America Region. Locally he has worked with the Interfaith Association for Central Ohio for over 20 years and is currently Moderator of its Program Committee. He is co-editor of landmark book **Religion in Ohio: Profiles of Faith Communities** and received the 2016 Luminosa Award for Unity from Focolare Movement.*

“True Community Cohesion and Harmonious Living”

Closing ceremony address on 7 November, 2018 by Dr Kanwaljit Kaur,
President of the Global Sikh Council (GSC)



I am privileged, honoured and humbled to be asked to give some closing reflections at this truly memorable *Conference of Parliament of World Religions*. We have had a great stimulating week with much food for thought. Learning from people of different faiths and beliefs and listening to spiritually uplifting dialogues on how to improve self, that enables us to love our fellow beings.

We need to understand that we are all equal members of one human family, irrespective of our, faiths, ethnicities, colours and races. This understanding is necessary in working together for a cohesive society so that we can bring peace and justice in this disunited world. We have learnt a lot but learning needs to be practiced otherwise it is meaningless. My Sikh faith teaches: *Recognise there is only one race and that is the race of human beings*.

Our Sikh scriptures remind us,

*From the divine light all creation sprang.
Why then should we divide human creatures into high
and low.
God the Maker, has moulded one mass of clay into vessels
of diverse shapes.
God the True One pervades in all.*

Friends, one thing I have learnt this week is the importance of respecting and learning from the views of others. All too often religions behave as if they have exclusive truths, denied to others by the One God of us all. This leads to the absence of true dialogue, and to notions of superiority and inferiority and conflict between sister faiths.

It is like a boy (it's always boys!) telling another boy “my dad is bigger, stronger and better than your dad”. The inevitable result is a fight. We have learnt this week that

there is much in common between our different faiths, and of the urgent need to put our egos and prejudices to one side. We need to recognise the shared truths and the importance of respect for one another.

Guru Nanak taught '*Na koi Hindu na Musalman*'. That is, that God is not interested in religious labels but the way we conduct ourselves. The One God of us all does not have any enemies or favoured people. Our different religions are like different paths up a mountain leading to an understanding of God. The paths are not mutually exclusive and frequently merge to give us a heightened understanding of our own faith. All paths should be respected.

Our *Parliament of World Religions Conference* of 2018 will have achieved much if it helps us move from exclusivity and superiority to understanding the wealth of similarities that are common in all our religions. We can make a start by promising to ourselves that "I will try to overcome any prejudices that I have against other faiths and beliefs and will respect other views", I think this will bring us closer to true community cohesion and harmonious living.

Sikhism teaches that mere tolerance for other religions is too weak and too negative a word. A Sikh should be willing to defend to death the right of others to believe in their faith. Sikh Guru Tegh Bahadur was cruelly martyred upholding the right of Hindus to worship in the manner of their choice.

Moving on from the personal to bringing change in practices in public life, we need to bring the ethical teachings that have been discussed during the seven days of the Conference back into our daily work places. If we promise with ourselves that from today we are going to practice these teachings of equality of all human beings, including gender equality, respect for other people's views and a commitment to social and political justice, into our work places. Then we can say we have been successful in implementing the aims of this Conference.



Let us look at the international scene. There is much to do in a world that seems to have lost its ethical direction. We talk of a common brotherhood and of *One World Week* and yet are prepared to accept our brothers and sisters being destroyed by bullets and bombs manufactured by ourselves, super-power colleagues and super-power rivals. Most industrialised nations see the arms industry as an important earner as well as a means to political leverage on the less developed world. We need to raise our voices against this sordid death trade. We don't want our grandchildren and their children to look back on today's time with loathing and revulsion at a generation prepared to continue the suffering of millions just for its own economic prosperity.



Dr. Kanwaljit Kaur with other participants of the Parliament



Kirtan at the Parliament of World Religions, Toronto 2018

Pope Francis in his book *‘Path to Change: Thoughts on Politics and Society’* writes that people complain about the increased number of refugees coming into our country. Yet we are the ones that supply tyrants with weapons that fuel conflict turning settled communities into terrified refugees. Pope Francis further explains that, “When I say *we*, I mean the *West*.”

If we truly believe in the *Promise of Inclusion and Power of Love*, we should be prepared to live to our ideals no matter what the cost. It is not always very easy but as Sikh Gurus taught, life has little meaning if we constantly compromise our ideals. In Sikhism, we believe in the ideal of *Gurmukh*—a person who moves in the direction of Godly or ethical teachings as opposed to *Manmukh*—a person willing to compromise truth and justice for worldly gain, or in today’s terms, a higher standard of living. How many times have we heard it said, keep religion out of politics. To a Sikh this is like saying keep truth, justice and compassion out of politics. Shared ethical imperatives are necessary in building a just, stable and peaceful society. A good politician is one who bases his or her policies on ethics.

We will be commemorating Centenary of the end of the First World War on 11 November, only four days away. We remember the millions who died

and every year we say, never again. Yet since then, we have had the Second World War and countless other conflicts. We have had genocides against whole communities including my own Sikh Community in 1984 in India in this very week of November. Thirty four years on, still not a single person has been punished. We would like justice so that can live in peace. We would like to build bridges and have a closure to this episode. We still hope for justice.

Why? Why these conflicts keep happening? This was a question considered by the



human rights activist Alexander Solzhenitsyn. In his London Guildhall speech following Templeton Prize award, he recalled the suffering and purges in the Soviet Union and how his mother would say, “it’s all because we’ve forgotten God.” “He continued to say, having since seen and endured even greater horrors, I can do no better than repeat those pithy words, “it’s all because we’ve forgotten God.”

Today let us get God back in our lives, let us pledge ourselves to bringing Godly values back into all we do. Let’s make the Promise of Inclusion and the Power of Love a reality.

Interfaith Session at New Delhi



On 27 October 2018, a most meaningful Interfaith Session was held at the India Habitat Centre in New Delhi, organised by the International Committee of the Red Cross Society (ICRC), the Delhi Sikh Gurdwara Management Committee (DSGMC), Centre for Advanced Studies in International Humanitarian Law (CASH) and the Rajeev Gandhi National University of Law (RGNUL).

These very well attended Sessions were on the *Role of Interfaith organisations in changing Humanitarian landscape* which was followed by that on *Bhai Ghanaiya Ji, Sikh Faith and International Humanitarian Law* (see following article).

The welcome address given by Jeremy England, Head of the ICRC in India, followed by a galaxy of speakers including Prof Akhtarul Wasey, President Maulana Azad University, Jodhpur; Bishop Theodore Mascarenhas Archbhisop :Christian faith; Swami Chitanandsarswati (Muniji) : Hindu Faith; Dr Imam Omar Ahmed Illayasi, Chief Imam of India: Muslim Faith; Dr Acharya Lokesh Muni : Jain Faith; Dr Binny Sareen : Brahmakumari; Dr Jaspal Singh : Sikh Faith; AK Merchant : Bahai Faith; Bhikkhu Sanghasena : Buddhist Faith; Goiswami Sushilji Maharaj : Hindu Faith.

Gaurav Yadav, RGNUL Punjab, Kanika Jamwal, Researcher London School of Economics, Sugandha Sawhey, Researcher, RGNUL Punjab, S Jaswinder Singh, Principal SGTB Khalsa College, Delhi and Dr Anuradha Saibaba Head IHL, ICRC, New Delhi.



The Sessions were very ably conducted by Surinder Siungh Oberoi of the ICRC.

The Session on Bhai Kanhaiya ji was chaired by Dr Manoj Sinha, Director, Indian Law Institute with presentations made by Dr Sangeeta Taak., Assistant Professor, RGNUL Punjab;



Bhai Kanhaiya as the embodiment of humanitarian ethos



Bhai Kanhaiya (1648-1718) was a disciple of Guru Tegh Bahadur, Ninth Guru of the Sikhs. He was a devout and peace loving Sikh and saw everyone as equal in the eyes of God, and would go out to serve anyone who needed his service in whatever capacity he could give. His biggest service was to serve the wounded and sick on the battle field, administering water to both friend and foe. He did not see any difference between them, as to him they were all equal and he saw God in all of them. Having the compassionate heart that he had, he treated all humans equally.

Even though there were complaints against him that he was tending to the enemy as well, all he said was that he saw the Guru in all of them, had been taught by the Guru that all were equal and as far as he was

concerned, they were all men of God and he needed to look after all of them. This in fact is inspiration for the present day Red Cross; Bhai Kanhaiya kept “the light of God in all hearts” as his motto and served all.

As articulated by Dr Harpreet Kaur, onset of the 19th century witnessed a movement for humanisation of war and law. The need to codify the laws of war was raised out of which the international humanitarian law emerged. In this regard, the Battle of Solferino in 1859 was a decisive factor. Today the western world has the example of Florence Nightingale and Henry Dunant as epitome of service to the humanity. In India, Bhai Kanhaiya exemplified such values and was devoted to the humanitarian cause of service and care of war victims more than 300 years ago, Bhai



Bhai Kanhaiya served devotedly in the Guru's stable and langar. His devotion, dedication and selfless service so impressed the Divine Master that He advised him to travel and preach such virtues to others and serve humanity at large

Kanhaiya's altruistic conduct reflects that the service rendered to humanity (that is, God in man) is indeed considered the highest form of worship.

Bhai Kanhaiya is an embodiment of humanitarian ethos presetting an example of idealism par excellence while in Dunant, the values and pragmatism converge. The efforts of Henry Dunant resulted in a movement to codify the laws of war in the body of international humanitarian law that emerged subsequently but the efforts of Bhai Kanhaiya are guiding light to the humanity to endorse humanitarian values and imbibe the legacy of the Sikh Gurus in words, actions and deeds till posterity.

Bhai Kanhaiya endorsed humanitarian ethos 160 years before Henry Dunant and can be truly considered as forerunner of Red Cross Movement. In fact, the world must recognise the great contribution of Bhai Kanhaiya in endorsing humanitarianism in war in true earnest.

Symbol of the ICRC is the most common 'Red Cross', as adopted in 1863 at an international Conference in Geneva which has become the distinctive sign for medical relief teams on the battlefield. In 1876, the Ottoman Empire had introduced a 'Red Crescent' while Persia chose a 'Red Lion' on a white background, all of which were recognised by the Geneva Convention of 1949. In 2005 an additional emblem, the 'Red Crystal' was adopted, appearing as a red frame in the shape of square on edge, with white background. They all stand for serving humanity at large.



“We Are All Sikhs!”

*Islamophobia, Mistaken Identity, and Flying While Brown **



Image of American Muslim women, taken from the Internet



American Sikh lady and her Child

Post 9/11 has seen the increased exercise of surveillance across Western nations in the new moral panic around security. Sikhs, Muslims, and other “brown bodies”, have become problematised within this landscape of tougher profiling measures directed at racialised communities. In the context of the war on terror, *Islamophobia* has intensified in political and public discourse. Depictions of Muslims as either terrorists or as subjects to be emancipated have become entrenched in contemporary Western societies leading to the exclusion, vilification, and suppression of their voices.

The “war on terror” created such conditions under which the suspicion around racialised populations (both Muslim and non-Muslim) heightened. In this

climate a new category developed to group together, “Muslim-looking people”. The Sikhs perhaps represent some of the most prominent examples of ‘Muslim looking’ people which is illustrated most explicitly by the phenomenon of ‘mistaken identity’ in which mainly turbaned Sikhs have been ‘mistaken’ for being Muslim (and through a reductive extension ‘terrorist’) by Islamophobes throughout the West. For example the first person to be murdered in a ‘revenge attack’ following 9/11 was Balbir Singh Sodhi, a turbaned Sikh male in Arizona. As Gunman Frank Roque confessed, he ‘mistook’ Sodhi for an Arab Muslim. 2012 also saw the chilling attack on a Gurdwara in Wisconsin whereby a white gunman (who confused

** The book by Katy Pal Sian*

the Gurdwara for a mosque) opened fire at Sikhs while they were praying. Vandalism and verbal and physical abuse has been a daily occurrence for many diasporic Sikhs. Alongside the sharp increase in the number of racist hate attacks on the ground, Sikhs have also encountered disproportionate levels of racial profiling at the structural level in the monitoring and regulation of ‘suspicious’ brown bodies.

The racialisation of Sikhs through surveillance in the war on terror has led to the exercise of mundane and exceptional forms of racialised governmentality. With formation of the Department for Homeland



No comment !

Security immediately following 9/11, new security measures were introduced to collect intelligence on US citizens, these exceptional practices have included the monitoring of telephone patterns without consent; investigating internet browsing histories; and warrantless wiretapping. As new technological forms of surveillance continue to advance, masses of data on citizens and communities have been collated. Within this climate there has also been a tightening of airport security. Following 9/11 for example, the US government placed thousands of travelers on the ‘No Fly List’. Watchlists have developed rapidly with the effect of disproportionately targeting racially marked populations through a prejudicial profiling policy. South Asians and those perceived to be Middle Eastern have been increasingly constructed as potential ‘suspects’ by the security state and as a result have encountered uneven levels of surveillance.



Comment?

As Sikhs, particularly males with turbans and beards, have been increasingly classified as ‘looking Muslim’ ‘suspicious’ or terrorists, they have come to feel and share with Muslims the effects of *Islamophobia*. Diasporic Sikh, Muslim, and brown lives have been increasingly conditioned by everyday practices of *Islamophobia*. This has been particularly evident in airports with the ‘flying-while-brown’ phenomenon. At the same time that Muslims have been removed from flights due to passenger complaints; unable to fly due to various security measures; or subjected to Schedule 7 of the Terrorism Act 2000 which is an invasive power to stop, search and hold individuals at ports, airports and international rail stations, Sikhs travellers have similarly experienced constant discrimination and harassment from security officers at airports. As was reported by the US Sikh Coalition (2012) that at some US airports, Sikh travellers had been subjected to secondary screening “100% of the time”.

The visible Sikh turbaned male body has been particularly targeted as “problematic.” From my interview data my respondents spoke of being profiled, subjected to pat downs, and being swabbed by officers, as example: “Sikhs are just used to it, getting stopped in airports, hands being swabbed, pat downs, I mean once a guy at an airport patted down the material on my turban and said he was looking for gun powder”.

Similarly another respondent recalled his experience of being stopped by airport security:



American Sikhs amidst a sea of Star & Stripes

“I was 11 years old and I remember I couldn’t ever go through an airport security without being pulled aside, it just kept happening every time I travelled, and finally after being afraid for a while and because this had happened to me so many times, I just started screaming about it, I didn’t care anymore”.

Another respondent went on to say: “We have had situations where people are constantly harassed whenever they go to the airport – I mean it’s just profiling as policy, which is a ridiculous thing because I mean it’s just theatre, it’s making the public feel safer when they really aren’t, and its coming at the expense of the dignity of a certain group of people”.

Sikhs clearly occupy an ambiguous position in the climate of the war on terror. In such a tense time with overt expressions of *Islamophobia*, the immediate reaction of many Sikhs following 9/11 was to state, ‘We are Sikhs not Muslims’ as a way to separate themselves from the Muslim community. This response seemed to illustrate that sections of the Sikh community were unable to find common cause with Muslims, thus

perpetuating the split between the communities. This was picked up from my interview participants who were critical of the way in which the Sikh community chose to respond.

For example: “Post 9/11 unfortunately the first response was ‘we’re not Muslim’s, we’re Sikhs’ and it actually took a long time before Sikhs said, ‘we’re not Muslim’s, we’re Sikhs but there’s nothing wrong with Muslims.’ I think once some of the civil rights organizations started to do a bit of solidarity work the community started to vocalise this position more strongly”.

The next respondent who stated the following similarly echoed this sentiment: “After 9/11 you had lots of groups in the US that foolishly stated we are Sikhs not Muslims as an attempt to educate people, in Canada I think there’s more understanding. So here I didn’t see much of that separation going on because when you grow up here you’re brown, and you’re kind of related to each other in that respect. There were some Sikh groups in the US however that were



that sense of still being immigrants and still not being part of the wider community”.

In the immediate aftermath of 9/11 Sikh discourse certainly sought to articulate a position in which Sikh interests (i.e. not to be confused with Muslims) were seen to be more important than general the principles (i.e. the exclusionary and discriminating nature of the disciplining of ethnic minorities). As pointed out by my respondents such a position was troubling because it tended to naturalise *Islamophobia*, rather than contribute to its questioning. As the war on terror continues to deepen, there have been more and more efforts by the Sikh community to reject the ‘We are not Muslims’ slogan’ in favour of fighting against global *Islamophobia*.

My respondents were also aware that the general population showed a large degree of ignorance and racism which needed to be challenged, for example one respondent said: “After 9/11 I think there was this kind of ‘be weary’ atmosphere of people who look distinctly different, which is awful, I think that was a lot to do with how uneducated people are about different groups

challenging the whole ‘we are not Muslim’ discourse and they’ve been pretty vocal in taking up Muslim human rights as well”.

Another interviewee challenged the Sikh response following 9/11 for being too apologetic: “There’s certainly been that evidence of mistaken identity where people in the mainstream have thought anyone wearing a turban was a terrorist. From my personal experience, anecdotally I’ve been asked time to time from people “are you Muslim?” I think what I saw post 9/11 from the Sikh community was hypersensitivity and over correcting, there was certainly an over-apologetic narrative, and I think that has a lot to do with the way in which we might still have



Sikh American Attorney General, Gurbir Singh Grewal from New Jersey, who was target of a vicious campaign against him and his community, told his three daughters ‘to turn off the radio’ after hateful comments continued

and cultures. I think people definitely mistook Sikhs for being Muslim and projected racism toward Sikh people because they thought that they were Muslim, so 9/11 definitely steered people towards that way of thinking that all Asians are the same and there's no difference between Sikhs, Hindus and Muslims. I think 9/11 created this stigma about all Asians, so Muslims, Sikhs and Hindus all seemed to experience racism, it was obviously a lot worse for Muslims which is really unfair because the whole Muslim community was judged on the actions of a small minority”.

Similarly another respondent stated: “Since 9/11 Sikhs have definitely been stereotyped as being a terrorist, it's happening to anyone and everyone that's got brown skin. I think although some Sikhs might think they're having to carry some of the brunt of it, it all really goes down to the narrow-mindedness of people in this society. They just seem to assume if you are Muslim, or Sikh or whatever you are, that you're just a terrorist and it really shows the general ignorance and lack of education about these issues in Britain”.

Here we are certainly seeing a greater critique of state racism, as opposed to Sikhs explicitly distancing themselves from Muslims as seen in the immediate post-9/11 context. Solidarities between Sikhs and Muslims are strengthening as both communities continue to face racism and *Islamophobia*, this feeling was expressed by one of my interviewees who said:

“I think there's been maybe more unity for our generation. It may be that a Sikh and a Muslim happen to be in a line together queuing, or sometimes we'll just be walking by and hear some racist remark. The fact that we both go through the backlash of 9/11 together gives us more of a sense of being in a pack, you know this is me and you, like we're in this together because other people are treating us weirdly for no reason. In my opinion, Sikhs and Muslims have been brought closer together because of that shared experience”.

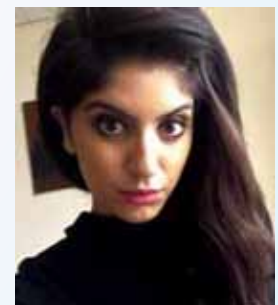
Sikhs and Muslims (and other racialised bodies) have had to navigate through a number of complex challenges and issues presented by the war on terror. As objects of hate, and suspects to the state, the communities continue to delicately negotiate the



Vishavjit Singh, Sikh Captain America

(im)possibility of exercising their own agency. In such a climate of intense *Islamophobia* and state practices of racial profiling, both Sikhs and Muslims constitute vulnerable subjects whereby a sense of fear, anxiety, and humiliation comes to mark their experiences living in a post-9/11 world. Sikhs and Muslims become suspect not because of what they do or who they are, but because they are caught up in processes of racialisation generated by the ‘war on terror’.

However, in these difficult and demanding times we have also seen many instances of Sikhs and Muslims coming together in the fight against *Islamophobia*. This is a time when unity, not division, is necessary. Through their shared experiences and challenges, solidarity between Sikhs and Muslims will lighten the burdens they are made to carry, and offer strength as well as a common, collective voice in the campaign to combat *Islamophobia* and racism.



Katy Pal Sian

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In Perspective

Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's visits to India in early 2018



Depending on which side of the metaphorical fence were those commentators, Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's visit to India in February 2018 was described as either "emotionally wonderful", or an "unmitigated disaster". And that exemplifies the complete chasm created by politicians, the media and nefarious elements, particularly where it concerns the Sikhs and, increasingly, their vibrant homeland of Canada in North America.

First the antagonists, who reported that Justin Trudeau's visit to India was "mired in the thorny politics of identity, memory and symbolism". Even

before the trip was over, columnists in both countries concluded that Trudeau was receiving "a royal snub" from the Indian government. Prime Minister Modi did not welcome the Canadian first family at the airport in New Delhi, instead, sending a junior minister nor did the Modi issue the customary welcome tweet that most heads of government receive upon their visit to India and did not accompany Trudeau on the latter's visit to Gujarat, a courtesy that has in the past been extended to Xi Jinping, Shinzo Abe, and Benjamin Netanyahu. Indeed, Modi and Trudeau did not meet until the sixth day of Trudeau's eight-day visit, and that too for only half a day of "consultations".



So much for that. Everything changed when Trudeau and his dotting family visited Amritsar, heading to the holiest of holy Sikh Gurdwaras, Darbar Sahib or the Golden Temple. Here, wearing a saffron-*patka*, Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau paid obeisance at the sanctum sanctorum, also being honoured with a *siropa*.

Later with his wife Sophie Gregoire Trudeau and their children Ella-Grace, Xavier and Hadrien, they performed *sewa* at Guru Ram Das Jee Langar hall, making rotis and then partaking food at the *langar*.

An obviously overwhelmed Trudeau wrote at the visitors

book “What an honour to be so well received at such a beautiful, meaningful place. We are filled with grace and humility”.





What then are the reasons for such polarised views? As Rohan Mukherjee, Professor Political Science analysed “why did a globally celebrated superhero prime minister receive such shoddy treatment in India? On the face of it, the main issue seems to be his government’s pandering to members of its Sikh electorate who cling to the goal of creating Khalistan, an independent state for Sikhs carved out of Indian territory.”

Although the movement finds few takers in Punjab today, the issue remains alive in left-wing and liberal politics in Canada, with politicians signalling their implicit and often explicit endorsement of the separatist ideology espoused by a non-trivial portion of Canada’s approximately 500,000 Sikhs, or 1.4% of the country’s total population. This political dalliance has caused friction with India that has transcended party lines. Earlier, Amarinder Singh, the chief minister of a Congress Party-led government in Punjab, refused to meet Canadian defence minister Harjit Singh Sajjan, whom Amarinder Singh alleged was a “Khalistani sympathiser”.

It might seem convenient to dismiss these events as the result of political posturing and bureaucratic lapses, but at a deeper level Trudeau’s visit is a clear instance of the primacy of domestic politics over foreign policy, as well as the pitfalls of ignoring symbolism in politics. It would be naïve to assume that domestic politics do not shape foreign policy on both sides.

Trudeau faces the possibility of losing a sizeable portion of the Sikh vote to the left-leaning New Democratic Party (NDP) under Jagmeet Singh, who has taken openly supportive positions of the Khalistan movement in Canada. Modi for his part is committed to a more assertive foreign policy that brooks no challenges, real or imagined, to India’s national security and territorial integrity.

At Amritsar, the Trudeau’s also visited the world’s first Partition Museum at Town Hall, together with five of his Cabinet ministers, a senator and 14 members of the Canadian Parliament. The PM was accompanied by ministers Harjit Singh Sajjan, Navdeep Bains, Bardish Chagger, Kirsty Duncan, and Amarjeet Sohi. He was



Signup the visitor's book at the Partition Museum, Ahluwalia

grateful to Prime Minister Trudeau for visiting the Partition Museum. As Canada has a vibrant Punjabi community, the museum is very keen to record and include the stories of Punjabis settled there.”

Prime Minister Trudeau also shared his thoughts on the Partition Museum, saying “to think of the lives torn apart, the violence and loss... We need to remember that it’s always easy to divide people. It’s much more

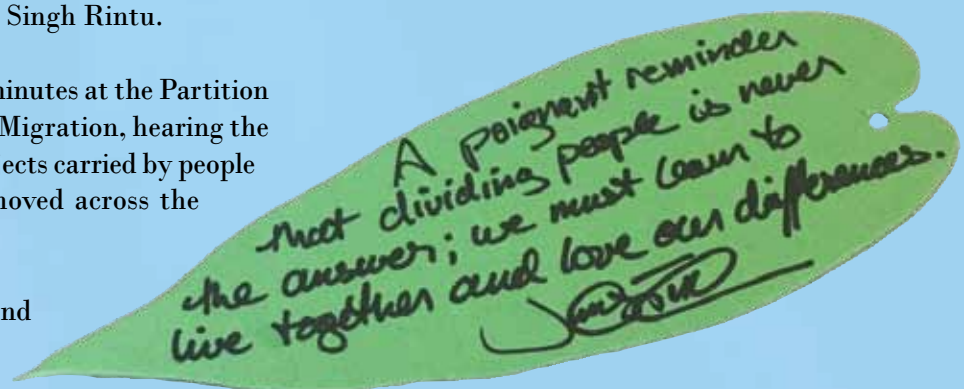


shown around by Mallika Ahluwalia, CEO and curator of the Partition Museum, Union minister of state for housing and urban affairs Hardeep Singh Puri, Punjab culture and tourism minister Navjot Singh Sidhu, Amritsar’s sitting Congress MP Gurjeet Singh Aujla and Amritsar’s mayor Karamjit Singh Rintu.

difficult but it’s the only path to bring people together in love and understanding. We have to be ever vigilant that is what we are putting into the world and that is the way we are building our future”.

Mr Trudeau spent about 25 minutes at the Partition Museum, time in the Gallery of Migration, hearing the stories and looking at various objects carried by people as they fled their homes and moved across the newly-drawn borders.

As Partition Museum CEO and curator Mallika Ahluwalia later said: “We are very



Canadians deserve better !

“Sikhs have long served as a political football for all Canadian political parties, it’s time to demand the representation we deserve”, writes Harinder Singh.



On 11 December 2018, a report from Canada’s Public-Safety Ministry documenting terrorist threats to Canada included a section on “Sikh (Khalistani) Extremism” for the first time, a move that has received backlash from the Sikhs across Canada, and not just politicians. There has been a call for retraction, with the argument that the short mention in the report maligns and stigmatises the entire Sikh Canadian community, who dealt with these same sentiments 30 years ago, after the Air India bombing of 1985.

In over 20 years, evidence presented by the former Crown prosecutor reveals that the threat of Sikh extremism is virtually non-existent in Canada – or in India. The real threat to Canadians of all stripes, supported by evidence, is the very real, and current

wave of right-wing extremism accentuated by Neo-Nazis and *Three Percenters*.

A retraction is not the end game and will not help the Sikh community address why the community finds itself at the centre of one firestorm after another. It is clear that despite having Sikh politicians and civil servants at the highest levels of government, Sikhs are pawns in Canadian politics, and some Canadians regard the community with suspicion, which makes them willing participants in the promotion of anti-Sikh propaganda. Canadians deserve better !

Sikhs form less than 2% of the population in Canada – and India – serving in major civil servant and ministerial roles at federal and provincial levels. Despite

their positions, they have not been able to successfully advocate for their human rights in India or collectively recognise the trauma and history of India's Sikh genocide in their new, adopted homelands where they do not face the same degree of political oppression.

(see separately) and Minister of National Defence Harjit Singh Sajjan (April 2017), where even the fact that the resolution passed, was denied in India. In both countries, we see Sikhs as the political football in the endless game of politics. Depending on who is in power



On the other hand, the previous Governments of India have appointed and elected those directly accused of playing a role in the 1984 Sikh Genocide. In Canada, a resolution proposed by the provincial New Democratic Party (NDP) to declare 1984 a genocide was defeated in Ontario, later winning in the same province through the Liberal party, spearheaded by Member of Provincial Parliament (MPP) Harinder Kaur Malhi (this was through the efforts of then MPP Jagmeet Singh). All of this came into play in the last trips to India of Prime Minister Justin Trudeau in February 2018

and which vote bank they are catering to, politicians in both countries flip-flop on whether the pain-filled recent history of Sikhs, is worth acknowledging.



Jagmeet Singh, Member of Canada's Provincial Parliament

It was only after 34 years, on 28 November 2018, that the Delhi High court in its landmark judgment, finally acknowledged that it was a Sikh Genocide in 1984: “The large-scale rioting, mob violence, arson, plunder, genocide, and looting has been duly proved and established.” And in another judgment on 17 December 2018 while sentencing a former MP for a life term, the Court acknowledged: “Neither ‘crimes against humanity’ nor ‘genocide’ is part of our domestic law of crime. This loophole needs to be addressed urgently.” On 21 December 2018, the Legislative Assembly of National Capital Territory Delhi adopted a resolution on 1984 Sikh Genocide terming it “clearly and unambiguously a genocide» and the «worst genocide in the history of India» national capital.”

Now let us look at the numbers. In 1907, 111 years ago, harsh immigration introduced legislation to disenfranchise and deprive Sikhs of voting rights. Today, of the currently ruling Liberal party in Canada, 4 Sikhs are Federal Ministers and 14 are MPs. Sikhs serve as policy makers, which policy now says Sikh extremism is “a top five threat to Canada”! Further, their stance that even the act of asking for Khalistan

is extremist is a denial of the ‘rights and freedoms’ guaranteed since 1982 via Canadian Charter to all Canadians. Sikh-Canadians have a right to discuss the concept of an independent Sikh homeland, and it is notable that Quebecers asking for separation are not deemed extremist.

Let us zero in on four Sikhs at the national political scene: Navdeep Singh Bains (LP), Harjit Singh Sajjan (LP), Jagmeet Singh (NDP), and Tim Singh Uppal (PC). Why these four? Because they are also initiated Sikhs. In Sikh terms, this means they chose to give allegiance to Sikhi, that their turbans and *kirpans* (curved swords) are not optional. Three have served or serve as federal ministers and one is leader of the party. There are MPs now who grew up with the stigma of “Sikh extremism”, but they seem to be unaware of how they themselves are creating and reinforcing this same stigma for future generations.

Guru Granth Sahib, the Sikh charter of spiritual-political paradigm, begins with *Ik Oankar* (One Force), the foundation of Sikh religion-revolution. Understanding the foundation of the Sikh worldview



Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and his cabinet pose for a photo inside Rideau Hall in Ottawa, 4 November, 2015

– the belief that everything is One – is critical to understanding Sikhs as a larger community both in Canada and around the world.

Stemming from the *Ik Oankar* paradigm is the slogan often heard by party representatives when they visit Sikh platforms: *Degh Tegh Fateh*. It means: “Guaranteeing economic and political freedoms shall establish victory in life.” This is from the seal of the Khalsa Raj, a historical precedent established in 1710 in the Panjab. It emphasises that establishing just rule, informed by *Ik Oankar*, is critical to a healthy society. Understanding the Sikh context is crucial to understanding Sikhs, because without that understanding, Sikhs can easily be written off as “extremist” when in fact they are in no way any threat to Canada.

Here are what is needed : The Canadian Government should explicitly retract their offending statements and commit to further due diligence in the future. Sikh politicians must work together to form a multiparty Sikh caucus, and Sikh civil servants need to create a Sikh-leaning policy making organisation. Each party must establish written platforms on issues important to their Sikh constituents. With the 2019 federal elections on the horizon, Sikh-Canadians must examine all party platforms. Sikh voters need to assess a party’s overall policies, looking beyond a single issue. A vote for any candidate is also a vote for all that his or her party

stands for. It is the overarching policy commitments of these parties which should weigh far more heavily in determining how one votes. Single-issue voting is simply not responsible.



The Canadian Government’s job is to address risks and ideologies directly. It can do that job even better if its concerns are not party to non-evidence based propaganda from foreign governments. It can instead act extensively to protect all of its citizens from claims and allegations levied by foreign governments at a time when we know Canada’s elections could be susceptible to foreign interference.

All Sikh Canadians deserve better treatment than they have received in 2018 at the hands of Canada, the media, and those politicians counting their Sikh votes en route to some of the highest offices in the land.

Guru Granth Sahib (468) unequivocally states:

“The constituency, the leadership, and whole world is full of trash-lies ... [Guru] Nanak humbly submits, without You, all is meaningless.”

The only solution, for all, is to identify with the Eternal: truthful living that sees the One in all dimensions.

Harinder Singh is Senior Fellow of Policy and Research, Sikh Research Institute.



Raising the Nishaan Sahib at Ottawa



The day was over-cast, over-cold but under busy when the phone rang. “Auntiji, can you do me a favour?” Hmmm, now who was this fine young voice I didn’t recognise, and how could Aunti ji possibly say no to this?

To my question, “what can I do for you?” she asked, “would you be able to do seva as a member of an all women *Panj Piaray* to raise the Nishaan Sahib at the Ottawa City Hall on the first Sunday of April 2018 at 9:30am?”

“Of course,” I said. “That’s wonderful,” said the voice. “What do we wear?” I asked. “Amrit will phone you with details,” she responded.

The day came, and our worthy leader organised us at the meeting place. We were dressed in elegant white Punjabi suits, strap on *kirpans*, and navy *chunnis*. The Sangat formed, with both familiar and new families.

We were missing one member of the Panj! She arrived late because of all the neighbouring street closings. They are part of the new transportation system which is called *the which-way-to-turn-to-get-whenever on one-way streets!* Still, we had plenty of time before moving to the flag square.



Hundreds of Sikhs in their finest gathered and greeted each other, joining in singing the kirtan which was delightfully presented by our talented local children and their teacher, ragini Devinder Bhanji. The Sadh Sangat smiled with pride. We women of the *Panj Piaray* stood with the greatest respect, on frozen ground, in our bare feet. Most were without coats. The wind was bitter.



When the Anand Sahib *kirtan* for the flag raising began, we looked up on the magnificent pole, which was at least three stories high! The first *sevadar* secured the handle and turned the crank twice. It resisted, and she moved back into our group. The second and third *sevadars* did the same. The fourth one offered 4-6 turns of the handle and stepped back to the group. Anand Sahib was almost finished. The Sadh Sangat looked

dejected as the *Nishaan Sahib* was only a third of the way to its place in the sky.

Being the fifth *sevadar*, I called on my father Guru Gobind Singhji to back me up on this. Everyone was looking at me. I was the little, elder white woman and would never be able to get the *Nishaan Sahib* to the top in time. I stepped to the encompassing pole, grasped the handle, and kept my mind focused on Guruji. I checked the flags progress, inhaled and kept up the circular force while the orange and blue sign of Sikh identity danced in the forceful, multi-directional wind. Success was achieved! Our identity was flying high!

Joy and relief were on the faces and voices of all present before Anand Sahib was completed! Ardas was performed for a thanksgiving for life in Ottawa, Canada's capital. Voices sang "Oh, Canada," our country's national anthem in unison. An Ottawa Sikh Society member then introduced the Councillor who delivered a short speech, commenting on the cold as a reason to keep it short. The president of the Ottawa Sikh Society accepted a framed proclamation to the Sikh Community.

Ottawa's first all-woman *Panj Piaray* and a devoted Sadh Sangat served Ottawa's community with devotion in our simple offering of Sikh identity in our icy homeland. Afterwards we quickly retreated from the ice-covered ground to our shoes and the inside. We laughed at our stalwart success and partook of delicacies served in the name of Guruji. All in all, a blessed day!

SS Siri Bandhu Kaur Khalsa
as part of Ottawa's first all-woman *Panj Piaray*

The Sikh Forum marks 34th Anniversary of November 1984



Members of The Sikh Forum with many grandchildren of the victims of November 1984

On 1 November 2018, **The Sikh Forum** organised their annual panel discussion, this time at the Speaker Hall, Constitution Club, New Delhi on **Genocide November 1984 : Justice Still Awaited.**

Amongst the eminent speakers were Sr HS Phollka, Ms Uma Chakravarti, Sr KC Singh, Mrs Urvashi Butalia Mr John Dayal, and Sr Hartosh Singh Bal, all of whom spoke forcefully and factually, with the large audience then adopting the following resolution:

- * The Parliament of India should each year observe a two minutes silence to mourn the heinous murder of over 5000 Sikh citizens of India during the period 1-3 November 1984.
- * Officially declare this as *Sikh Genocide Day* : the BJP-led NDA government has stated such system in every manifesto and election that the guilty of 1984 will be punished if it is voted to power. This government has now been in power for over 4 years, but has not fulfilled its undertaking even though the Union Home Minister Rajnath Singh had publicly

pronounced that the 1984 violence was a “genocide” at a function on 26 December, 2014 while distributing cheques of compensation in Tilak Vihar, a resettlement colony of widows of 1984. Further a BJP spokesperson, Prakash Javdekar, later Union Minister for Human Resources Development had said on 28 January 2014: “1984 was a genocide and pre-planned, it was executed by the ruling government.”

Sushma Swaraj and Rajnath Singh, both senior cabinet ministers attended the foundation laying ceremony for the *November 1984 Sikh Genocide Memorial* at Gurdwara Rakab Ganj in New Delhi in 2013.

- * The Supreme Court-led Special Investigation Team (SIT), must complete the investigations earnestly and in a set time-frame to provide speedy justice to the victims of 1984. Two persons stand out in particular, Jagdish Tytler and Sajjan Kumar whose cases are pending with the CBI for investigation. Despite repeated court orders, the CBI has not concluded investigations. Action must be taken against the main accused Sajjan Kumar and Jagdish Tytler immediately, charge-sheets filed and proceedings begun against them.
- * Human rights and interests of minorities have been engaging attention of the world and the Sikh Forum resolves that it would also engage with people and organisations which work for adoption of universally accepted laws on genocide, change in our criminal laws to penalise the instigators and participants of violence and provide for State compensation and rehabilitation of the genocide affected.

The Government’s expeditions action on these resolutions could go a long way in assuaging the hurt feelings of the Indian Society at large and the Sikh community in particular.

Genocide of the Sikhs, November 1984 'Justice' after 34 years ?



Time after time, when the terrible memories of November 1984 reappear in the minds of Sikhs the world over, some express their grief silently, with prayers for the many thousands of innocent men, women and children who were hunted down and murdered by politically motivated ghouls, many others gather to remember those days of infamy, from the night of 31 October 1984 for the next 72 hours in India's capital Delhi and many cities of north India.

The Sikh Forum of New Delhi is one such. This apolitical organisation, which was formed in late 1984 under the leadership of Lt Gen Jagjit Singh Aurora, of 'Bangladesh' fame, has relentlessly sought justice for victims of the November 1984 genocide and welcomes the Delhi Court's very first verdict in just one of the cases which has come after over 34 years and follows establishment of the Supreme Court-monitored SIT. This is an apt judgement, but however pertains to just one locality, and the masterminds and main culprits, who enjoyed political patronage, remain at large. It is hoped that with the SIT functioning and being time bound, all those accused are awarded exemplary punishment which would at the very least and at last bring some succor to the families of the victims' families and restore India's image for the world to see.

The Sikh Forum has relentlessly fought for justice, over the past 34 years alongside other organisations such as the People's Union for Civil Liberties (PUCL), People's Union for Democratic Rights (PUDR) under Justice SM Sikri and

Justice VM Tarkunde, Nagrik Ekta Manch of Ms Jaya Jaitley and other Human Rights Groups who have actively pursued these cases. With formation of Legal Cell by the DSGMC, venerable members of The Sikh Forum, including Chief Justice Ranjit Singh Narula, Dr Maheep Singh, Sr Manohar Singh Batra, Dr Amarjit Singh Narang and the indomitable Sr Harvinder Singh Phoolka have worked with dedication in handling innumerable these legal cases. Special mention must be made of Wg Cdr RS Chatwal, then Secretary Sikh Forum, Sr Tirlochan Singh, Maj Gen Mohinder Singh Chadha, who was for long President of The Sikh Forum and many others who worked around the clock at Rakab Ganj complex, preparing legal documents with over 1000 affidavits, a massive task for filing cases in the Courts, producing them for various Commissions appointed from time to time, and these have finally begun showing some results 34 years later.

The Sikh Forum has time and again reiterated that the Indian Government must enlarge scope of Supreme Court monitored SIT to file cases and FIRs against the errant Police officials, serving or retired who were equally responsible for those horrendous acts, getting direct support from political dispensation. Not only were there mass murders of hapless and innocent citizens of India but also of scores of uniformed Sikh armed forces personnel, as also rapes and pillaging, while many properties of Sikhs in the national capital region was looted or burnt down.

The Sikh Forum has demanded that all those who planned and funded this genocide from the very highest level of governance at the time, also be tried in the Courts of Law and charged for crimes against humanity. Not only Sikhs but the country in general and the international community are watching and waiting for justice to come about in a secular and democratic country, which is India.

“Punish the Guilty!”

34 years after the Genocide, several organisations demonstrate in the centre of New Delhi



On 1 November 2018, activists belonging to several organisations gathered in Sansad Marg (Parliament Street) in the heart of New Delhi, in a demonstration to mark 34th anniversary of the Genocide of Sikhs in 1984. The initiative for organizing the protest demonstration was taken by Lok Raj Sangathan. Many organisations have been consistently fighting for the cause of the victims of the genocide, and demanding that those guilty of organizing the genocide be punished. Representatives of these organisations addressed the protest rally.

Those who addressed the demonstration included Shri S Raghavan, President of Lok Raj Sangathan, Shri Shahid Ali of United Muslim Front, S. HS Phoolka and S. Inderjeet Singh of The Sikh Forum, S. Jarnail Singh, former Member of Delhi Legislative Assembly, Shri Siraj Taalib of Welfare Party of India, Inamur Rehman of Jamaat e Islami Hind and Comrade Prakash Rao, Spokesperson of Communist Ghadar Party.

Speakers pointed out that in spite of immense pressure from the ruling establishment, “we have never let people forget the horrendous crimes perpetrated 34 years back in the streets of Delhi and other places on innocent people. In an atmosphere of growing hate crimes and state repression on those who defend human rights, it is very important to boldly come out and condemn what is wrong, even if the perpetrator is the state itself and parties of the establishment, Ministers and high ranking officials. We need to counter the total silence in the mainstream media about the genocide. New generations born after 1984 need to be told the

truth so that such gruesome killings can be avoided in the future”.

Speakers pointed out that the genocide of 1984 was a meticulously planned state-organised crime and not just a spontaneous outburst. It was planned several months in advance. There is overwhelming evidence that it was planned at the highest levels including the ruling party, the cabinet, security officials, and the bureaucracy. The genocide was a part of the overall “divide and rule” strategy of the ruling class. This strategy has been the preferred weapon in the hands of political parties and their governments to stabilize their rule and push through policies which are against the interests of people and benefit only the corporate business houses.

Speakers pointed out that just as the real perpetrators of the genocide of 1984 are yet to be punished, the criminals who organised the destruction of Babri masjid, the massacres of Muslims in 2002, and other communal massacres are still roaming scot free. Attacks on minority communities have only increased since 1984.

The protest demonstration revealed the growing political unity of people against state organized communal genocides. The participants resolved to strengthen this unity, and expose the machinations of all political forces who try to divide people on religion, caste, language and other ways. They resolved to step up the struggle to punish the guilty of 1984. Families of victims of the genocide from Kanpur organised a protest in front of Parliament to highlight their terrible plight. Several other demonstrations and public meetings were also held in Chandigarh and other towns of India on 1 November, 2018.

Lok Raj Sangathan is an all-India organisation that was established in May 1998. It came into being in response to the widespread demand and desire of the people of India to take control of their own lives, and not leave it in the hands of self-serving politicians and narrow-minded parties of vested interests.

The Historic High Court Verdict



The Historic High Court verdict

The Delhi High Court verdict on 17 December 2018, relating to the pogrom against Sikhs in 1984 is historic for more than one reason. This is a significant judgment of a court in India inquiring into the legal framework relating to mass atrocity crimes, which include crimes against humanity, war crimes and genocide. The importance of this legal analysis is clear in the words of justices S Muralidhar and Goel, who emphasise the “larger context” and state that such cases “...are indeed extraordinary and require a different approach”. Part of this difference relates to the organisation and planning by political actors,

the targeting of specific communities, along with the connivance of law enforcement agencies.

The court traces the development of the concept of crimes against humanity, from the Nuremberg trials after the Second World War, to international tribunals such as those for the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda, and the approach of the Supreme Court of Bangladesh regarding crimes committed in 1971. Crimes against humanity are also defined in Article 7 of the Rome Statute (establishing the International Criminal Court) and consist of a “widespread or systematic attack directed against any civilian population” and include

murder, extermination, persecution, torture, rape and other crimes within its fold. While the court does not delve into the definition and elements of the crimes, and apply them directly to the case at hand, it finds that the crimes committed against Sikhs fit within this pattern and should be considered crimes against humanity. The court has honed in on the key components of crimes against humanity – that these crimes are not committed in a ‘normal context’, and that there is an underlying plan and intention in the commission of these offences. Previously, there was a requirement that crimes against humanity apply in the cases of armed conflict – but due to international legal developments, this is no longer the case, and such crimes are equally applicable in non-conflict contexts. In an unsparing verdict, the court also states, “There has been a familiar pattern of mass killings in Mumbai in 1993, in Gujarat in 2002, in Kandhamal, Odisha in 2008, in Muzaffarnagar in UP in 2013 to name a few.” As the International Law Commission (a body of international law experts) is drafting a treaty on crimes against humanity, the court wryly observes that “India, in view of her experience with the issue, should be able to contribute usefully to the process”.

However, in India, neither crimes against humanity nor the crime of genocide are detailed within the domestic criminal law, meaning that individuals cannot be prosecuted for these international crimes. The collective nature of these crimes, as well as the particular elements of these crimes, are not reflected in any domestic law provisions. While the offences under the Indian Penal Code such as murder, assault, arson, rape, and others are used, they are not the same and do not capture what crimes against humanity and genocide encapsulate — the planning, the targeting, and the totality of the crimes committed and the context in which they are committed. The court highlights this absence in domestic law as a loophole that must be “addressed urgently”.

And herein lies the crux of the matter. For years, civil society and legal experts have urged the ‘incorporation’ of these international law crimes into domestic law. In fact, India has signed and ratified the Genocide Convention, which places a legal obligation on the state to ensure the ability to prosecute this

crime. However, on the floor of Parliament in 2002, the official response was that the domestic law is sufficient for such crimes. This is legally incorrect. Signing up to the obligations of the International Criminal Court and including the definitions of these international crimes into domestic law is another way that such mass atrocity crimes could become part of the fabric of domestic law — but there is a palpable resistance to adhere to this international treaty, which is meant to ensure individual accountability by means of an international court.

For too long, there has been impunity for the commission of such mass crimes in the Indian context, whether by apathetic or non-existent investigation, or laws that shield perpetrators requiring sanction for prosecution, or simply the non-implementation of international legal obligations into domestic law. While there is no magic wand which would ensure accountability in the event of adoption of these international crimes, the ability to frame these atrocities as crimes within the domestic legal system is a necessary and essential component — and an attempt to begin to redress the terrible losses of survivors.

Priya Pillai

The Cycle of Impunity

The Sajjan Kumar judgment should be a learning moment. It tells us that mass crimes like 1984 are not spontaneous, nor are they committed in the spur of the moment, in a rush of passions blinding people and turning them into mobs. There is a mind, individual or collective, that plans, organises and gets the crime executed. This planner is sure of a ring of eternal impunity and assures the same impunity to those who perpetrate the crime.

This aspect of the judgment is being ignored. While the moment of justice is lauded, the lament of the court is not being heard. The judgment rued the fact that India does not have laws to deal with “crimes against humanity” and “genocide”. Even before this judgment, the Delhi High Court, while convicting 89 persons for the killing and mayhem in Trilokpuri, had used the term genocide for the 1984 killings.

Hailing the judgment, Union Finance Minister Arun Jaitley described 1984 as “the worst kind of genocide”. When he calls it the worst, he must have in mind genocides less worse, though he does not talk about them. The court, however, is uninhibited. The judgment reads: “The riots in early November 1984 — in which in Delhi alone 2,733 Sikhs and nearly 3,350 all over the country were brutally murdered [official figures], was neither the first instance of a mass crime nor, tragically, the last [...] there has been a familiar pattern of mass killings in Mumbai in 1993, in Gujarat in 2002, in Kandhamal, Odisha in 2008, in Muzaffarnagar in UP in 2013 to name a few. Common to these mass crimes were the targeting of minorities and the attacks spearheaded by the dominant political actors being facilitated by the law enforcement agencies.” Nellie, Bhagalpur etc. can be added to this list.

The court has used the term, genocide, carefully, unlike the minister— there cannot be any hierarchies while comparing genocides. According to the UN convention, genocide means any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnic, racial or religious group: Killing members of the group; causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group; deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part; imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group; and, forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.

It is neither the method used in killing nor the number which makes a crime a genocide, but the intent. When the law holds a person who himself has not committed murders or lootings responsible for what others did, it underlines a simple fact that scholars of genocide like Daniel Jonah Goldhagen have repeatedly asserted — genocidal violence is not spontaneous, there is no inevitability about it and that it is a matter of choice. The choice is made by three kinds of people at three levels: The political leaders who plan and organise, the actors who participate in the violence, and those who watch and not come forward to stop it.

Interviews with the participants in genocides reveal they feel they were led into it, their thinking

got clouded, yet they accept that they knew what they were doing. In that moment, they felt immortal. But it comes out that though the violence is made to look spontaneous, it is a well-planned and organised act. There is always a mind behind it which works to make it possible. The political class makes this choice because it feels the action helps to consolidate power. For example, in Gujarat, the BJP turned the burning of passengers in a train into an issue and claimed that Muslims did it— without an iota of proof. Other parties did not make this choice. It is not that they did not want the Hindu votes. So, it was a voluntary choice.

Goldhagen says it is an eliminationalist ideology that persuades a set of people to look at another set of people as irritants, pollutants, parasites or dangerous virus. It waits for an opportune moment or even creates one to turn this deepened prejudice into violence. For a genocide to happen, a long and sustained campaign to foster hatred against a set of people is necessary, and others are made to believe they have nothing in common with the targeted lot, who are but a sleeping threat, waiting for an opportunity to kill or enslave.

Scholars still debate if anti-semitism was inherent to the Germans, which made them willing executioners of the Jews. There are examples to show they were not merely obeying orders, as Hannah Arendt said. Even when there were no orders to kill the Jews, the Germans in charge killed them. It can be argued that the anti-semitic ideology stoked long-held prejudices and made murder inconsequential, since the Jews had already been deemed non-human. Genocidal education had made anti-semitism look like an innate character of the German.

When Adorno searched for ways to make Auschwitz impossible in the future, he focussed on education. There is education that the state sponsors, but there is also an informal and more effective education of prejudice and hatred carried out through various channels. Anti-Muslim hatred gained roots in India through this route. India has allowed, tolerated and even supported such education at various times. Europe paid a heavy price before realising that anti-semitism cannot be allowed in any form. It is not about Jewish honour; anti-semitism is offensive to humanity itself.

In India, the political class takes offence if you utter the word genocide while talking about 1984, Nellie, Bhagalpur, Mumbai, Gujarat or Muzaffarnagar. We think these cannot be compared with Auschwitz. But as Jairus Banaji points out, it is worse than genocide. There is a seriality in the violence in India. This is because eliminationalist ideology has been allowed to be professed and practised in India. The president of BJP can call certain people termites and call for their expulsion; Bangladeshi, Rohingya have become code words for Muslims.

The Sajjan Kumar judgment breaks the cycle of impunity. But if it remains an exception, India will continue to see more 1984s.

Apoorvanand
From *The Indian Express*

Official Apathy, Judicial Inaction

By sentencing Congress leader Sajjan Kumar to life imprisonment for his involvement in the 1984 anti-Sikh riots, Delhi high court has corrected a grave injustice compounded by years of official apathy and judicial inaction. Despite several commissions of inquiry probing the 1984 riots which took nearly 3,000 Sikh lives in the capital, Sajjan was finally implicated only in the 2005 Nanavati commission report. In 2013, a trial court acquitted Sajjan but convicted five other

rioters despite three eyewitness testimonies naming all six men.

Sajjan's conviction after decades is a scathing indictment of state agencies and the criminal justice delivery system. Justices Muralidhar and Goel go to the heart of the matter when they note in their judgment: "There has been a familiar pattern of mass killings since the Partition, including Mumbai in 1993, Gujarat in 2002, and Muzaffarnagar in 2013 ... Common to these mass crimes were the targeting of minorities and attacks spearheaded by dominant political actors facilitated by law enforcement agencies. The criminals responsible for the mass crimes have enjoyed political patronage and managed to evade prosecution and punishment."

This pattern of targeting and impunity is indeed true of most mass crimes India has witnessed. The verdict makes a stirring call to strengthen the legal system so that decades do not similarly elapse before the guilty are made answerable. The absence of punishment for "crimes against humanity" and "genocide" in the Indian Penal Code has also been flagged. Unless this pattern of impunity and political patronage is recognised and reversed communal riots, mob violence and lynchings can be expected to go on.

From *The Times of India*



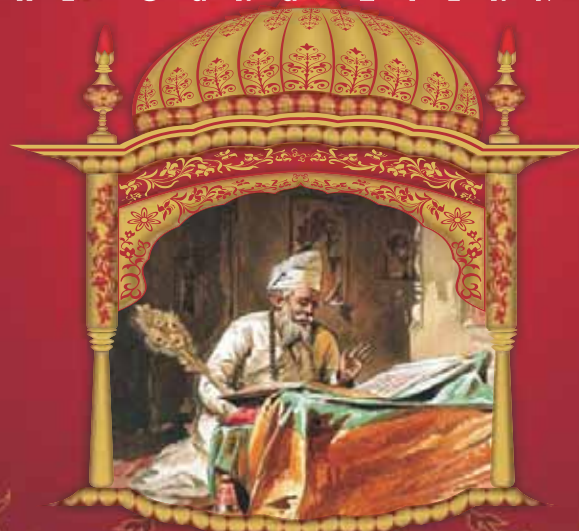


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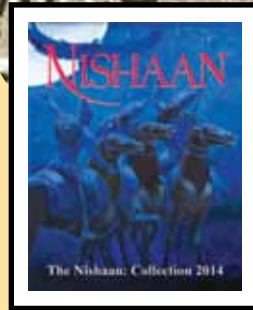
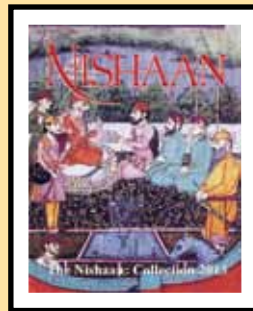
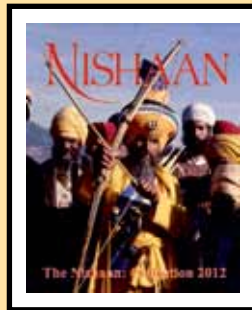
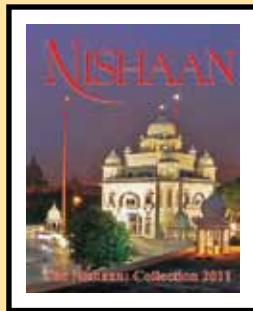
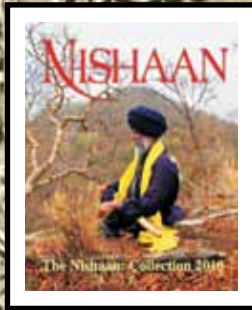
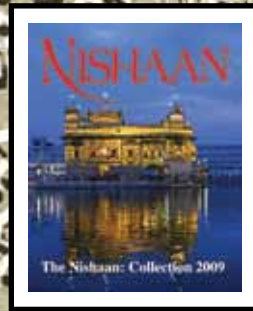
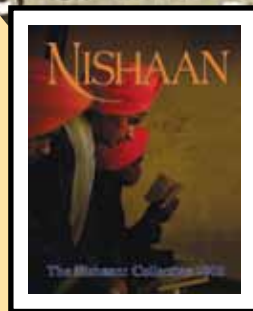
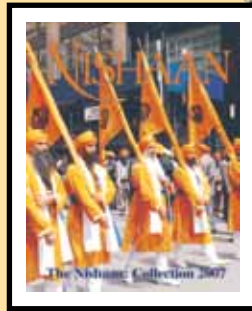
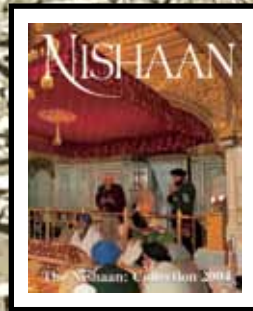
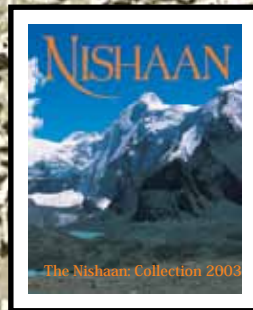
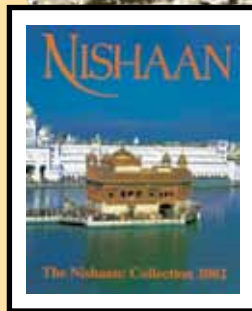
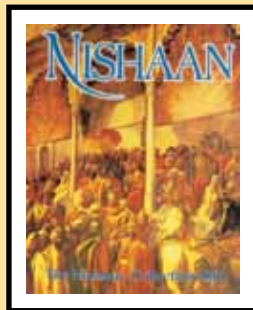
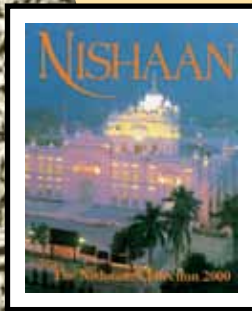


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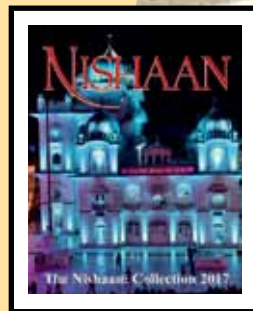
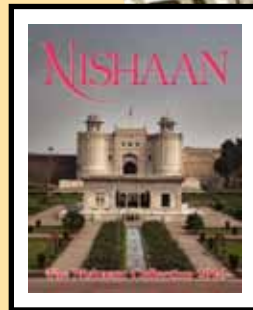
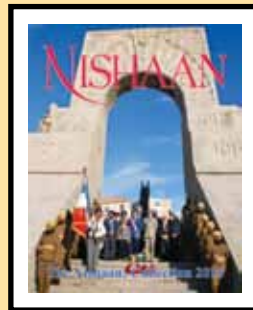
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