

NISHAAN

NAGAARA



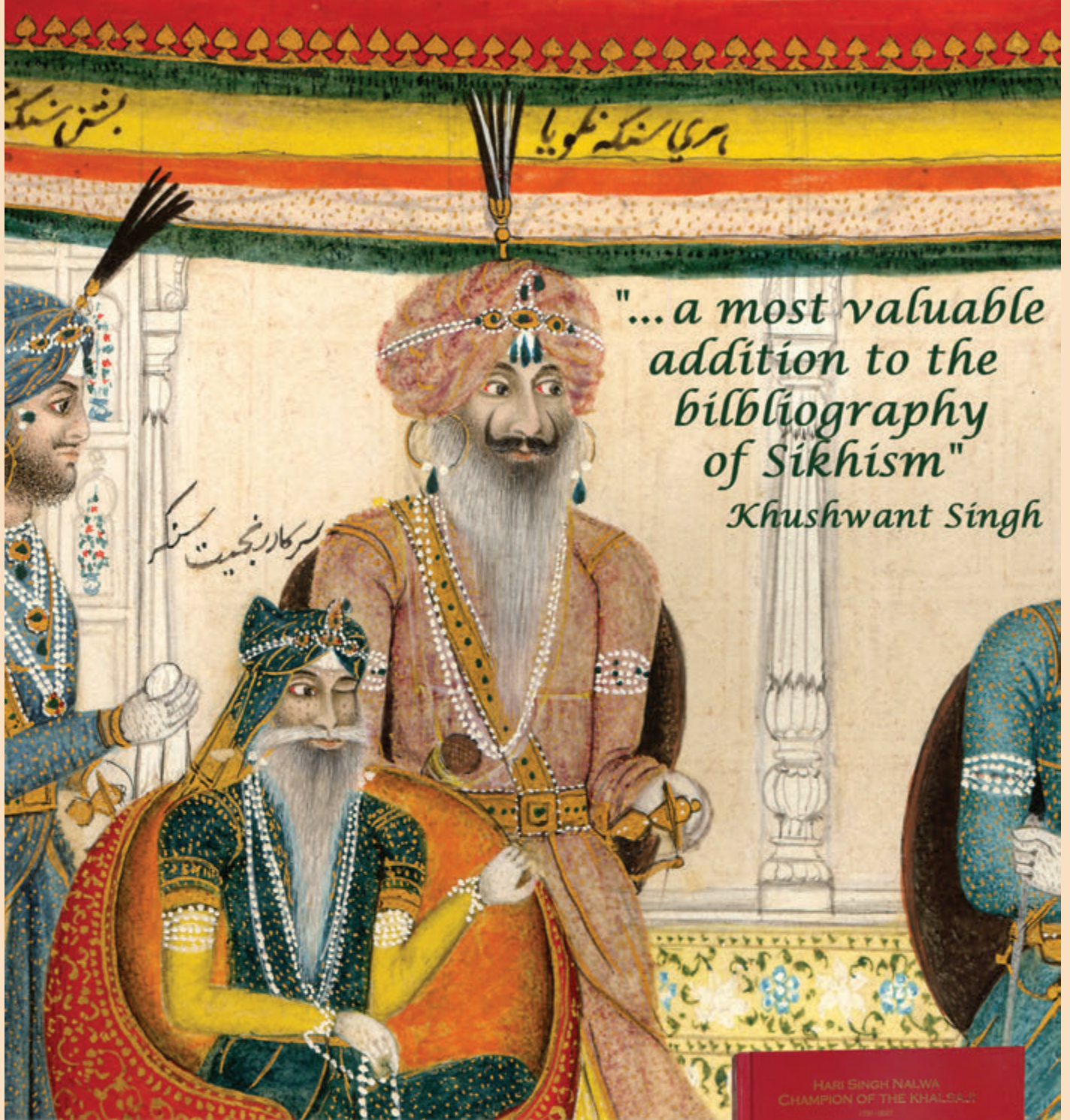
Kashmir of the Sikhs

Beyond 1947

A War Epic

Sikhs of Kashmir Today

Floods and Fellowship



"... a most valuable addition to the bibliography of Sikhism"
Khushwant Singh

سرکار پنجیت سنگھ

HARI SINGH NALWA
CHAMPION OF THE KHALSAJI
 (1791 - 1837)

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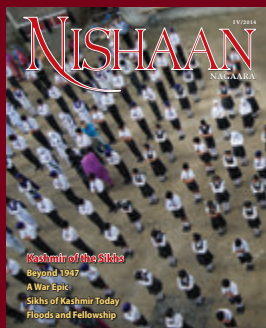
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Kashmir of the Sikhs, beyond 1947

In continuation of the theme 'Kashmir of the Sikhs' the first part in *Nishaan* III/2014, began with the visit to this land by Guru Nanak Sahib which is vividly commemorated from Ladakh to the Vale and beyond the Pir Panjal to the Jammu region. Our Sixth Guru, *Chhevin Patshshahi* Guru Hargobind Sahib came to Kashmir about a century after Guru Nanak and there are scores of gurdwaras in the Valley sacred to his visit, an abiding legacy. The composite culture of Kashmir and its Kashmiriyat was established centuries back even as Kashmir became part of the Sikh Empire after its conquest by Hari Singh Nalwa in 1819. Then, in the 1820s, Zorawar Singh expanded the Empire north-eastwards, incorporating Ladakh and there are several Sikh forts and baghs in Kashmir that are witness to that time.

Thereafter, the Dogras ruled Kashmir for nearly a century after the British had 'given' this vast territory to them as 'reward' for their 'services' (read treachery) during the hard fought Anglo-Sikh Wars of 1845-6 and 1848-9. This issue of the *Nishaan* takes the narrative forward after that century and in fact, begins with the article '1st Sikhs save the Kashmir Valley' which they did in dramatic manner, just over a century after Sikh warriors captured the Kashmir valley and its reaches from the Afghans. Sikh warriors were again in the vanguard, this time leading an independent Indian Army to defend and secure the Vale and reaches beyond from invading hordes, possibly even descendants of the same tribes they had battled a century before but this time around from the north west frontiers of a newly born Pakistan.

The raiders or Kabalees, including Pathans, Chitralis and viscous Mahsuds plus regular Pakistan Army troops "on leave", after capturing Muzaffarabad and Domel on the Kashmir border, had swept the few State Forces troops aside and after sacking Uri, had invested Baramula, an hour's drive away from Srinagar itself.

That 'Haunted Legacy' of 1947 is recalled by Amardeep Singh, now a Singaporean citizen-banker whose family came from Muzaffarabad, now capital of Pakistan occupied Kashmir. Many of his ancestors had fallen victim to the invading Kabalees from the northwest frontier in October 1947. Searching for his roots, his writing and many of his evocative photographs, including those of the ill-fated Domel bridge where over 300 Sikhs were shot in cold blood, appear for the first time in print.

It was thus perhaps fated that Sikh troops would be in the forefront of halting the invasion and then reversing it in the closing months of 1947. The valiant 1st Battalion, Sikh Regiment which had distinguished themselves only a few years earlier during the Burma Campaign of World War II, stopped the raiders' advance and then in bold counter-attacks retook most of the valley in desperate battles which actually saved Kashmir. Stories of valour, dignity and honour of one's duty abound in this battle of saving Kashmir. Soldiers like Nand Singh Victoria Cross, who then won a posthumous MVC, was the most decorated soldier of the Commonwealth, while others like Sub Bishan Singh, L/Nk Karam Singh PVC and many others continue to inspire generations several decades later.

Following such turmoil and pandemonium that has ironically been fate of this 'Paradise on Earth', the resplendent Valley was barely able to restore normalcy and smoothen the socio-economy fabric of its inhabitants over the next few decades when strife and violence again reared their ugly visage in 1989. Withdrawal of Soviet forces from Afghanistan after a decade of conflict signalled a new phase in Kashmir, with a new surge in the Kashmiri 'struggle'. Indian security forces in Kashmir were now faced by a new and deadly enemy armed with a vast variety of weaponry, including diabolical IEDs. There was a surge in the number of youth crossing over to

Pakistan for war-like training and procurement of arms, the 'indigenous' militant groups including the pro-independence JKLF and the pro-Pakistan Hizb-ul-Mujahedin (Hizb). During decade of the 1990s an estimated 10,000 Kashmiri youth were estimated to have joined various militant groups.

The Indian Army and paramilitary forces were given the task of counter-insurgency, leading to a vast deployment of troops in the region. The AFSPA, or Armed Forces Special Powers Act was, and still continues to be, a source of tension between the locals and the establishment. Twenty five years on, terrorist attacks may have become less commonplace, but stone pelting is now seen as the Kashmiri appropriation of 'Intifada', a term used meaning 'uprising', often used synonymously with the Palestinian situation.

Bearing the brunt of this virtual 'Talibanisation' of Kashmir have been the common people, especially those who did not succumb to the path of mindless violence. They lost their homes, livelihoods and kith and kin to the violence and no matter whose guns these bullets came from, they extinguished the light of life of many a hapless Kashmiri.

Almost a quarter of a century back, when such violence peaked in the Kashmir valley, most Kashmiri Pandits left the Vale for the safety of Jammu and beyond. Such an "ethnic cleansing" had begun with creation of a fear psychosis, spearheaded by aggressive crowds, clearly communal, flooding the streets, their slogans mixed with dire warnings.

From mid-September 1989, there was a virtual exodus and the eventual numbers of Kashmiri Pandits fleeing the Vale of Kashmir swelled to 750,000, thereafter living a life of refugees "in their own country". In sharp contrast, even as the tragic ethnic cleansing of Kashmiri Pandits was underway, the Sikhs of Kashmir stood out for their steadfastness amidst the political, economic and civil turbulence in the state.

Sikhs are seemingly 'accepted' by the overwhelming Muslim majority as being part of 'Kashmiriyat' but unfortunately have been ignored, nay even neglected, by the Government. In 2014, some 100,000 Sikhs live in the Vale of Kashmir, 18,000 of them in and around the second biggest town of Baramula. There are numerous Sikh villages

in the Vale of Kashmir, many around the town of Baramula, some in the Tithwal Valley and Tangdhar, surrounded on three sides by territory under control of Pakistan occupied Kashmir. In Jammu province, there are half a million Sikhs, making a combined population of over 600,000 Sikhs in the State of Jammu & Kashmir. Yet many feel that Sikhs of the State have been denied support, not even being recognised by the Government as "a minority".

Although the Sikhs go about living their lives as normal citizens, as administrators, teachers, farmers, businessmen or serving with the police and civil services, they have not remained unscathed. Scores have died in cross firing between militants and security forces, others being killed in landmine blasts.

And yet, their inter-personal relationships with local Muslims and other Hindus, who call Kashmir their home, are impeccable and a shining example of inter-religious peace, harmony and brotherhood. This fraternity of Kashmiri Sikhs have maintained the historic gurdwaras in the Valley with much affection and kept them spruced and robust, a manifestation of their dedication towards their universal faith in the goodness of mankind and love for humanity, despite all odds. Their selfless spirit of servitude during the devastating floods of September 2014 and their resilience under distress continues to inspire millions of Sikhs settled in different parts of India and the world.

The Sikhs of Jammu and Kashmir have always played an important role in the political scene of the State, holding important portfolios and responsibilities of governance. Their contributions are briefly acknowledged in this Issue which also highlights some Kashmiri Sikhs who have distinguished careers in India's armed forces, Army, Navy and the Air Force.

Many intrepid Kashmiri Sikhs have taken the initiative to celebrate sporting events and tournaments, the Khalsa High School at Magarmal Bagh in Srinagar, is a shining example of how high level education is imparted to all communities in the Valley.

This issue of the *Nishaan* then pays fine homage to all these good men and women, who continue to uphold the highest principles of Sikhism and serve their motherland to the best of their abilities in difficult circumstances. *Chardi Kala!*

Kashmir :

A capsulated socio-economic History till the mid-1960s*



The vale of Kashmir is verily the heart of the state

There exists a strange misconception about the State of Jammu and Kashmir. Although the Valley constitutes just ten per cent of the whole State in area, in the popular mind it is the State. Another complication is the forcible occupation on the west and north-west by Pakistan and on the north-east by China, which together form as much as 55 per cent of the State's total area.

Aside from the mountainous tracts of the Karakoram, the Pir Panjal and the Greater Himalayan Ranges, the State falls into three distinct natural divisions : Jammu Province, the Ladakh plateau and the Valley of Kashmir. The regions have little in

common in their history, culture, language or religion. Ladakh is connected with the Valley by only one road via Kargil which passes through the Zojila Pass in the Greater Himalayas. The pass is snow-bound throughout the winter and spring seasons.

The only all-weather road from the Valley was the Srinagar-Rawalpindi highway, which since the 1947 'invasion' has been denied to Kashmir. The Pir Panjal range gives access to the Valley through three other passes : the Banihal, the Haji Pir and the Golab Garh, all impassable during the four winter months. The Haji Pir Pass was in past ages the most widely used. The White Huns entered the Valley and the Mughals

took the Imperial road through it. Bernier who visited Kashmir during Aurangzeb's reign, reached the Valley through this pass. With the loss of the Haji Pir Pass to Pakistan, (*briefly recaptured by Sikh troops in August 1965 and then 'returned' to Pakistan after the ceasefire*) the Valley is approachable from India only through the Jammu-Srinagar road which crosses the Banihal Pass.

The Vale of Kashmir undoubtedly is the most important of the three regions. About ten times as thickly populated as the Ladakh plateau, it forms the heart of the State. Three out of every four persons in the Valley live, in villages and derive their livelihood from the land. The Valley of Kashmir is virtually the basin of the Jhelum, traditionally called the Vitasta.

engineers regulated a number of the Jhelum's tributaries and built kuhls for irrigation. In all probability, Kashmir has the distinction of being the first to lift water through water-wheels for irrigation.

Surrounded by steep mountains, the Valley is like a tilted saucer sloping towards the Wular lake. According to an old legend, the Valley was a vast lake called 'Sat Saras' or the Lake of Sati, which was drained by the sage Kashyap after whom Kashmir is named, by cutting an outlet through the mountains at Khalanyar. Geologically the Valley must have once been a great lake, which has left surviving swampy 'nambals' and water-logged low lands as prominent features.

The ethereal beauty of the Kashmir Valley makes it a truly picture post card entity



It is navigable throughout its length and provides a cheap means of transport. Its waters feed the irrigation system of Kashmir.

The Jhelum river is both the blessing and the scourge of the Valley. Its water, carried through Zamindari kuhls (gals) has always sustained the crops. The great chronicler Kalhana wrote that since times immemorial, the contribution of the kuhls to Kashmir's agricultural economy had been notable. The Suvarnamankalya kuhl, built by King Suvarna still irrigates the area which was once his domain. King Lalitaditya is credited with having carried irrigation to villages near Sahadar. King Avantivarinan's

The outlet for the Jhelum waters at Khalanyar is too inadequate to carry the full discharge and during the monsoons the river swells and becomes a scourge causing heavier losses than any other Indian river. The devastating floods of 1893 and 1959 (*and recently in 2014 - see separate article*) when the whole Valley virtually became a lake, are still remembered by the people. During the flood the nambals are inundated with water, the flow of water in the kuhls is reversed and they carry huge quantities of flood water from the Jhelum, destroying the crops in the fields.

Srinagar is protected by a number of embankments and other anti-flood measures in the upper reaches



The capital of Kashmir, Srinagar, is dissected by water of the river Jhelum which is both of life sustenance and life taking

of the river, but in high floods, sometimes the embankments have to be cut to divert a part of the flood waters to save the town. Floods in the Valley seem to have worried the benign King Avantivarman, whose engineer Suyya is said to have changed the entire course of the Jhelum from its confluence with the Sindh to the Wular lake. He also improved the drainage system of the land extending to the Khalanyar gorge.

Over the centuries the Valley's urban economy had been built on tourism. Unlike the hill stations

of Simla and Darjeeling which are the creations of the British, the Kashmir Valley has a history, culture and tradition of its own. In some respects these are dissimilar to those of the rest of the sub-continent. The Great Himalayan Ranges on the north have protected the Valley from the rugged civilisation of Central Asia and the Pir Panjal from the exuberant living of India.

There had always been some trading between the Valley and north India, specially Lahore and Delhi, but the credit for throwing open the Valley to India goes



to the two Mughal Emperors, Jahangir and Shahjehan. Fascinated by its climate and beauty, they made Srinagar their summer capital, and at the beginning of summer every year a whole caravan of courtiers and officials would move to that city. There the Mughals built some beautiful terraced gardens, like Shalimar and Nishat. By stemming the springs, they developed the Chashma-i-Shahi and structurally controlled the Jhelum's source at Verinag. These are outstanding examples of the Mughals' architectural skill and love of

nature. The chinar which had been imported from Iran, was planted all over the Valley. It now inspires much of the art of Kashmir, appearing in designs of wood carvings, embroidery, papier mache paintings, carpets and the like. The Mughals developed the wool, silk, wood, papier mache and leather industries and now an inexhaustible variety of carpets, namdas, embroidery, papier-mache, stoles, capes, coats, shahtush, pashmina, woollen cloth, silk, jewellery, fur and leather goods have found a big market within Kashmir and in India.

The Valley is full of places of interest for tourists. The golf course at Gulmarg, skating, skiing and winter sports on the snows of Sonamarg are great attractions. The Dal Lake at Srinagar and the Wular Lake near Baramulla are popular water resorts. Camping at Pahalgam on the bank of the Liddar has its charms. Nowhere in India does the tourist receive such lavish hospitality as in the Kashmir Valley. The Kashmir rulers had built comfortable traveller's bungalows throughout the State. With the increase in popular demand, the State has put up wooden cottages at all important tourist places for middle-income visitors.

The handicrafts of Kashmir are intertwined with the tourist trade. One shares the prosperity and woes of the other. There is hardly a tourist who does not buy some Kashmiri wares. Tourists are the biggest unpaid advertising agents for Kashmiri goods. When a tourist carries home some specialties from the Valley, his friends and relatives are introduced to Kashmiri goods. The Valley grows excellent fruits —apples, peaches, apricots, almonds, walnuts, chestnuts and cherries which have a ready export market. With the invasion of the tribesmen the tourist trade of Kashmir came to a near-standstill and the sales of goods declined. Efforts made to transport handicrafts and fruit through Air Force transport aircraft returning to Delhi after unloading soldiers and weapons met with little success. After the Cease Fire line was finalised, the Sheikh's ambivalent attitude on the question of accession and rumours that he would declare an independent Kashmir acted as a damper on tourism. Handicraft goods accumulated and Kashmiri fruits began to perish. The Kashmiris are dependent for supplies of cotton textiles, rice, kerosene, sugar, salt, tea, etc. as imports and the lengthening of the trade-route raised the prices of all these commodities. Sometimes shortages were created by delayed supplies because they were cornered by greedy traders. The distress in the cities and towns was worse than that in the countryside.

The bleak and arid plain of Ladakh forms the highest plateau in India. It is drained by one of the mightiest rivers of the world, the Indus, but the river water is not of much use in the Ladakh region. It is the driest part of the country. The short summer of Ladakh permits only the raising of low value crops like ragi and buckwheat. The plateau is of little consequence agriculturally. Jammu Province is the extension of the Indus plains with fairly good summer

and winter rainfall, high temperatures in summer and low temperatures in winter. The river Ravi, and the Chandra Bhaga which, on entering Jammu Province, assumes the name of the Chenab, supply water for irrigation canals. The Dogra rulers had built a number of canals such as the Ranbir, Pratap, Ujh and Basantpur. Jammu produces all the crops of the plains.

In the days of the Maharajas, fruit orchards and agricultural lands were held almost wholly by the Darbar, the Jagirdars, the ruler's relations and a special class of landowners known as Chakladars. They were mostly either Kashmiri Pundits or Dogra Rajputs and, increasingly, Kashmiri Sikhs. The tenants were generally poor Muslims who held lands on the basis of crop-sharing. The rate of sharing was half and half. The first land reforms introduced by Abdullah Sheikh raised the tenant's share to two-thirds.

The Sheikh's reforms

The Sheikh set up a Land Reforms Committee to prepare a programme for abolishing landed estates. But before the report was ready, he announced that no land-owning family would in future hold more than a total land area of twenty-two and three-fourths acres for raising crops, vegetables, orchards and for housing. Surplus lands were vested in the Government for distribution among the landless workers and for organising collective farms. No decision was taken on the payment of compensation for lands acquired and the issue was left for decision to the Kashmir Constituent Assembly when it met. In India, proprietary rights in land had been acquired on payment of compensation; and the Union Constitution carries a provision that for any land within the ceiling acquired by the State, compensation at the market rate has to be paid.

When the time arrived for taking possession of the land, it was found that as a result of a scramble in collusion with that notorious official, the patwari, surplus lands had been transferred to the relatives of the land-owners. No land was available for distribution to landless labourers or for organising collective farms. In terms of social gain, the result was nil. The zamindari kuhis, which were formerly looked after by the land-owners, after the imposition of the ceiling became nobody's concern. The new cultivators would not cooperate in maintaining them. The kuhls fell into disrepair and the productivity of land suffered. The two years 1949-51 were years of severe drought



Typical Gumpa in Ladakh, the high altitude plateau, bordered by Tibet

in the Valley. India supplied subsidised rice but this depressed the price of local rice, and the economy of the countryside suffered the severest shock.

Some relief did come from the Conciliation Boards set up to scale down debts which weighed heavily on the peasantry. In many cases the scaling down was by as much as 80 per cent of the debt. Some new lands were reclaimed and cultivation extended over them to reduce the State's food shortage. The old feudal system of compulsory purchase of a part of the farmer's produce was abolished. But the economic distress among the people was so great that these small gains were forgotten.

The Sheikh organised consumer's cooperatives for the sale at fair prices of the necessities of life, but these societies were soon the scene of a scramble for power and money. Similar societies organised later for the distribution of imported rice and sugar became instruments for sustaining the power and finances of politicians including a large number of MLAs. Black-marketing and illegally raised prices became commonplaces. An enquiry set up in 1952-53 by the Kashmir Government revealed that the cooperatives had collapsed because of the corruption and malpractices of their directors and employees.

The administrative machinery of the Maharaja's time had also collapsed. The Sheikh was wholly

involved in power politics and he had little time to rebuild the administration. The State's sources of revenue had virtually dried up. Its expenses were mounting. Its budget had to be financed by India. The Sheikh was suspicious of India and would not accept the loan of Indian officers, though trained and experienced personnel in the State were not available. A complete administrative dead-lock ensued. Among the leaders of the National Conference, Bakshi Ghulam Mohammad was personally efficient, but he had scant regard for the rules and procedures which are

essential for sustaining any official machinery.

The people's suffering was further aggravated by the infighting between the politicians — with the Sheikh and his supporter Mirza Afzal Beg on the one side, and Bakshi and his supporters Dogra and Saraf on the other. It had created an atmosphere of universal depression. The Sheikh had lost his earlier popularity. While India was going ahead with developmental programmes, Kashmir's economy was stagnant and its politics uncertain. In terms of developmental activities, the six years of Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah's rule were a complete blank.

Neglect of Ladakh

The Ladakhis had been neglected during the Maharaja's regime. They did not get any worth while relief even after the advent of Sheikh Abdullah. Ladakh threatened to break away from the State and establish a direct link with India. The Maharaja had the full support of the Hindus of Jammu, especially of the Dogras. The communal-minded Praja Parishad was carrying on an incessant propaganda against the Sheikh, and encouraging separatist tendencies. Those who had suffered from the new land reforms joined the ranks of malcontents. But the arrogant Sheikh made no effort to meet the peoples' genuine grievances. Infuriated, he threatened to separate the Valley from Ladakh and Jammu.

1947: Savage Partition, Vicious Invasion



From LIFE Magazine, 1947

The tragic, nay savage, partition of the Punjab in August 1947 was followed by invasion of Jammu and Kashmir by tribals from the north west frontier, armed and led by regular officers and men of the newly emerged Pakistan Army. Only six months earlier, the Punjab was an united entity and its secular Ministry was governing the State efficiently enough till confronted by the Muslim League's Civil Disobedience Movement. The die was cast when Punjab's British Governor invited this unabashedly communal party to form a new Ministry.

Earlier, on 4 March 1947 communal rioting had broken out in Lahore, spiraling to Amritsar, Multan, Rawalpindi, Jullundur and Sialkot cities. Worst were the massacres of innocent and hopelessly outnumbered non-Muslims in the rural areas around the Rawalpindi, Attock and Jhelum districts of Rawalpindi Division, while there were very heavy casualties in Multan district and much arson in Multan city. Serious rioting and arson was witnessed in Amritsar during mid-April with some repercussions in Lahore.

Trouble then spread along the Mewat in Gurgaon district, south of Delhi in late April and from mid-May onwards, the communal 'war of succession' began in earnest in Lahore and Amritsar, with incendiarism, stabbing and bombing. Serious incidents occurred in various districts, particularly Gujranwala and Hoshiarpur and village raiding began especially around Amritsar, Lahore, Ferozepore, Jullundur and Hoshiarpur. Revival of disturbances in Gurgaon resulted in 140 villages being burnt, with very heavy casualties. The communities began war-like preparations, with weapons procured, bombs manufactured and drills carried out. From mid-May onwards, a virtual 'civil war' was raging in Delhi and the Punjab and such mass terrorism made control by Army troops and civil police most ineffective.



British troops stage flag march through a town in the NWFP

There was bitter criticism of the British administration who had been able to crush without difficulty the 'Quit India' movement of 1942 but failed to deal in the same way with the communal frenzy of 1947. While in 1942, attacks were concentrated on Government property and personnel, in 1947 little attention was paid to the Government and the 'two nations' fought one another in the streets, in the markets, in the fields and in the villages.

The Muslims were working to secure a more favourable position at the time of transfer of power (for instance in the Rawalpindi Division the objective was to eliminate the entire non-Muslim population while at Lahore, the Muslims wanted to "scare away" the non-Muslims and so on).

Sir Evan Jenkins, Governor of the Punjab stated on 4 August 1947 that "nobody who has not lived

through the last six months in the Punjab can conceive of the dangers we have escaped. To take a Province of thirty million people noted for their pugnacity, to whip these people into a communal frenzy, to tell them that the British authority, which has held the reins for nearly a century, is going almost immediately to divide their province into two parts by a boundary driven through an area homogeneous in everything but religion, and to convert its two principal cities into frontier towns these are surely no ordinary times". In concluding his memorandum on the "intolerably difficult situation", Jenkins then stated that "the future is unknown and it would be idle to speculate upon it" but that "the grouping of forces and the problems to be solved will be entirely different from 15 August and that neither improvement nor deterioration after that date will prove anything whatsoever".

Sir Cyril Radcliffe was ready to announce the award of the Punjab Boundary Commission by 9 August, but the Viceroy felt it desirable to defer this to 14 August. Sir Evan Jenkins, the Punjab Governor, pointed out that there were administrative advantages from early publication and telegraphed the Viceroy about the "most serious" situation in the Boundary Area, asking for Army reinforcements, additional armed Police and possibly an Air Force tactical reconnaissance squadron.

Field Marshal Sir Claude Auchinleck had tried his best to get reinforcements to meet the Punjab situation but however, wanted the units out of necessity to be mixed, particularly for the North-West Frontier as there were a proportion of Sikhs in nearly all the Units of the Punjab Boundary Force.

As the Governor put it: "You can doubtless be of assistance in this regard. If the Sikhs are taken out of Hindu clutches—as they want to be—and put in a more or less independent position on their own, they are much more likely to gravitate in the end towards their natural alignment with the rest of the Punjab and Pakistan. The next step would be to indicate that it is optional for this Sikh Eastern Punjab to join either Hindustan or Pakistan and that there is no presumption that it must join one rather than the other. The Sikhs will probably make this clear themselves, but if they ask for some pronouncements to this effect from HMG, it will probably be advisable to accede to their request. Please forgive this unasked for effusion. My excuse is that without a Sikh-Muslim pact there will be chaos in northern India".

A “just and equitable” division of the Punjab on the basis of number and property was mooted and the continuing dilemma of the Sikhs aroused the sympathy of many British parliamentarians. As stated on 15 July in the House of Commons: “The British have had the happiest possible relations with the Sikh community and, of all the martial races of the world, the Sikhs probably had built up the greatest reputation. The only situation which could mitigate the plight of the Sikhs was that the Boundary Commission should so define the boundary that the maximum portion of the Sikhs should be included within one conglomerate whole”.

The most horrific trans-migration in history

The frenzy of hatred fanned by the Muslim League, particularly in Western Punjab, stung the Muslims to terrorise non-Muslims in towns and villages, coercing them to leave their ancestral homes in panic and to flee eastwards in the general direction of India. Murderous attacks by armed gangs, mass

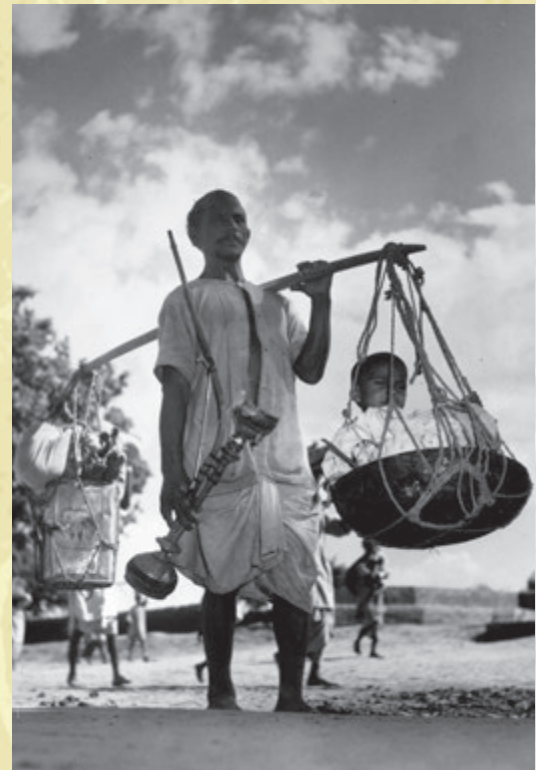
At the beginning, such movement was mainly from the districts of Rawalpindi, Multan, Muzaffargarh and Mianwalli, but this soon spread to the rest of Western Punjab. On 20 August, thousands of non-Muslims were butchered in Sheikhupura and, shortly, passenger trains on their journey to East Punjab were being stopped, the men butchered, women and young girls kidnapped, children slaughtered. The police force had completely disintegrated and the civil administration, so far virtually run by British officials, were nearly paralysed. Far worse was the active participation in these atrocities by uniformed personnel of the Pakistan Army, particularly some units of the Baluch Regiment. Soon, in East Punjab, acts of revenge were perpetuated by civilians against Muslims and so began mass migration in the other direction.

Dilemma for the Sikhs

That the Sikhs were utterly opposed to partition of the Punjab is well recorded in history, the *Panthic Pratinidhi* board fully supporting Sir Khizr Hyat Khan’s Unionist

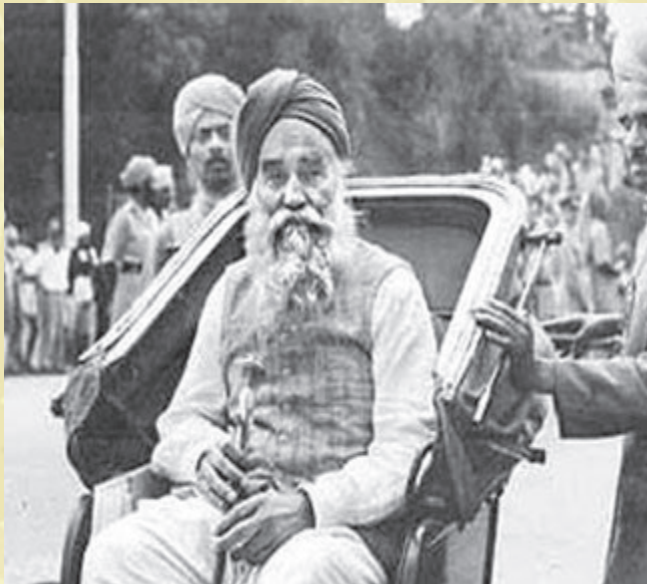


Trail of destruction as refugees cross the new frontiers between an independent India and newly emerged Pakistan



butcheries, arson and rape in an atmosphere of bitter hatred soon resulted in the mass migration of millions, unparalleled in the history of mankind.

Party which had rallied against the Muslim League’s relentless pressures for creating a Pakistan. The British Cabinet Mission which visited India in the spring of



Master Tara Singh, leader of the Sikhs, seen at Simla during 1946

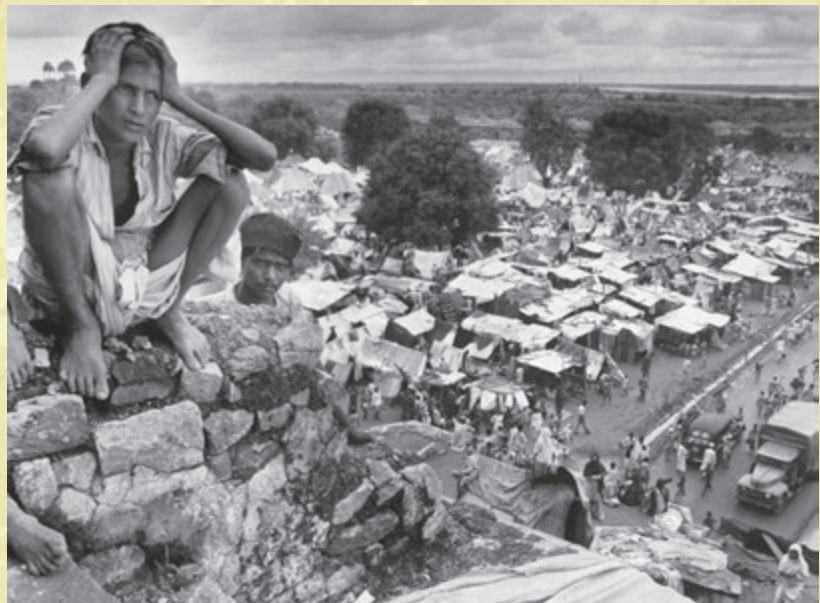
1946 were impressed by the arguments marshaled by the Sikh leaders but could not reconcile these with the extremist stance of the Muslim League and duplicity of the Congress Party. The Sikh leader, Master Tara Singh stated that he was for a *united* India but if Pakistan was conceded, he was for a separate Sikh state with the right to federate with either India or Pakistan. The Sikh state would comprise the entire Jullundur and Lahore divisions, together with Hissar, Karnal and Simla districts of the Ambala division, as also the districts of Montgomery and Lyallpur, with an approximate boundary along the River Chenab.

On 22 March 1946, the Shiromani Akali Dal had passed a resolution stating that *Sikhistan* was its political objective. It said : "Whereas the Sikhs being attached to the Punjab by intimate bonds of holy shrines, property, language, traditions and history claim it as their homeland and holy land which the British took as a trust from the last Sikh ruler during his minority and whereas the entity of the Sikhs is being threatened on account of the persistent demand of Pakistan by the Muslims on the one hand and of danger of absorption of the Hindus on the other, the executive committee of the Shiromani Akali Dal demands the preservation and protection of the religious, cultural, economic and political rights of the Sikh population and their important sacred

shrines and historical gurdwaras with provision for the transfer and exchange of population and property".

The Muslim League-inspired killings in Noakhali and Tipperah in Eastern Bengal in October 1946 soon had repercussions in Bihar where the Hindus then took their revenge. Inflamed by this, Muslims of Hazara District in the North West Frontier Province, wreaked their vengeance on the comparatively few Sikhs there and such killings soon spread to the districts of Rawalpindi, Cambellpur and Multan in the Punjab. Sikhs became the main victims of the March 1947 riots, being easily identifiable, the Hindu and Muslim less easy to tell apart. Amongst many others similarly affected, the Sikh village of Kahuta in Rawalpindi District (now the centre of Pakistan's Nuclear Weapon programme) was totally destroyed by ravaging Muslims. Lord Louis Mountbatten, who visited it in April 1947 likened "the destruction as thorough as any produced by fire-bomb raids in the war". The communal bent of the Punjab Police was another important factor in the programme, with nearly 75 per cent of them being Muslim.

The March 1947 riots became a drastic challenge to the Sikhs, whose own semi-organised *Akal Fauj* or *Akal Sena* were seen only as paper tigers. The Sikh's humiliation, especially when their martial prowess was in question, steeled their hearts and their mood darkened to fight back and save the community from



Millions lost not just their belongings but also their near and dear ones during the movement across the border



Nearly 9 million Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims were displaced from their homes and hearths during the terrible partition of India in 1947

Muslim aggression. On Baisakhi Day (13 April 1947) Master Tara Singh and 280 jathedars vowed at the *Akal Takht* (Amritsar) to sacrifice their lives if necessary for the community and then began to organise self defence *jathas* in towns and villages, to arm them with swords and spears and some firearms if possible with help from the Sikh princely states. Members of the defunct Indian National Army were recruited to guard the Golden Temple and other historic gurdwaras.

The Muslim League had, however, long begun to build up stocks of weapons and bombs as early as from December 1946, with a secret fund raised for arms to be obtained mainly from the North West Frontier Province, as also the tribal areas and Bahawalpur. This secret fund (*sandug*) was also used to purchase jeeps, trucks, rifles, machine guns, ammunition, hand grenades, steel helmets, iron jackets etc. The Sikhs, on the other hand, tried to get arms from the Princely States of Patiala, Kapurthala and Faridkot, so as to reinforce the *jathas* traditionally

armed with only kirpans and spears and mounted on horses. The *jathas* greatest asset however, was their martial organisation and very soon, an operational system was in place, with designated leaders, mobile headquarters and military-like tactics. It was these Sikh *jathas* which, in the vacuum of a law and order force, steered the defence of Sikhs (and Hindus) from murderous assaults of the Muslims.

When on 15 August 1947, India celebrated its independence and Pakistan was born, millions of Punjabis had been displaced, and hundreds of thousands were murdered. Horrible atrocities were committed, gaunt and starving foot-convoys of refugees were mercilessly attacked, trains stopped and passengers slaughtered. "Never in the history of the world was there a bigger exchange of population, attended with so much bloodshed".

The final tally : Hindus and Sikhs who had left West Punjab, and the NWFP totaled 4,351,477 against the 4,286,755 Muslims who left East Punjab.



The Trauma of October 1947

As the independence of India from the British Raj neared, the various rulers of princely states were given no choice but to accede to India or Pakistan. Most of the states under the Act of independence became part of a new India except for those with Muslim majority. There were exceptions, the most obvious being Hyderabad-Deccan and Jammu & Kashmir. While the former had a Muslim Nizam ruling a Hindu-majority area, the latter had a Hindu Maharaja ruling a Muslim-majority area, particularly the Vale of Kashmir. Maharaja Hari Singh of Kashmir could not decide which way to go and sought a three-month 'standstill' to decide upon his course of action. If this was allowed to pass, then on 15 November 1947, he would have perforce had to decide on the State's future.

On the eve of partition in 1947, Dogra Janak Singh had replaced Pandit Ram Chand as Kashmir's Prime Minister and the enigmatic Shiekh Abdullah was released from detention. However, when 15 August 1947 dawned, the communal rioting, terrible massacres and arson in the Punjab also affected Kashmir. Over the past century, in the spirit of Kashmiriyat, Sikhs, Muslims and Hindus had co-habitated the State but those living along the borders with the Punjab and NWFP directly faced the storm. Worst off and affected by armed bands looting and murdering were the border towns of Muzaffarabad, Poonch, Mirpur, Bimber and others.



After being armed, invading forces were transported by vehicles from the NWFP to Kashmir, crossing the Jhelum and Kishanganga (Neelam) rivers at Kohala and Domel

On 4 September 1947, Maharaja Hari Singh of Kashmir protested to the newly emerged Pakistan government about armed bands violating Kashmir's borders from western Punjab. Soon enough, Pakistan imposed an economic blockade by stopping supplies of essential commodities into Kashmir. With tens of thousands of Sikhs living in the border towns of south-west Kashmir, the imminence of danger was apparent. Akali Kor Singh sent messages to the Sikhs of Muzaffarabad to be vigilant as the days ahead were likely to be dangerous. Other Sikh leaders including Sant Gurbaksh Singh, Jathedar Kapoor Singh and Giani Ujjagar Singh toured villages to apprise the



Sikhs of Abbottabad in the NWFP, many of whom moved to Muzaffarabad in Kashmir during the summer of 1947 and then faced more danger

people on the volatile conditions and were joined in their endeavours by other prominent Kashmiris including S Balwant Singh Bali and Giani Balwant Singh.

The future was most ominous and from end September 1947, conditions started to deteriorate. On 6 October 1947, Sodan Muslims of Poonch (many of whom were retired army personnel) began planned attacks on several Sikh villages adjoining Muzaffarabad. Tribals from the NWFP in Pakistan (soon to be termed as Kabalees) were meanwhile concentrating in Hazara and the threat of imminent violence was creating havoc in the Valley. Even as the Pakistan Government asked Maharaja Hari Singh to discuss the future, they were covertly working on plans to occupy Kashmir by armed force.

The invasion of Kashmir by Kabalees, led by regular Pak Army in mufti under the command of Major General Akbar Khan of the Pakistan Army (alias Tariq), began on 20 October 1947, fully armed including with machine



Typical tribals from the NWFP (or Kabalees) who were concentrated on the borders with Kashmir before being led in by regular Pak Army officers



Kohala Bridge over the River Jhelum, connecting the north west frontier and Kashmir

guns and mortars, crossing the bridges at Domal and Kohala, heading for Muzaffarabad and then onwards to the Vale of Kashmir.

The Sikhs and Hindus of Muzaffarabad were dependent on the State Forces for protection but, when on 22 October 1947, the Kabalees launched a major attack from the Lahori Gali side, the unprepared state forces were outnumbered by the raiders, who relentlessly destroyed property, set houses on fire and slaughtered the hapless populace of Muzaffarabad. Thousands of Sikhs congregated at Gurdwara Chhattipatshahi Naloochi to defend themselves, and large numbers were killed fighting gallantly with whichever arms they could find, mostly swords and some, very few, fire arms. As the men died, many women and children plunged into the Jhelum river to save their honour.

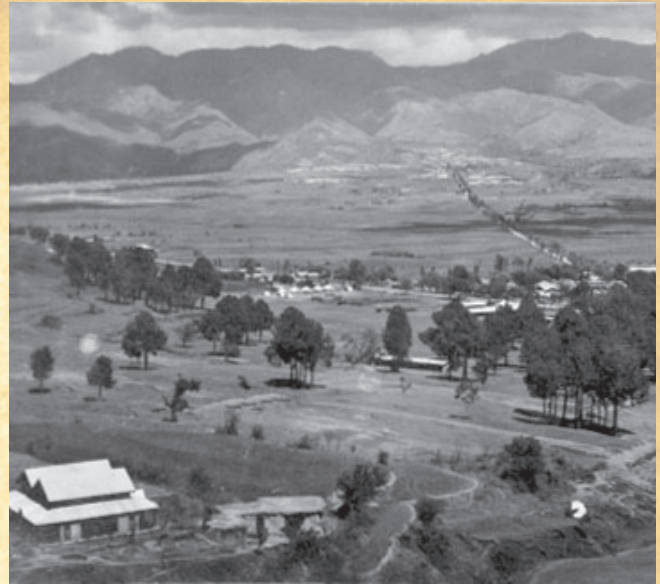
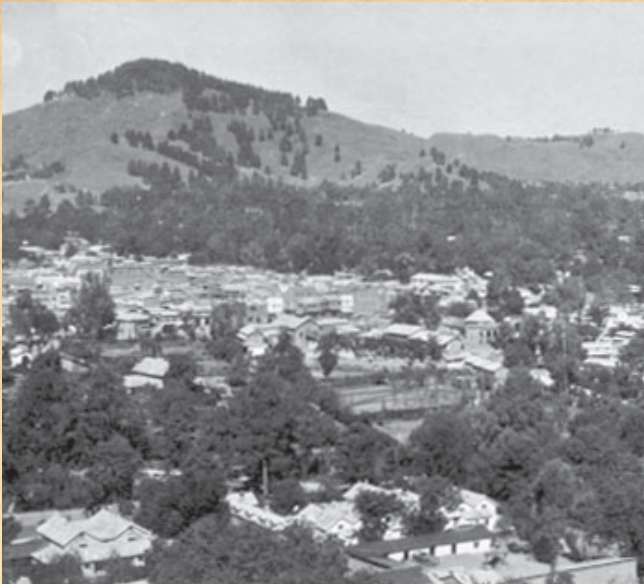
Uri-Muzaffarabad highway

Betraying the trust of Kashmiriyat, many Muslim leaders, including the treacherous Thekedar Bahadur Khan, guided the vicious invaders. A large number

of Sikhs reached Domel in a kafila, where they joined other Sikhs gathered there. They spent the night in Domel and in the morning were informed that they lives would be spared if they converted to Islam. Leaders of the Sikhs, Sant Baldev Singh, Giani Rangil Singh, Giani Gurbaksh Singh, S Gulab Singh and others rejected this and in the late afternoon, when the Kabalees returned, the Sikh, men, women and children of the kafila were gathered on the Domel Bridge over the Jhelum and were then shot in cold blood by the Kabalees, an estimated 300 being massacred.

While resisting the tribals, the Sikh population of Kashmir suffered greatly, particularly in the villages of Bhatika, Chattar, Anbor, Radoo, Kotli and others, as they began to move eastwards along the Jhelum towards Srinagar.

After their capture of Muzaffarabad and Domel, massacring the Sikh kafila, the Kabalees too began moving towards Srinagar and the State forces were unable to defend the territory. The distraught Sikhs and Hindus were mercilessly massacred by not just



A typical frontier town in the NWFP, looking towards the hills of Kashmir

the tribals but also the local Muslims in areas such as Adoosa, Basma, Dariya and others.

Brigadier Rajinder Singh commanding the Kashmir State Forces made his last defence at Uri, destroying the bridge over Haji Peer Nala, and the Kabalees were stranded in Uri for two days, constructing a diversion road near the damaged bridge to then continue towards Baramula. Brigadier Rajinder Singh withdrew to Chayhel, where he was killed in the ensuing battle. The Kabalees entered Baramula on 26 October 1947.

A frantic Maharaja Hari Singh now signed the Instrument of Accession with India, thereby ending all

ambiguity regarding the status of Jammu of Kashmir. Immediate orders were issued to the Indian Army and Air Force for defence of Jammu and Kashmir (see article '1st Sikhs save the Valley'). Meanwhile, Kabalees attacked the State forces positioned at Khwaja Bagh from Janbazpura and Fatehpur.

The Kabalees continued their advance, killing many civilians, Hindus and Sikhs in Kanspura on 27 October and at Chandoosa on 30 October. On 31 October, Sikh villagers put up a brave fight, even firing on the invaders with a makeshift cannon improvised by Gian Singh Fauji. Whilst the Sikhs



*The mountain road from Mansera in the NWFP as it winds up along the valley leading to Uri, Baramula and Srinagar
[Photos from family album of Dr. DP Singh of Baramula]*



Sikh villagers evacuating their families by foot towards Srinagar following the tribal invasion of the Kashmir valley

were fighting the Kabalees at Atna, Ichama, Kashmiri Sikhs from Dalvana Shohagpura and Jazzbugg also joined the battle.

Kamraz, situated on the northern side of the river Jhelum, included several Sikh villages including Chak

Gujri, Patusa, Fagipura, Chanam, Shalkot, Rawalpura, Khundi, Didarpura, Karnah and others, which were also attacked by the Kabalees. Sadly, the resident Muslims had joined hands with the invaders, and the noble idea of Kashmiriyat had vanished.



The Church in Baramula after being destroyed by the Kabalees who had raped the nuns before shooting them along with many others



Destruction of Baramula after pillaging and arson by the Kabalees

A Haunted Legacy

Amardeep Singh writes about his search for the family roots in Muzaffarabad

As the postman said to my father, "Sunder Singh, this is a strange postcard and I believe it is for you."

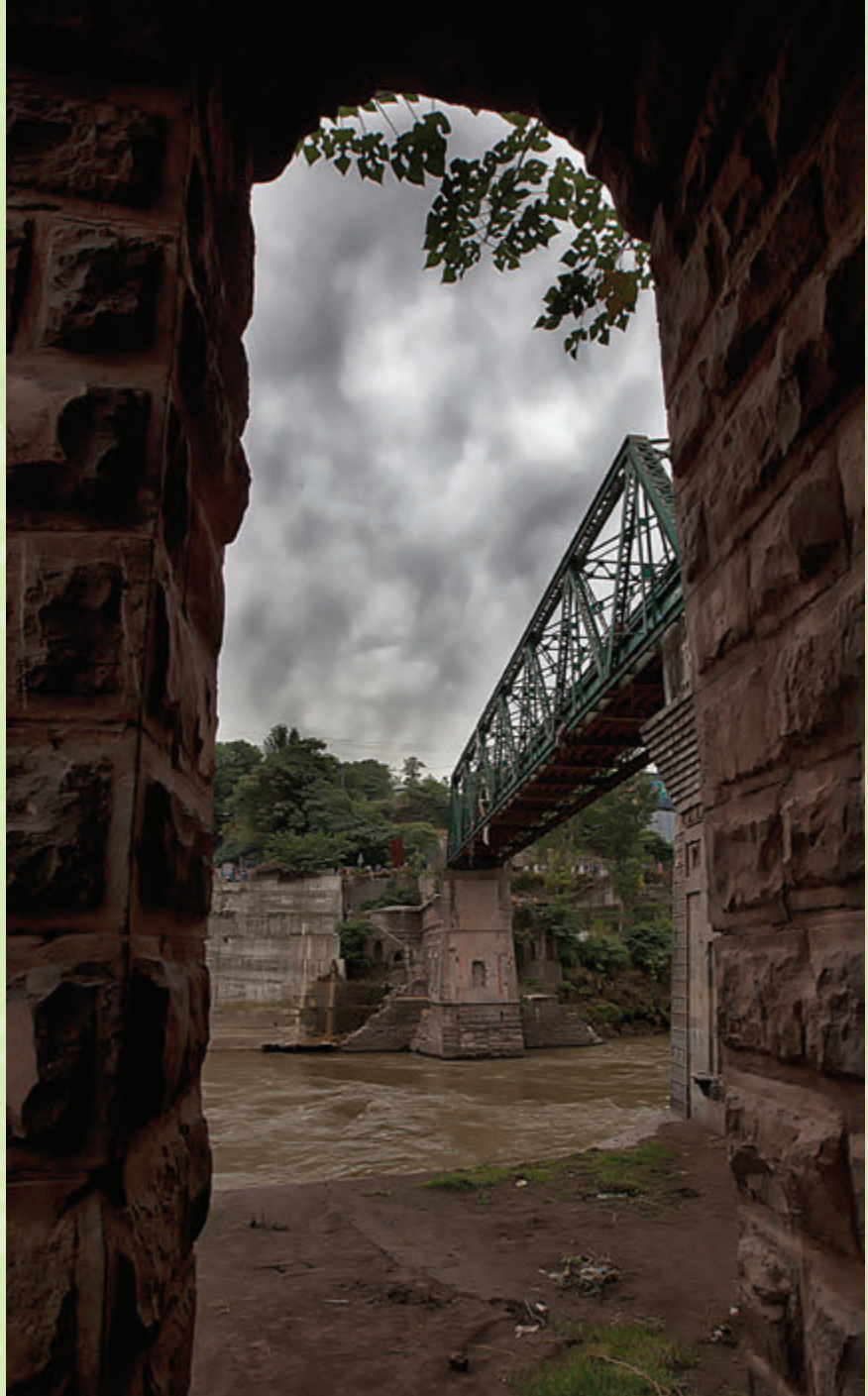
With a two-line address that just read 'Sunder Singh, Gorakhpur,' it could only be a divine intervention that the postcard sent from Rawalpindi in Pakistan had found its way to my father in Gorakhpur in Uttar Pradesh.

In somewhat crippled handwriting, its content was nothing else but an address of a Christian Missionary office in Rawalpindi, followed by the name 'Hari Singh.' Just like the concise address, there was nothing else.

This was a moment of joy that Sunder Singh could not express but let tears roll down his cheeks. He rushed to the thatched hut at a short distance from his home. It was the summer of 1949 and he was thankful to God that in the last two years after partition, life was slowly limping back to normal for his siblings who had moved to the city of Gorakhpur. In the massacre against non-Muslims in the frontier town of Muzaffarabad of Kashmir, his siblings had lost everything.

Wealth comes and goes but can life be replaced?

No mother can part with her children but when Pathans from the North West Frontier invaded Kashmir in their objective to capture the region for the newly formed Pakistan, Sunder Singh's sister was living in Muzaffarabad



The ill-fated Domel bridge, where over 300 Sikhs were shot in cold blood by the invading Pashtun tribals in October 1947



After the massacre, the family headed from Muzaffarabad to Srinagar

and suffered terrible tragedy. The tribals parted women from men and children from women, intent being to take away young girls and shoot all males. Helpless, she had no clue what happened to her two boys, as much as they did about their mother.

Sunder Singh pushed the door open in his sister's hut, "Bhenji, I think the children are alive!"

My father, a goldsmith by profession from Muzaffarabad, in Kashmir, had left for Gorakhpur in 1945 to explore new business opportunities associated with Gurkhas of the British-Indian army. Gurkhas from Nepal would arrive at the Gurkha Regimental Depot to collect their pension and many would

convert cash into gold, before heading back to their villages. In the two years before the partition of India, Sunder Singh was busy setting up a business in Gorakhpur and his presence in a distant land became the reason for his siblings to choose this city to live in.

In the religion-based partition of August 1947, Pakistan was formed, in the wake of which was mindless violence on both sides of the dividing line. The outcome was that Sikhs and Hindus were 'cleansed' from West Punjab and within weeks from Pakistan Occupied Kashmir.

As Maharaja Hari Singh, erstwhile ruler of Kashmir, delayed his decision, (to join India or



A distant view of the Muzaffarabad valley

Pakistan), in mid-October 1947, Pathan tribals from Waziristan and Khyber regions invaded Kashmir, in order to capture it for Pakistan. On the fateful day of 22 October, over 300 male Sikhs from the surrounding areas were rounded up at Ranbir Singh bridge (also called Domel bridge near confluence of the rivers Jhelum and Kishenganga) and executed by the tribals at point blank range.

Sunder Singh felt completely helpless, stranded in Gorakhpur but some of his family who had saved their lives headed from Muzaffarabad towards Baramula and beyond, to the valley of Srinagar.

In the months that followed, Sunder Singh was in great turmoil, and leaving all business behind he left for Delhi in the hope somehow to reunite with his family. For over three months, he spent day and night at Delhi Airport, sending messages through any defence personnel traveling to Srinagar. As luck would have it, one army person was able to locate his brother Amar Singh and conveyed the message to Sunder Singh. My father spent all his time and resources reuniting the family, bringing them to Delhi. In December 1947, an Air Force Dakota evacuating refugees arrived in Delhi and included some of my father's siblings.

This was a moment to celebrate but also one of intolerable pain as his sister knew nothing about her two young sons.

As it later became known, the two lads, Arjan Singh and Hari Singh, on being caught by the tribals were put through mental and physical humiliation. For Sikhs, keeping unshorn hair is the most sacred requirement and the tribals' first action was to deprive them of this visible sign of their faith. For days they lived in fear of the unknown till early November, when the 1st Sikhs recaptured Baramula and Uri, pushing the tribals back, who eventually abandoned their hostages and returned to Pakistan with looted wealth.

A Christian missionary from Rawalpindi had reached Muzaffarabad in November 1947 and managed to take custody of the two destitute boys.

But time goes on. Sunder Singh settled his uprooted brothers and sisters in Gorakhpur, helping them start their life again but was always concerned about his sister who was under emotional pain of separation.

Wonderful are God's ways for whom he desires to save. Even in a whirlpool, he leaves a twig to hold. As a young boy of around 7 years, Hari Singh had heard his mother often say that his Uncle, Sunder Singh had gone to Gorakhpur. Somehow in October 1949, Hari Singh managed to source a postcard and sent it by addressing to '*Sunder Singh, Gorakhpur*', mentioning the address of the Rawalpindi Christian missionary. The postcard did reach the hands of my father. This could only happen with divine intervention. The challenge now was that the borders of the two nations were sealed. Travel to Rawalpindi to retrieve the children was impossible. Sunder Singh headed to Delhi to leverage political strings. He met with Baldev Singh, the Defence Minister of India, requesting his help.

Files moved across the borders and a few months later, the children were re-united with their mother!

Although I was born in 1966, nineteen years after the partition, I grew up listening to such real lifetime stories. With passage of time the footprints have only grown bigger and were demanding a closure and I grew up delving into the history of my community and realised that 80% of our Sikh heritage lies in the area which is in Pakistan, and post partition, was lost forever.

I had told myself that once in my lifetime, I would travel to Pakistan. Our next generation may not be able to associate with the trademark events of partition but at least for me, the entire being desired to feel the energy of our ancestors.

Thus, in October 2014, at the age of 48 years, I was finally able to make the trip. In a backpacking style, I travelled for 30 days, exploring the Sikh heritage that now lies in dilapidated condition across remote areas,



Remains of Chatti Pathshahi Gurdwara – the north face wall

unprotected and soon to become extinct. I visited the non-functional Gurdwaras in villages, forts, schools and more importantly, met people with a Sikh lineage but had to convert their faith in order to survive.

Though I travelled extensively across Western Punjab, Khyber and Pakistan Occupied Kashmir, focus of the trip was a visit to Muzaffarabad, the place from where our paternal family hailed from. Driving from Abbottabad, I entered Pakistan Occupied Kashmir, and the first glance of the city of Muzaffarabad from the top of the hill, peaked my emotions to a level that I had to ask the driver to halt the car. As I stood



Kitchen of Chatti Pathshahi Gurdwara

by the road, looking at vast expanse of the town, the meandering Jhelum river making a U-turn, I was asking myself, "Is this the valley that my father would describe?" He had described a small Shangri-La type valley but this was just like any other modern town. This did not resonate with the image that I was carrying in my mind's eye, but time has not stopped. It was 67 years since partition and the town and surrounding valley has naturally expanded.

Muzaffarabad is located on the banks of Jhelum and Neelum (Kishanganga) rivers, bordered by Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa in the west, by the Kupwara and Baramula districts of Kashmir in the east, and the Neelum district of Pakistan Occupied Kashmir.

Guru Hargobind, the Sixth Guru Sahib had visited the valley and many residents had thereafter adopted Sikhism. Prior to 1947, the valley of Muzaffarabad and adjoining areas of Balakot and Ramkot had a large Sikh population. The historical Gurdwara in the memory of Chatti Pathshahi used to be a fulcrum where the Sikh population of the valley would come together. Today, the Gurdwara premise is a Police station and a CIA (Central Intelligence Agency) establishment. The northern wall of the Gurdwara building is all that remains of the main structure as it has been reconstructed into the new establishment building. The langar hall and the kitchen areas of the Gurdwara are being used as residence.

As I got out of the car in the market, a man approached asking in Punjabi, "Sardarji, what brings you to Muzaffarabad?" We struck a conversation, and he shared that he belonged to a nearby village and had heard stories from his parents about the vibrant Sikh community that had existed in this region, living in remote villages. He offered to take me to his village where he could point to the houses which once belonged to the Sikhs. He shared an interesting observation that many Sikhs leaving Muzaffarabad had buried their valuables under the cooking area of the kitchen or in the walls. So years after 1947 migration, the occupiers of residences would continue to dig the kitchen areas and break the walls in search for finding valuables - and many did. Going to his village would have required many hours to spare and therefore I politely requested to be excused.



Residential block of Chatti Pathshahi Gurdwara



Detail of the stone slab

On Domel bridge, the place so emotionally associated with our family, I became highly emotional. My mother-in-law, Satwant Kaur, who now stays in Dehra Dun had lost both her parents in the targeted Sikh killings on this bridge.

From the bridge, I took the stairs and headed down to the river bank, next to the gushing water.

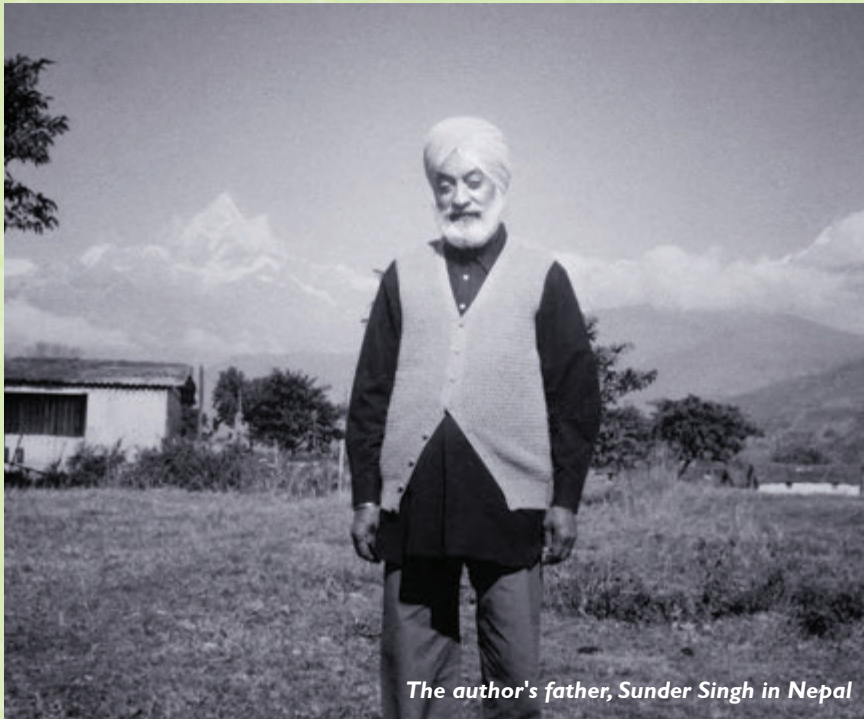
A stone slab with the year 1885 indicates this bridge has been standing for 130 years, initially named after the Dogra Maharaja Ranbir Singh.

The structure of the bridge and the existence of a Baradari (structure with twelve gates) at the lower section, with nearly extinct ghat structures, reflects prominence of this place for the Hindu community of the region, akin to the ghats of Varanasi. This bridge is the only structure of a secular civilisation that once co-existed.

When I was planning my Pakistan trip, I had a strong desire to carry back some soil of Muzaffarabad from under this bridge and preserve it in a sealed bottle to pass on to our generation as a reminder of the holocaust. However as I stood here, I had a numb feeling,



The Ranbir Singh bridge Baradari (twelve gated structure) and the ghats



The author's father, Sunder Singh in Nepal

the valley did not resonate with the picture that I had created for myself. The people were not approachable, and because of my own perception that as a lone Sikh, I could be under some risk. The Domel bridge gave me a creepy sense of the past.

I decided I did not want to spend a minute more in Muzaffarabad. I climbed back up the stairs, got into the car and drove off to Murree in Punjab. I had no desire to explore the Muzaffarabad valley.

I guess the closure that I had been seeking in my mind had taken place with the acceptance that things must change and I needed to accept this and move on in life.



The bridge at Domel

[All photographs by Amardeep Singh]

Amardeep Singh's book : 'Lost Heritage' : The Sikh Legacy in Pakistan is under publication

A War Epic



1st Sikhs in defensive positions near Baramula, October 1947

1st Sikhs save the Kashmir Valley

It was perhaps fated that, just over a century after Sikh warriors captured the Kashmir Valley and reaches beyond from the Afghans, Sikh warriors were in the vanguard of an independent Indian Army to defend and secure the Vale and reaches beyond, from invading hordes, possibly even descendants of the same tribes, now from the north west frontiers of a newly born Pakistan.

Cutting edge of this sword was the 1st Battalion Sikh Regiment while the 1st Patialas, 7th Sikhs, 7th Light Cavalry and others equally distinguished themselves in the battles for Kashmir which lasted 14 months until the UN-mandated 'ceasefire' of 1 January 1949.

Amongst the distinguished Sikhs officers in these battles were Lt Col Harbaksh Singh (later Lt General and GOC-in-C Western Army Command), Brigadier Pritam Singh (the hero of Poonch) and, not the least, Air Commodore Mehar Singh, Operational

Commander of the Royal Indian Air Force. In fact, to Mehar 'Baba' (as he was affectionately known) is attributed the successful defence of Poonch and the securing of Ladakh district. This intrepid flyer pioneered Dakota transport aircraft operations into the



small unprepared airstrip in the Poonch bowl, which was surrounded by aggressive hostile forces, flying in reinforcements, including artillery guns, flying out casualties and refugees. Thereafter, his remarkable leadership in pioneering the flight of Dakotas over uncharted terrain and high mountains to establish an airlink to Leh, was the main contribution in saving Ladakh from advancing enemy forces.

Bravest of the Brave



Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, Prime Minister of India, inspecting the 1st Sikhs in Kashmir, escorted by Major Harwant Singh MC

After their distinguished part in the Burma Campaign, where they were acknowledged as “one of the best units of the entire XIV Army” and earning the highest number of gallantry awards, the 1st Battalion Sikh Regiment were located at Clement Town, Dehra Dun in early August 1947 when they were specially selected to move to Delhi for the epoch-marking Independence celebrations. Along with contingents of the Air Force and Navy, the 1st Sikhs unfurled the tricolour flag at India Gate on 15 August 1947 and again on 16 August 1947 morning at the historic Red Fort. Major Harwant Singh MC of the battalion was Deputy Parade Commander, the fine bearing and turnout of the Sikh guard greatly praised by the Viceroy and others present.

However amidst the rejoicing, was the grimness of communal strife and vicious rioting in northern India, not far from the scene of ceremonies. The battalion, under command of Lt. Col. Dewan Ranjit Rai and including Major Sampuran Bachan Singh, Harwant Singh MC, Hazura Singh, Sardara Singh,

Lichmore and KL Suri, Captains Kamaljit Singh and Joginder Singh and Lt. Vijay Singh had been ordered to Gurgaon, south of Delhi beyond Palam airfield for internal security and maintaining the peace. Two companies were deployed at this town, the other two at Palwal and Rewari and other rural areas. The battalion was shortly visited by Lt. General Sir Dudley Russell ‘Pasha’, Army Commander of the just raised Delhi East Punjab (DEP) Command which had been formed on 20 September 1947.



C. Rajagopalachari, Governor General of newly independent India, inspecting the 1st Sikhs at Palam airport, in August 1947

As recorded “During a tour of Rohtak and Gurgaon in early October 1947, the C-in-C visited several units including 1 Sikh at Gurgaon, commanded by Lt. Col. Dewan Ranjit Rai. One could not but be struck by his confidence and bearing. General Russell was visibly impressed and this was certainly to influence the Army Commander in selecting 1 Sikh for the very critical operation just some weeks later. Earlier, Field Marshal Sir Claude Auchinleck, the Supreme Commander writing to General Sir Rob Lockhart, had singled out the 1st Sikhs on the “exemplary and impartial manner” in which they had performed “their thankless task” at Gurgaon.

In the late evening of 26 October, General Russell briefed them on the grave situation developing in Kashmir. The Prime Minister had just given orders for “defending Srinagar and driving out the raiders from Kashmir”.

This was now late October and winter would soon set in, rendering the small airstrip at Srinagar inoperable while the Banihal Pass too would

completely be blocked by snow. The Air Force could muster only 3 Dakota transport aircraft and so other Dakotas had to come from the civil airlines. With astonishing rapidity, 40 additional Dakotas were requisitioned in 36 hours. General Russell directed that the first troops to be despatched by air to Srinagar would be from 1 Sikh, while 77 Para Brigade from Gurdaspur would move northwards by road.

1 Sikh, less two Companies assembled at Palam airfield before dawn on 27 October 1947 and to make up strength, one battery of 13 Field Regiment (all Sikhs) then located at Delhi, was placed under command to function in an infantry role.

The CO was briefed on the operational task at the airfield itself, where warm clothing, rations and ammunition were issued. Information on the enemy was very scanty: "Tribesmen numbers and arms unknown but reliably reported to be in thousands and advancing towards Srinagar. The situation is critical." The Op. instruction was to secure Srinagar airfield and the wireless station



It was soon known that the raiders (or *Kablees*) mostly from the northwest frontier including Pathans, Chitralis and viscous Mahsuds plus regular troops "on leave" after capturing Muzaffarabad and Domel on the Kashmir border on 22 October had swept the few State Forces troops aside and after sacking Uri had invested Baramulla, just an hour's drive away from Srinagar. The estimated number of these *Kablees* soon swelled to 15,000 and they were entering the state of Jammu and Kashmir from various directions, the most ominous being from Muzaffarabad.



Rare picture of Dakota aircraft after landing at Srinagar airstrip, transporting Indian Army troops in late October 1947

and "to take such actions with available troops which would drive the tribesmen away from Srinagar and provide aid to civil administration for law and order". However, should the pilots not establish contact with civil aviation authorities at Srinagar or if weather conditions were poor, the Dakotas would divert to Jammu, land and await further instructions.

TAC Headquarters and 'C' Company of the 1st Sikhs commanded by Capt. Kamaljit Singh, the defence platoon and a section of 3" mortars for the first airlift, were in place at 0330 hours on 27 October. The second wave to follow consisted of 'D' Company under Major Harwant Singh MC and another section of mortars, the rest of the battalion to follow on 28 October, responsibility for the later moves being

1st Sikhs ready for battle



vested with Major Sampuran Bachan Singh who was to rejoin the battalion at Srinagar soon thereafter. 1 Sikh had an enviable war record, with most of the JCOs and NCOs experienced war veterans, many highly decorated for gallantry, including Jem. Nand Singh Victoria Cross, now a platoon commander while there were no less than 8 Military Cross holders from the Second World War.

The first Dakotas took off from Palam airfield at dawn, flying northwards over the Punjab and Jammu, past the Pir

Mortar Section on the fateful Hill 32



Panjal range before crossing the Banihal Pass into the Kashmir Valley. They circled over the airstrip south of Srinagar but there were no apparent signs of activity and the lead aircraft touched down at exactly 0915 hours. The Sikhs immediately deplaned and set up defensive positions around the airfield.

Lt Col Rai had two options, either to establish his defences right there and so attempt to hold the raiders or carry the fight to where the enemy was, reported to be numbering some 5,000 men, armed with automatic weapons and mortars, but reportedly indulging in loot and rape at Baramula some 45 miles away. It was to be the latter and the CO immediately led his 264 men in commandeered state government buses along the Jhelum valley passing Pattan and selecting the fateful hill at the 32nd milestone just short of Baramula, for confronting the enemy.

Major Harwant Singh MC, leading 'D' Company had meanwhile flown into Srinagar with the second wave of Dakotas by 1400 hours and almost straight

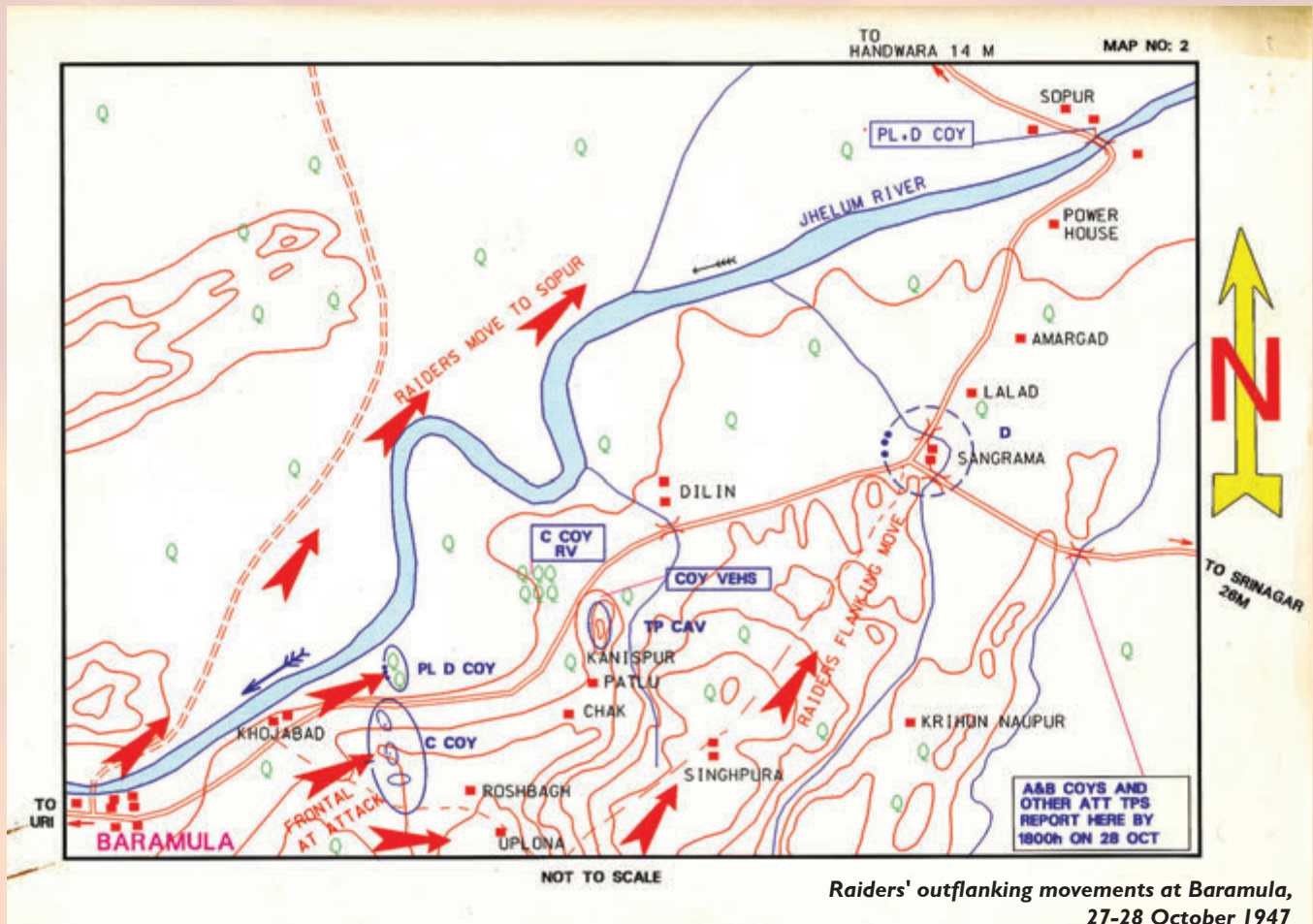
away carried out a 'flag march' in Srinagar city before moving out towards Baramula.

Meanwhile, Capt. Kamaljit Singh's 'C' Company had begun to dig defensive positions at the Mile 32 hill, a dominating feature with its northern flank resting on the Jhelum. Joined by 'D' Company in the late evening, now under command of Major Harwant Singh, the 1st Sikhs established defence positions between Khojabad and Poshbagh by nightfall and were ready for battle.

Early on 28 October morning, the raiders were seen moving out towards Sopur but were now directly confronted by the Sikhs. The first battle of independent India had begun, with fierce fire fights, including mortar fire exchanges which continued intermittently through the day, even as Colonel Ranjit Rai rushed back to Srinagar to co-ordinate move of more deplaning troops. The raiders, seized of how close they had been to their 'prize', now began to outflank the defensive lines, also moving from



Manning a light machine gun



Raiders' outflanking movements at Baramula, 27-28 October 1947

Gulmarg towards Sangam. By the evening, with large numbers of enemy fanning around the positions, it was decided to regroup 'C' and 'D' Companies at Pattan closer to Srinagar. Tragically, Colonel Ranjit Rai fell to a sniper's bullet while re-deploying the troops close to the hill at milestone 32, his body and those of others killed being covered under some bushes, to be recovered later.

As much later eulogised by a Pakistan military historian "... with no reserve of men or ammunition, Rai made an attack on the invading forces as if he had an entire Division at his support ! He saved Srinagar airfield, dashed down the Baramula road, delayed the raiders from advancing by a vital 36 hours and enabled reinforcements sent by air to land at Srinagar. He saved Srinagar, although he gave his life in the effort."

In recognition of his courage, Lt Col. Ranjit Rai was posthumously awarded the first Maha Vir Chakra of the Indian Army and 27 October has since been perpetuated in Indian Army history as 'Infantry Day'.

The 1st Sikhs re-deployed their defences, thinly spread from Pattan to Arnaburam and fought off several attacks, even as Major Sampuran Bachan Singh joined the battalion at Pattan and took over command. Meanwhile, airlift of troops from Delhi and Jammu continued apace and by 30 October, tactical headquarters 161 Infantry Brigade was established at Srinagar, with 1 Kumaon, 1 Punjab and 4 Kumaon. Maj. Gen. Kalwant Singh took over Command of JAK Force and the Royal Indian Air Force flew close air support with Spitfires and Tempests, perilously close to the airfield as also ranging across the valley for tac-rece missions.

The raiders continued to make flanking moves towards Srinagar airfield, fierce fighting took place at Badgam and the situation became critical. 1st Sikhs remained fully deployed at Pattan with fighting patrols seeking the enemy but were again moved back towards Srinagar to cover the north-east perimeter, guarding the main approach near Shelateng Bridge.

The decisive battle of Shalateng took place on 7 November 1947 which broke the raiders back and spirit, removing the threat to Srinagar and the Vale of Kashmir. 'B' Company of 1 Sikhs had been attacked by nearly 5,000 raiders on the 6th night, all attacks beaten back and heavy casualties inflicted. In brilliant tactical moves, while enveloping attacks were carried out and armoured cars came up from the rear, 1 Sikh continued their frontal attacks, stunning the enemy who fled the battlefield leaving 472 dead and another 146 on the road towards Baramula, abandoning 138 civilian lorries, field ambulances and load carriers plus a great quantity of arms and ammunition.

An immediate advance then began along the main axis, 1 Sikh closely pursuing the fleeing enemy, clearing Pattan on 8 November morning, killing another 150 and wounding 200 of the raiders, capturing vehicles, wireless sets, arms and ammunition. Some of the Pathans captured were Pak Army regular troops "on leave", thus immediately exposing Pakistan's perfidy.

Moving ahead, the battalion flushed out several enemy positions and on 9 November entered a devastated Baramula where the mortal remains of Col. Rai and other NCOs and men were cremated with full military honours. Continuing, the battalion advanced to Rampur and then Uri, via temporary bridges, to find utter chaos all around and immediately established defensive picquets covering the road Uri-Domel.

The regular Pakistan Army had now been committed to battle and adopting an aggressive posture, attacked the battalion with machine

guns and mortars. The fiercest fighting was for the Nalwa picquet on the night of 23/24 November, where the 1st Sikhs killed about 400 of the enemy, the hero of this defensive battle of Uri being Naik Chand Singh, who was awarded an immediate MVC.

Winter and aggression

Soon winter set in and heavy snowfall meant re-deployment of Indian troops to the lower heights of the wooded Sank Ridge on Uri's southern flank, with regular Pakistan Army troops dominating the Uri bowl. However the brigade, without proper appreciation directed Lt Col. Sampuran Bachan Singh to evict the enemy from Bhatgiran in a frontal, daylight attack. Nb.Sub. Nand Singh Victoria Cross who had rejoined the battalion was leading his 'D' Company platoon when an unfortunate lapse in communication exposed the advancing troops to well entrenched enemy positions and they suffered heavy casualties.



Sikh troops in position under the glacial heights of Tithwal



Light machine gun position of the 1st Sikhs

Jem Nand Singh with his platoon nevertheless tore into the massed enemy with bayonets, he was severely wounded but continued to lead till killed by a burst of LMG fire. His repeated acts of "valour, leadership and devotion to duty," won him a posthumous MVC, Nand Singh passing on into military legend as the most highly decorated soldier of the Commonwealth. To perpetuate the memory of this supreme warrior, the main bridge over the Uri Nala has been named as 'Nand Singh VC' Bridge and the road to Salamabad as 'Nand Singh VC Road', with an imposing memorial overlooking the bridge.

In the meantime, Sub. Bishan Singh MC of 'D' Company launched a counter attack and in severe hand-to-hand fighting, the enemy was thrown back, even as more troops were thrown into battle but Bishan Singh, continuing to cheer and encourage his men, was also gallantly killed in the lead. His cool courage, inspiring leadership and dogged determination against dangerous odds, earned him the posthumous MVC.

Sub. Gurcharan Singh MC&Bar also showed gallantry of the highest order and earned a Vr.C but the battalion suffered 125 casualties in this futile action because of inept orders from higher command.

However, the Pakistanis had been dealt a major blow and thereafter stopped interfering with movement over the Uri Bridge, which led to another successful operation that cleared the area upto Sank. 1st Sikhs had, within six days, recaptured the towns of Pattan, Baramula and Uri over a distance of 100 kilometres, had suffered severe casualties but inflicted multiple times that on the enemy, mostly regular Pakistan Army troops. The Kashmir Valley had been saved by the indomitable warriors of the 1st battalion of the Sikh Regiment.

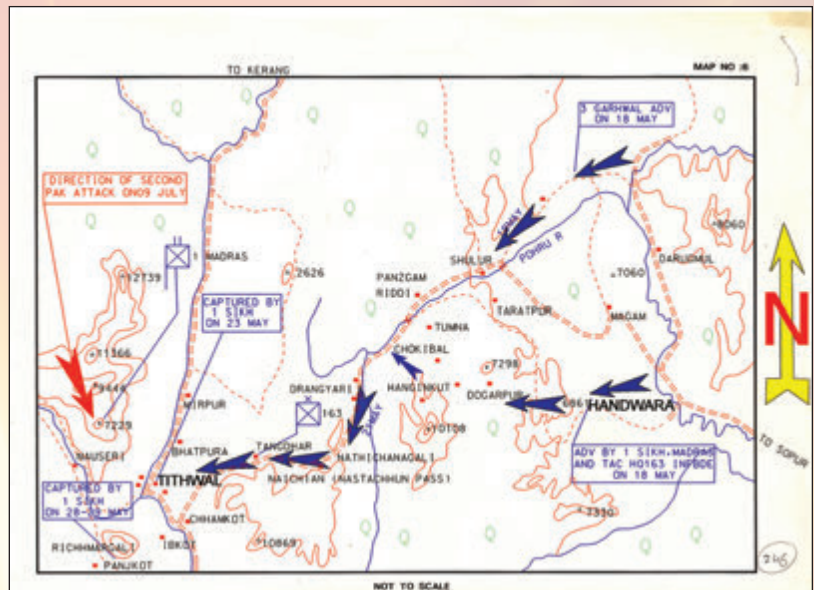
Consolidation

Lt. Col Harbaksh Singh had taken over as Commanding Officer 1 Sikh when during the height of severe winter, there was news of the enemy



1st Sikhs patrol in the Mandwara-Tithwal axis

having crossed over Pharkian Gali into the Tregham Valley. On 8 February 1948, the battalion moved out in darkness, via Sopur and advanced along the snowbound road, securing a firm base at Handwara the next afternoon. Ironically, Pakistan's 1st AK battalion facing 1st Sikhs was commanded by Lt Col. Nausherwan Khan, formerly of the 5th Sikhs and a colleague of Harbaksh Singh. Soon Handwara was cleared and the 1st Sikhs advanced along the road Wodhapur-Naugam-Kupwara, but the going was very hard because of snow and destroyed bridges. Tregham was soon relieved, the enemy seen fleeing but pursuit continued with some fire fights including at village Shulur where 40 of the enemy were killed. The clearing operations in the Tregham Valley were some of the toughest in the Kashmir operations, but were tackled with courage and tenacity.



Operation Handwara and Tithwal sector in May 1948

After some rest and reorganisation, 1 Sikh were in fine fettle and spirits when regular Pakistan Army formations were identified astride the heights along the Uri-Muzaffarabad area and the Haji Pir pass, spreading north of Uri and into the Kishanganga area. The Pakistan Army's "official" involvement in J&K was eventually admitted in April 1948 by General Sir Douglas Gracey, C-in-C Pakistan Army, who stated that "it is imperative that the Indian Army is not allowed to advance beyond the general line Uri-Poonch-Nowshera." The Pakistan Army's first formation to go into Kashmir was its 101 Brigade and by June 1948 two Infantry Brigades were reported in action.

Major General KS Thimayya, GOC Sri Div (later 19th Infantry Division), with 163 Brigade (now commanded by Brigadier Harbaksh Singh of which 1 Sikh, 3 Garhwal and 1 Madras were constituent), had planned offensive operations towards Domel in the spring but resources were grossly inadequate. Regardless, 1 Sikh secured Chokibal on 21 May 1948 and two days later Tithwal was captured. 1 Sikh were assigned the task of clearing the heights of Richmar Gali and Point 7229 on the left of Nastachhun Pass and north of the Kishanganga. Commanded by Lt. Col. Keshar Singh IDSM, 1 Sikh carried out a reconnaissance in force with 'B' and 'C' Company being grouped under Major Harwant Singh MC.

The approach to Richmar Gali involved a single file climb up a steep gradient with enemy positions

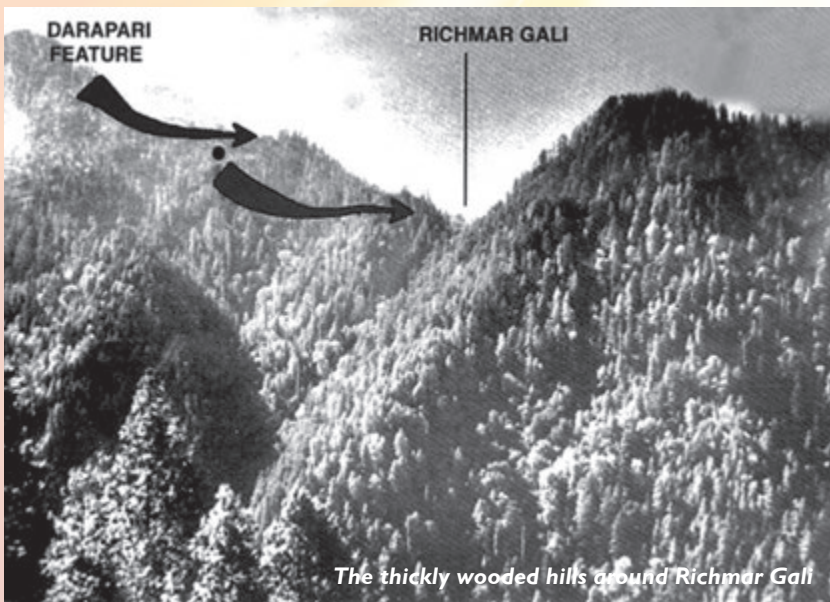


Brigadier Harbaksh Singh, commanding 163 Brigade led the brilliant offensive in the spring of 1948



1st Sikhs mopping up enemy defences at Tithwal

to be cleared all along. On 30 May, assaults were launched against the strongly held ridge and wooded crests well covered by series of machine gun posts. The CO had declared that even though the enemy was strongly entrenched, "*Sheron, Chhad Jao!*" "My braves, capture it." They certainly did and the 1st Sikhs assaulted the enemy (identified as the 3/12 Frontier Force Regiment, the venerable 53rd (Royal) Sikhs of undivided Indian Army) with severe hand to hand fighting. The opposing Pakistan 10th Brigade included some five crack battalions, including the 4/16 Punjab, 3/12 Frontier Force Rifles, 5/12 FF Regt ('Guides') and MMGs of 1/15 Punjab plus a mountain gun battery.



The thickly wooded hills around Richmar Gali

1st Sikh defences then leant on Pir Sahiba in the west with a rifle company on Nangi Terki, the troops creating a very strong defence in the wooded feature. On 4 June, under heavy artillery fire, the enemy launched strong attacks, but were held by Jem Harchand Singh's platoon which counter attacked with bayonets and grenades, killing 53 and capturing arms and ammunition in this battle which coincided with 'Gallipoli Day', which epic action had been fought by the battalion 33 years earlier.

Although a UN-directed Cease Fire was anticipated, the enemy used heavy artillery, mortars and machine guns to continuously attack 1 Sikh positions, having declared the Kashmir war as 'jehad'. The re-capture of Tithwal, with Richmar Gali as vital objective, became the Pakistan Army's obsession and a reinforced brigade, with artillery, was deployed to ring the position and they even broadcast that the Tithwal Valley- Nastachhan pass upto Kupwara was to be "an Eid gift for Pakistan."

A minuscule four-man section of Sikhs on a small knoll covering the knife edged ridge was to beat back battalion-sized attacks, the man of the moment being L/Nk Karam Singh who had earlier won the Military Medal in Burma. From the evening of 12 October 1948, heavy artillery and mortar fire damaged the main defences but the saddle had been overlooked.

Throughout 13 October, the battle was fought, wave after wave of assaulting Pakistan Army troops being beaten back and Karam Singh, though wounded, fighting it out, bayoneting those who came near his trench, holding the saddle for over three hours against five waves of attack.

Counter-attacks, artillery fire and fighter strafing during daylight hours held the enemy even as Sikhs in the forward-most trenches grappled with the attackers using bayonets and grenades. On the night of 13 October and the following morning the seventh and last of the attacks was beaten off and even if every bunker was destroyed, the enemy did not capture

any. While the Pakistan Army lost over 300 men and 500 were wounded, with many POWs taken, the 1st Sikhs had 15 killed and 263 wounded.

The GOC 19 Div, Maj. Gen Thimayya, brimming with pride and praise, termed the battle for Richmar Gali as “a magnificent fight.” L/Nk Karam Singh was awarded the Param Vir Chakra for his fiercely proud spirit and as a “dauntless and born leader of men in crisis, where spirits could neither be subdued by fire nor hardship.” The 1st battalion of the Sikh Regiment was given the battle honours ‘Srinagar 1947’ and ‘Tithwal 1948’ and ‘J&K 1947, 1948’ as Theatre Honours.



Major Harwant Singh of the 1st Sikhs with Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru inspecting the 1st Sikhs

Another battalion, the 7th of the Sikh Regiment took part in the J&K operations and that is another story but, briefly in January 1948, the battalion was

moved to Jammu & Kashmir and took part in the Srinagar Valley operations. They fought a major battle on 22 March, 1948. At dawn that day, when Lieutenant Colonel Mathura Singh was leading the battalion into attack against the enemy stronghold at ‘Pethahir’, it was confronted with heavy automatic



On their return after the gruelling and historic defence of Kashmir Valley, Lt Gen KM Cariappa meets Lt Col Joginder Bachan Singh, CO 1st Sikhs

and mortar fire. Undaunted by the enemy fire, the attack was pressed forward and after three hours of fierce fighting, the enemy fled leaving behind two officers and 46 other ranks dead while 6 were taken prisoner. Rifles, LMGs and pistols, were also captured in addition to a large quantity of ammunition and equipment. During the operations in Jammu and Kashmir, the 7th Sikhs earned 5 Vir Chakras, 19 Mention-in-Dispatches and the Battle Honour of ‘Pethahir’.

How the 'Air' saved Kashmir in 1947-48



Arming RIAF Tempest fighter-bombers with rockets before an attack sortie



Pilot of one of the many civil Dakota aircraft flying troops and supplies into Srinagar during October-November 1947



Flt Lt Dilbagh Singh (left) with Tempest fighter-bomber before close air support sortie in the Kashmir Valley, October 1947. He was to become Chief of the Air Staff, IAF in 1983.



Air Commodore Mehar Singh with IAF pilots and other personnel at Srinagar Airport. Facing him is Flt Lt Lal Singh Grewal, who was later to become Vice Chief of the Air Staff



Iconic photograph of the main personalities of the time: left to right, Air Commodore 'Baba' Mehar Singh, responsible for all air operations in J&K, Major General Kalwant Singh, GOC Sri Division, Maharaja of Patiala, Yadavendra Singh who offered immediate military support to Maharaja Hari Singh of Kashmir (on his left)



Loading mountain howitzer into RIAF Dakota before flying to Poonch



Sentry guarding Tempests at Jammu airfield



Air Commodore Mehar Singh and other Air Force personnel with Brigadier Pritam Singh, 'the saviour of Poonch'

A Crucible of Strife



rocket launchers, apart from diabolical IEDs. There was a surge in the number of Kashmiri youth agitating many of them crossing over to Pakistan for war-like training and procurement of arms, the 'indigenous' militant groups including the pro-independence JKLF and the pro-Pakistan Hizb-ul-Mujahedin (Hizb). During decade of the '90s, an estimated 10,000 Kashmiri youth joined various militant groups.

The Indian Army and paramilitary forces were given the task of counter-insurgency, leading to a vast deployment of troops in the region. The AFSPA or *Armed Forces Special Powers Act* was, and still continues to be a source of tension between the locals and the Indian establishment. 25 years on terrorist attacks may have become less commonplace, but stone pelting is seen as the Kashmiri appropriation of 'Intifada', a term used meaning 'uprising', often used synonymously with the Palestinian situation.

The use of the term 'Intifada' with respect to Kashmir has been widely debated among political analysts. On the one hand, the image of Kashmiri youths with stones and slingshots in their hands evokes ideas of the Palestinian movement. However, the lack of an ostensible "occupying force" in the case of Kashmir veers away from this reading. The facts of destiny cannot be refuted: the instrument of ascension signed by Maharaja Hari Singh in October 1947 is a legal document and even as popular protest has, however, managed to replace militancy to a large extent in the state, there is a definite paradigm shift in the politics of the region.

In some Kashmiri minds, the narrative against Indian authority has always existed, but in recent years, Pakistan has lost credibility and Kashmiris in fact are rejecting Pakistan's overtures just as fiercely.

Twenty-five years on, there remains uncertainty about the future of Kashmir. There is a veneer of peace, but violence still simmers in the valley. With the US pulling all troops out of Afghanistan by 2016, eerily reminiscent of the 1989 Soviet withdrawal, there is a very real fear of a second influx of militants in Kashmir, even while the spectre of ISIS looms.

Over the past quarter century, it has been a bleak situation in Kashmir, becoming hard to differentiate the victim from the terrorist. 25 years after the insurgency in J&K began in 1989, there has been sporadic peace in the valley, but the lines between various conflicting demands have blurred. The situation flares up from time to time and political discourse has evolved greatly, but turbulence in the region is palpable. What started out as a movement for 'azaadi' has seen phases, first coloured by Pakistani political aspirations, then by resentment of the violence that engulfed the region and finally a growing disillusionment with all the external players involved.

With the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan in 1989, Afghan 'mujahideen' or mercenary fighters who took part in the war against the Soviets through the '80s turned to Kashmir. End of the Afghan War signalled a new era in Kashmir, with a surge in armament and manpower available for the Kashmiri 'struggle'. Indian security forces in Kashmir were forced by a new and deadly enemy armed with a vast variety of weaponry, including AK-47s and

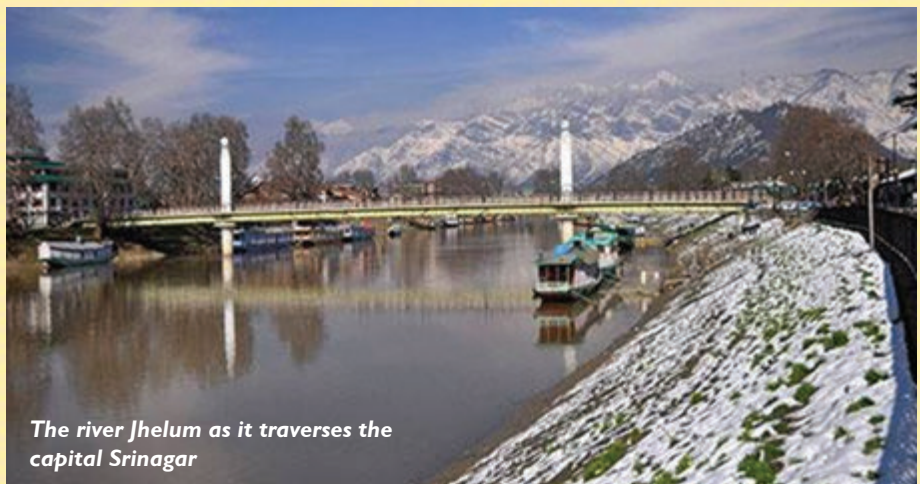
The Sikhs of Kashmir today



Sikh family at Shaheedi Diwas of Guru Arjan Sahib at Gurdwara Shaheed Bunga Baghat at Srinagar

A quarter century back, during the closing months of 1989, ominous disturbances which were developing in the Kashmir valley peaked when the first trickle of Kashmiri Pandits (KPs), leaving the Vale for the safety of Jammu and beyond, turned into a frenzy to flee in the darkness of the night. As recorded by observers at first hand, such an “ethnic cleansing” had begun with creation of a fear psychosis, spearheaded by aggressive crowds, clearly communal, flooding the streets, their slogans mixed with warnings. The clear and present danger was to the Kashmiri Pandits and the clear aim was

to chase them out. “We want Kashmir without the Hindus ; *Hum kya chahte ...Azadi! La ilaha illala*” the crowds screamed.



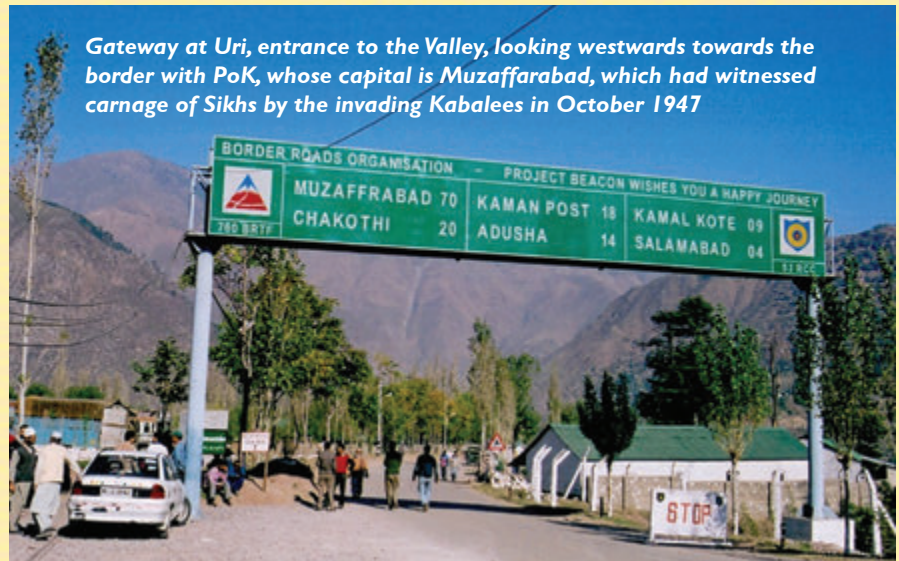
The river Jhelum as it traverses the capital Srinagar



The river Jhelum flowing westwards through the Kashmir Valley

That trickle became a flood from mid-September 1989, with a virtual exodus and the eventual numbers of Kashmiri Pandits fleeing the Vale of Kashmir totaled 750,000, to thereafter live a life of refugees “in their own country”. The Pandits today are described as a lost people, still struggling to come to terms with their displacement and subsisting in alien conditions. 25 years later, in 2014, there obviously are many Kashmiri Pandits who long to return to their homeland, with that bygone era haunting their brutalised psyches. The KPs today are a dejected community, struggling to come to terms with life away from their original homeland.

Kashmir remains ‘a festering sore’ in polity of the nation and the cause of continued confrontation with Pakistan but the Indian State has kept the valley, albeit



Gateway at Uri, entrance to the Valley, looking westwards towards the border with PoK, whose capital is Muzaffarabad, which had witnessed carnage of Sikhs by the invading Kabalees in October 1947

without the Kashmiri Pandits who have virtually been ‘erased’ from the region.

From time to time, the Government of India has attempted to ‘lure’ the Pandits back to the valley, with promises of cash assistance, of uptoRs 20 lakhs, and



There were a large number of stately Sikh homes in the Kashmir Valley, some of which were later requisitioned by the State Government and Indian Army but many of which remain maintained in their original form

have even mooted the concept of creating ‘composite townships’ for the Kashmiri Pandits, an idea which is fiercely abhorred by many. “A separate colony will only intensify the mental and physical barriers between the two communities” feel many of those offered the possibility. Former Indian Army Chief, General Shankar Roy Chowdhury, in contemplating such a ‘gharwapsi’ of Kashmiri Pandits, feels that only the (near) future will tell whether the idea of ‘Kashmiriyat’ still exists amongst the Kashmiris or has been obliterated “perhaps forever”.

In sharp contrast, even as the tragic ethnic cleansing of Kashmiri Pandits was underway, the Sikhs of Kashmir stood out for their steadfastness amidst the political, economic and civil turbulence in the state. Sikhs are seemingly ‘accepted’ by the overwhelming Muslim majority as part of ‘Kashmiriyat’ but have unfortunately been ignored, nay even neglected, by the Government. In 2014, some 120,000 Sikhs live in the Vale of Kashmir, 18,000 of them in and around the second biggest town of Baramula.



At Singhpora Kalan village in Baramula district which has one of the highest literacy rates in Jammu and Kashmir

In Jammu province, there are some half a million Sikhs, making a combined population of over 600,000 Sikhs in the State of Jammu & Kashmir. Yet many feel that Sikhs of the State have been denied support, not even being recognised by the Government as ‘a minority’.

There are numerous Sikh villages in the Vale of Kashmir, many around the town of Baramula, some in the Tithwal Valley and Tangdhar, surrounded on three sides by territory under control of Pakistan occupied Kashmir. Although the Sikhs go about living their lives as normal citizens, as administrators, teachers, farmers, businessmen or serving with the police and civil services, they have not remained unscathed. Scores have died in cross firing between militants and security forces, others killed in landmine blasts. According to statistics, a number of truck drivers have been killed, particularly in the Banihal area, others at Mahjoor Nagar, some at Dalwana Budgam and others at Rajpora Chowk in Pulwama.



Sikhs have moved away from agriculture in the last 20 years and they are now mostly into trade and commerce

However, the most sinister and worrying incident was the brutal execution of 36 Sikh men at Chattisingpura in Anantnag district of southern Kashmir 15 years back, on 20 March 2000, on the eve of US President Bill Clinton’s visit to India. Stories abound including one that some ‘turned-around’ militant renegades were responsible but this theory has been refuted nor any explanation given to the subsequent elimination of suspected “foreign militants’ in an encounter” by the Armed Forces inspite of a CBI probe and J&K High Court directives.

In a telling interview with IBN Live, Jagmohan Singh Raina, Chairman of All Parties Sikh Coordination Committee (APSCC) whose office is at Iqbal Park in Srinagar, said : “We have never faced any problem here. No local Kashmiri Muslim troubled us or treated us like unwanted people. The ‘Kashmiriyat’ is very strong. But, the state government and the Centre have been very unkind to us. For them the Sikhs in Kashmir don’t exist. The entire focus is on the Kashmiri Pandits and their plight. We too want to be heard. We also have other issues”.

According to him, the Sikhs are the most neglected religious minority in Kashmir. He said that the Kashmiri Pandits left the valley during the height of militancy and the Sikhs stayed back.



Jagmohan Singh Raina, Chairman of All Parties Sikh Coordination Committee (APSCC)

He said, “Kashmiri Pandits claim that they were forced to leave the valley by the militants and the local Muslims. But, I don’t think that the local Muslims did that. Out of fear most Pandits left the valley.



JP Singh, earlier DIG Jammu was later posted as the DIG of Baramula

The agencies (referring to intelligence agencies) also created a situation for the exodus (of Pandits). Sikhs also faced some problems. But we are a martial race. We are not afraid of anything. We stayed back and the local Muslims did not trouble us. However, many



Gurdwara at Baramula, open to all faiths

Sikhs have left their villages and moved to cities like Srinagar and Baramula for safety. We lost our agricultural land. The land is still there, but is in neglect."

Before the militancy heightened, the Sikhs of Kashmir virtually controlled the agriculture sector across the valley, and some of the biggest apple and saffron growers were Sikhs, not Muslims.

But the Sikh migration to cities has badly hit Kashmir's agriculture sector. Still, according to him no Muslim family in rural Kashmir has usurped the land which belongs to the Sikhs. Heaping praises on the Muslims, he said, "When the floods hit us in September, local Muslims first rescued Sikhs. They first gave them relief material. We have a very strong bond."

Attacking the successive governments which ruled Jammu & Kashmir as also India, Raina said, "We are being discriminated against. The focus is only on the Kashmiri Pandits. We have nothing against them. But, listen to us also. We stayed back during the militancy. Respect us for that. We have too many issues. Both the state and Centre must come forward to us."

Jagmohan Singh Raina however, criticises the state government for not holding the election to Sikh Gurudwara Prabhandak Board of Jammu & Kashmir for the past 10 years. He also complains that Jammu & Kashmir is the only State Government which has not accorded the minorities' status to the Sikhs. He also claims that he was contacted by the RSS to politicise the issues related to the Sikhs, but he told them not to communalise or politicise such socio-political issues. He feels Prime Minister Narendra Modi offers hope, but he is against giving any communal colour to the issue.

Raina narrates an incident in which he was threatened by a local Muslim who was actually eyeing his gas distribution business. He says that the local Muslim used militants to threaten him and he had to shut his business for two years. But, other Muslims supported him and he was able to restart his business.



Kashmiri Sikh students doing kirtan

“Such incidents are isolated ones. They keep happening. We need to stand up to such criminals. Fleeing from the valley out of fear is no solution,” he stressed.

Gurdwaras in Kashmir attract not only the devotees and tourists but have been a shining example of communal harmony especially during times of distress like during the recent devastating floods. Speaking to IBNLive at the Gurdwara, Gurumukh Singh, a local Sikh expressed confidence in the PM Modi’s leadership. However, he refused to buy everything the BJP is saying about Kashmir issue.

Gurumukh Singh criticised the state government and predicted that Omar Abdullah government would lose the forthcoming Assembly elections. He was also equally unhappy with the Congress and said that “When previous Prime Minister Manmohan Singh came to Srinagar, he went to Hazratbal, but he did not visit our Gurdwara. This has hurt us a lot. Being a Sikh, he should have visited our Gurdwara. We will not vote for the Congress” !



S Bahadur Singh runs his National Watch House at Rangreth, Srinagar



Sikh driver owners at their Tata Sumo taxi stand in Srinagar



Sikh shops at ‘Ground Zero’, the ‘always-in-the-news’ Lal Chowk in downtown Srinagar



S Navinder Singh in his hardware shop at Rangreth, Srinagar

Most of the Sikhs have moved away from agriculture in the last 20 years and they are now mostly into trade and commerce. Some of their children live outside Kashmir and other states of India but still have close connections with their state and keep visiting their parents and relatives. The local Sikhs proudly claim that their relationship with the local Muslims and Kashmir is “inseparable”.

Sardar Jagjit Singh, who is presently Postmaster at the Rangreth Post office in Srinagar has immensely helped *Nishaan* to put this issue in semblance and we extend our heartfelt gratitude. In his words: "My main aim in life is to work for quality education, both academic and religious among our youth so that our community has an increasing number of Sikhi-inspired intellectuals and professionals of global standard. As such, along with my friends, we are running two libraries and are also helping another library with books and other reading material".



These are the Komal Library Gurdwara Shaheed Bunga Baghat and Khalsa Library Gurdwara Singh Sabha Rangreth along with the Akali Kaur Singh Library Gurdwara Sahib at Alucha Bagh in Srinagar.

"Every year with the support of the GPC, we have been organising various sports activities like cricket, hockey and volley ball tournaments for young enthusiasts. On the eve of Baisakhi, we organise a weekly programme- the Khalsa Week - every year since the last sixteen years, in which programmes such *askatha kirtan* lectures are performed by students.

During the 2014 floods, our students worked with various Sikh NGOs to help the flood-stricken people of Srinagar and the Komal library became the biggest medical camp in Kashmir during the calamity. We even adopted some families rendered homeless by the floods.

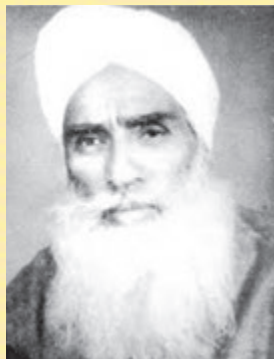
Our endeavour is to offer financial help to students who cannot afford their school or college fees and we ensure that no boy or girl of ours discontinues education owing to any financial problems.

We dream of seeing Sikhi-inspired global leaders - be they doctors, engineers, IAS officers, writers, columnists, painters economists leading the world, following the way shown by our Great Gurus".

Chardi Kala !

Sikhs in J&K politics

The Sikhs of Jammu & Kashmir have always played an important role in the political scene of the State, holding important portfolios and responsibilities in Governance of the State.



The list is long but over the decades, amongst the prominent Sikhs, one must begin with S Budh Singh Tyagi of Mirpur who was a renowned politician and parliamentarian closely associated with important political events in the State. From 1930, he actively participated in the movement for National Freedom and it was because of his and Raja Mohd Akbar Khan, also of Mirpur, that Sheikh Mohd Abdullah changed the entire complexion of the Kashmir's freedom struggle, giving it a national character. He was a great orator and on 18 March 1948 was appointed Minister for Health and Rehabilitation. In 1952 he was elected

to Parliament and represented Kashmir for 12 years, passing away in 1974.

S Harbans Singh Azad of village Khadniyar Baramula, did his LLB from Aligarh Muslim University and thereafter practiced Law,



Mehak, a Kashmiri Sikh girl, presenting her painting of Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah to Dr Farooq Abdullah

contesting State Assembly elections on National Conference ticket from Baramula, becoming a member of the J&K constitution drafting committee. In 1958, he became Dy Speaker of the J&K Legislative Assembly then Minister of State for Home and Education, was speaker of the Assembly 1960-1963 and also was Minister for Forests, Works and Power.

S Harsajan Singh Bali of village Chak Shutloo Baramula, worked with Radio Kashmir for many years and successfully contested state elections from the Gandhinagar constituency in 1987, defeating Pandit Tarlochan Dutt who had been undefeated before. As a religiously minded person he conceived and implemented the beautification of Baghe-Bahu in Jammu and beautification of areas around the Hazratbal Shrine in Kashmir. He was instrumental in the construction of Gurdwara Tali Sahib at TalabTilo Jammu and Gurdwara at Akhnoor.



S Harbans Singh of Gandhinagar, Jammu began his career in politics in 1978, being elected Sarpanch Halka Satwari, later being nominated as Vice Chairman J& K Tourism Development Corporation in 1984. Being elected in 1987, he was Minister of State till 1990 and a Cabinet Minister till 2003. He was responsible for building of Gurdwara Fateh Singh in Gandhinagar, Gurdwara Guru Ka Bagh in Channi Himmat and the Gurdwara near Bahu Fort.



S. Gurmukh Singh of village Rada Tehsil Muzaffarabad has worked tirelessly for the cause of refugees. He was also Chairman of the Peace Council in the State. In 1967 he was inducted as a Minister for



Relief, Rehabilitation and Revenue and became Vice Chairman of Legislative Council in 1974.

S Rangil Singh graduated from the GGM College Jammu and did his LLM from London. In 1967, he was elected as MLA from RS Pura, and again in 1987, becoming Minister for Education 1974-1977. In 2000, he joined Peoples Democratic Party and is currently the Party Spokesperson. He is President of the J&K Olympic Association and Founder Chairman of the MBS College of Engineering and Technology at Jammu.



S Pardaman Singh Azad of Muzaffarabad was President of All India Sikh Students Federation 1961-1962 and began his political career from Jammu Cantt in 1983. In 2003 he was nominated the Member of Upper House from Jammu.



Farooq Abdullah of Kashmir with Amarinder Singh of Patiala seen felicitating Colonel Harwant Singh, whose role in defence of the Kashmir Valley in October 1947 is legendary

Dr Harbajan Singh from Tangmarg in the Valley was the first Sikh to post graduate in medicine from England after completing his MBBS at Lahore. After partition he was head of the ENT department of Govt Medical College Srinagar and in 1997 was inducted as Minister in the Govt by Sheikh Mohd Abdullah. He was President of the Jammu & Kashmir Panthak party.



There are numerous other Sikhs who have been involved with J&K politics including S Surinder Singh of Tangmarg who was elected as a MLA with huge margin from the Muslim – dominated area. Then S Dharamveer Singh Oberoi was President of the Srinagar Municipal Committee in 1980 and



Mehbooba Mufti Sayeed, President of the Jammu & Kashmir People's Democratic Party, daughter of former Home minister of India and also J&K chief minister Mufti Mohammad Sayeed, seen with her Muslim and Sikh partymen.

later nominated as a member of the J&K Govt as NC member. S Tarlochan Singh Wazir was nominated MLC in the National Conference Govt. and presently the President of J&K GurdwaraParbandhak Board. S Manjeet Singh has served as Minister of State for Education while S Charanjeet Singh has recently been nominated to the upper house as BJP member from Jammu.



The Sikhs of Kashmir : today and tomorrow

Kashmiri Sikhs in the Armed Forces

Imbibing their splendid martial traditions, it is natural that Sikhs from Kashmir would serve in the armed forces in substantial numbers. Recently, Lt Gen Pardeep Singh Mehta became a first Sikh Army Officer from the Kashmir Valley to become a three-star General. A second-generation Army Officer, whose parents are from Shogapora (Badgam) and Singhpora (Baramulla), he studied

at the Presentation Convent School in Srinagar and graduated from the Government Degree College, Udhampur in 1977.

He was commissioned in the Indian Army in September 1978, having passed out as 'First' in the Order of Merit (Gold Medalist) from the Officers Training Academy, Chennai. He joined the elite 1st (Skinner's) Horse and in his service career spanning over 36 years, has served in various sectors, he commanded an Armoured Regiment, Armoured Brigade (T-90 MBTs) and an Armoured Division. He is now GOC of the elite XXI Strike Corps.

General Pardeep Singh had earlier served in counter insurgency operations in J&K as a Colonel General Staff of the Counter Insurgency Force, was Deputy Director General Military Operations (AHQ), Instructor at the School of Armoured Warfare and Directing Staff at the Higher Command Wing of Army War College.

Other Kashmiri Sikhs serving in the Indian Army are Brigadiers Balbir Singh and RS Reen from Baramulla and Colonel Daljit Singh from Dardapura.

The Indian Navy boasts of a number of Sikh officers, including Rear Admiral Inderpal Singh Bali from Srinagar and Commodore Dalbir Singh Sodhi, from Baramulla, the latter also being highly articulate in his research and writing on the history, culture and present lives of Sikhs in Kashmir.

Also in the Indian Navy serve Commodore Homipal Singh of Tral, Commanders Gurdayal Singh Raina and Manjit Singh Bali from Baramulla.

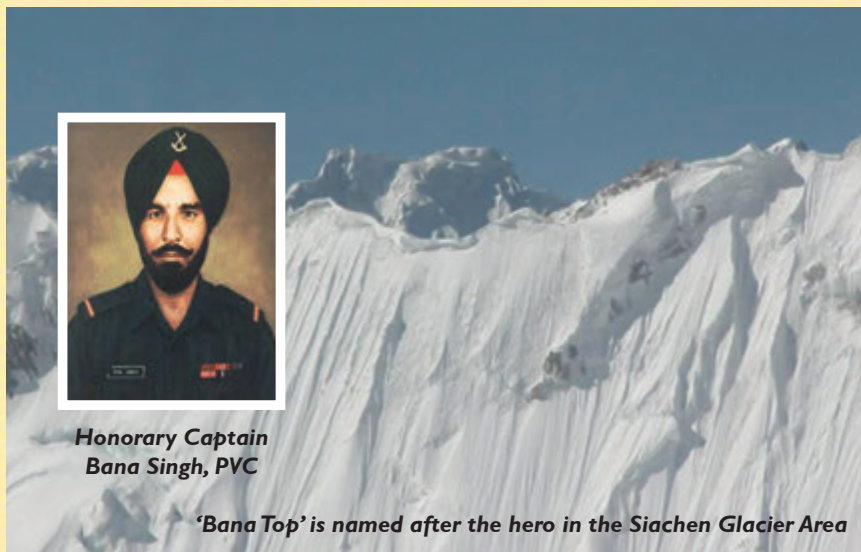
There have been several Kashmiri Sikhs in the Indian Air Force, presently including Sqn Ldr Daljit Singh Bali, flying frontline



Lt Gen Pradeep Singh Mehta



Commodore Dalbir Singh Sodhi, IN



*Honorary Captain
Bana Singh, PVC*

'Bana Top' is named after the hero in the Siachen Glacier Area

MiG-29 air superiority fighters. His inspiration surely is Flying Officer Nirmaljit Singh Sekhon, who was posthumously awarded the ParamVir Chakra, India's highest military decoration, in recognition of his remarkable action in the air defence of Srinagar air base against raiding PAF's Sabres



Postage stamp in honour of Nirmaljit Singh Sekhon, PVC



Daljit Singh Bali of the Indian Air Force on parade

Glacier area, the peak captured from the enemy now being named as 'Bana Top' in his honour.

The Jammu and Kashmir Light Infantry (JAK LI) of the Indian Army has its roots in the erstwhile State Forces and today comprises 15 battalions of regular infantry, two of its earlier battalions renamed as Ladakh Scouts. With its regimental centre at Srinagar's Airport Complex at Avantipur with a small winter setup near Jammu, the troops are volunteers from the state of Jammu & Kashmir, with 50% Muslims and the others Sikhs and Dogras..

during the Indo-Pakistan War in December 1971, the only IAF person so honoured.

Another ParamVir Chakra awardee, this time from Jammu, is Subedar Major and Honorary Captain Bana Singh of the 8th J&K Light Infantry. He was given the nation's highest military award for his incredible feat in the Siachen



Lt Gen Gurmeet Singh, then GOC XV Corps in Srinagar, at the JAK LI attestation parade



JAK LI recruits taking the oath after the ceremonial parade

Being a Sikh-Kashmiri

Is every Sikh a Punjabi? Does every Sikh belong to Punjab? No. Every Sikh is not a Punjabi and every Punjabi is not a Sikh.

These are questions I have to answer, clarify and justify every time someone new gets to know me. The dilemma is around regional identity and religion. Needless to say, most often Sikhs are considered as Punjabis and vice versa.

In the case of India, Punjab is a state in the North and people living there are called Punjabis. All of the major religious communities are to be found in the Indian side of Punjab. During partition in 1947, most of the Punjabi-speaking Muslim population was either left behind in, or migrated to, the part of Punjab that is now in Pakistan. Similarly, Punjabi-speaking Hindus migrated to the Indian side. Ideally anyone who speaks Punjabi and lives in Punjab is a Punjabi, irrespective of their religious faith.

Pre-1947 and post-1947 Punjab is a historically important region in Sikhism as it is its place of origin. Sikhism has flourished in this region. It is the same with all the religions in the world; they originate in one place and then get adopted by different regions and are coloured by their native culture.

I am a Sikh-Kashmiri woman by birth who studies at the JN University in New Delhi. I grew up like any other Kashmiri. Whenever I tell someone I am a Sikh, it is assumed that I am a Punjabi and like anyone really touchy about my region, I explain that being a Sikh has nothing to do with me being a Kashmiri.

I have to explain that I am not from the Punjab, that I don't speak Punjabi or eat typical Punjabi food. I have never seen fields of mustard and corn as this is a usual inquiry. I only know of lush orchards of apples and pears, cherries, walnuts and huge chinar trees as a Kashmiri. I have met a lot of Sikhs like me who are judged because they don't belong to Punjab or speak Punjabi. The dilemma does not originate solely in the relationship between being Sikh and Punjabi but in being a Kashmiri.



A young Singhnee in her Punjab style chunni

The general assumption is that if you are a Kashmiri-looking person, then you must be Muslim –or perhaps Hindu. When I was growing up in Kashmir and studying in St. Joseph's in Baramula, I never felt that my identity was unknown to the world outside the valley. I was very happy having some Sikh friends and many Muslim friends.

However, while studying in Aligarh Muslim University two years ago I became conscious of this fact. Most people assumed I was a Muslim because

I identified myself with Kashmir. Although I was accepted as a Sikh woman, because most people think that "every Sikh is Punjabi", questions became focused on me being Punjabi.

I would love to be thought of as a Punjabi if I was a Punjabi. After all, who would not love to be associated with such an amazing culture? What upset me was that I was not judged by who I am.

It is often said that we are not conscious of things until they affect us seriously. The dilemma of needing to prove my identity all the time has led me to write this article. Being identified as a Muslim by appearance and Punjabi by name has made me conscious of the need to reflect on this. Bearing a Sikh name we can be part of many different cultures. I don't know how many other people like me face similar problems. It's really tough to have to explain who you are all the time.

What hurts is the fact that the stereotypical image showcased by the media often means people do not take us seriously. Stereotypes and segregation based on religion needs to be condemned and stopped. It further divides this already cracked society of ours. Religious identity and cultural identity are two different things and we need both to distinguish them from each other and to appreciate them.

So from now on, whenever you come across a Sikh, please don't automatically relate her (or him) to the Punjab and assume she is Punjabi. It is better to ask her about her native place and its culture.

*Komal JB Singh
[Courtesy: Viewpoint]*

Hedging their risks, digging in their heels

As he sits in his small rented premises, Gurmeet Singh's mobile phone constantly rings, showing he has a finger in many pies. At 44, he is a booking agent for transporters, commission agent for fruits and vegetables, property dealer, tour arranger, and finance guide all rolled into one. He is also a classic example of how the Sikh minority earn their living in Jammu.

"I don't want to be dependent on a particular business. Last week, the Jammu-Srinagar highway was closed. It affected the supply of fruit and vegetables. The barter trade between India and Pakistan is closed these days along the defacto Kashmir border due to seizure of heroin by Indian authorities. The suspension of the trade has affected us."

He recounts the story of how he burnt his fingers in the transport business. Gurmeet Singh's family migrated to Jammu in the partition of 1947. He completed high school in 1983 and started his career as a driver. A few years later, he bought two trucks, a fleet size that grew to six.

Unfortunately, introduction of the national permit system made his business unviable. Like Gurmeet Singh, there are many members in the Sikh community who once had control over the transport business but have diversified. Jagmohan Singh Raina, who ran a fleet of 30 trucks, runs a cooking gas distributorship in Srinagar. Sikhs say there was a time when they had 80 per cent of the transport. Their share is now less than 20 per cent.

Gurmeet Singh, who says he struggled hard to survive, does not want his children to get into business. His two children go to private schools. His daughter, a class IX student, wants to be an army officer, while the son wants to be a lawyer. "I aspire to be an army officer because of the kind of pride and honour involved. I think no other profession provides this," said his daughter Rasneet Kaur.

Raina has advocated for his community rights such as minority status, which will allow special programmes to be directed at them. The Sikhs number 600,000 or five per cent of the population of Jammu & Kashmir, of which 500,000 live in Jammu while 100,000 are in Srinagar and other parts of the state.

The community feels it dug in its heels in the face of militancy but suffered high collateral damage. "Due to the turmoil, thousands of Sikhs living in the villages have left behind their property and have settled in cities and towns. We demand compensation for agricultural and horticultural losses, since these are more than Rs 25 lakh per family," said Raina, who has formed the All Parties Sikh Coordination Committee to press for Sikh rights.

Jagdev Singh left his 50 kanals (roughly six acres) in Rafiabab village in Baramula district to settle in the Baramula municipality. "I, with 20 family members migrated. We are running a transport business to sustain ourselves."

The bigger struggle is to protect culture. Raina says Punjabi as a language is losing in the state and openings for teaching Punjabi in state-run schools and colleges remain vacant. "Also, the state subject (domicile certificate) is being denied to the Sikh youth since they have left their native places and settled in Srinagar city and various district headquarters," said Raina.

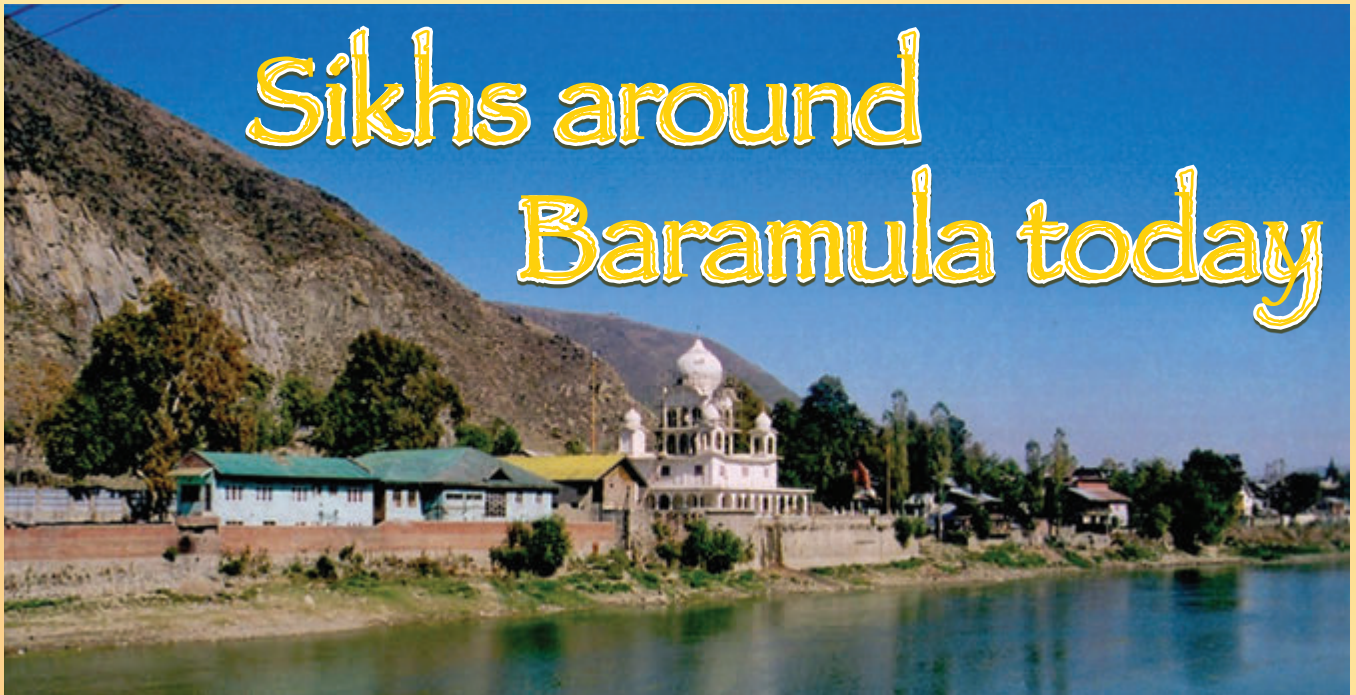
Sikhs had lived in refugee camps in J&K for a long time after partition. The irony is their areas are still called camps. Gurmeet Singh, who has built a two-storey house, says that since in revenue records he is a custodian of Muslim property - those who moved to Pakistan during partition and left land behind - he cannot ever get a loan against his house!



A young Kashmiri Sikh

Vijay C Roy

Sikhs around Baramula today



The very first view on entering the Vale of Kashmir is Gurdwara Chhevin Patshai on banks of the river Jhelum at Baramula



Young Sikh girl reciting from the Guru Granth Sahib at one of the many Gurdwaras in the Valley



On the main road leading to Baramula



Gurdwara maintained by an Army unit on the outskirts of Uri



Plaque honouring Jemadar Nand Singh VC MVC overlooking the stream over which was constructed the bridge named after him



Numerous Sikh organisations were involved in providing relief supplies and rehabilitation of victims after the Kashmir earthquake in October 2005



The well known photographer, Sandeep Shankar with townspeople of Baramula



Tombstones at the convent in Baramula, victims of the Kabalees. Second from the right is that of Lt Col DOT Dykes of the Sikh Regiment who was killed along with his wife and others on 27 October 1947, just hours before the first Sikh troops landed at Srinagar



Editor Nishaan, Pushpinder Singh, with villagers at village Singhpora Kalan in the Baramula area



Young Sikh boys at Baramula



Guarding the Valley today : Sikh soldier overlooking Baramula



Entrance to the Khalsa High School at Magarmal Bagh, Srinagar

Khalsa High School in Srinagar

The Khalsa High School at Magarmal Bagh, Srinagar was established in 1943 and is today one of the leading such institutions in the capital of Kashmir. The founder was Gyani Kartar Singh Komal, this private coed school offering the range of subjects required by the syllabus including maths and computer education, social sciences plus music apart from english, hindi and regional languages. The school has a well stocked library, apart from labs, auditorium and playgrounds.



Senior students of the Khalsa High School, with their teacher



All-faith assembly at the Khalsa High School (also see Cover of this Issue)



Younger children of the Khalsa High School at Magarmal Bagh, Srinagar



Line up for finals of the Baba Baghel Singh Ji volleyball tournament, 2014 (Photo : Hardeep Singh)

Baba Baghel Singh Ji Sports Tournaments in Srinagar

The first Baba Baghel Singh Ji Volleyball tournament, organised by GPC Budgam was held in May 2014 at Gurdwara Shaheed Bunga. 13 Sikh teams are participated in the event which was aimed at “providing an opportunity to budding Volleyball players of the community to rub shoulders with their counterparts and to inculcate healthy competition among them”, said Chairman of the tournament organising committee.



The Organising Committee with various trophies and prizes (Photo : Hardeep Singh)



Participating in the 1st Baba Banda Singh Bahadur Cricket Tournament held at the BSF Campus, Budgam



The teams at the cricket tournament

Former Principal Physical Education College Ajit Singh and Zonal Physical Education Officer Kuldeep Kaur were guests of honour on the occasion, the event being declared open by Head Granthi of the Gurdwara Sahib.



The Cricket Umpire (Photo : Bhupinder Singh)



Over 2,26,000 people were rescued in Jammu and Kashmir within a span of some two weeks

Floods and Fellowship

Incessant downpours and unrelenting rains resulted in massive flooding in the Kashmir Valley during September 2014. Even as the State authorities were somewhat bewildered and seemingly helpless, the armed forces swung in to action, launching Mission *Rahat* along with Mission *Sahayata* to save the marooned, provide relief to the homeless and transport thousands to safety. In this, they were vigorously supported by the Sikh community not only that of Kashmir, but much further afield, in the Punjab and further away in Delhi.

The Indian Air Force airlifted some 850 military and paramilitary personnel to the flood-affected regions, and sent a RAMT (Rapid Action Medical Team), medical supplies, blankets, tents and boats to Srinagar

to aid in relief efforts. A massive number of 80 transport aircraft and helicopters of the Indian Air Force and Army Aviation Corps were deployed along with some 30,000 troops for carrying out the relief operations.



Aerial view of Srinagar city under water



IAF helicopter over Srinagar, flooded with overflowing waters of the river Jhelum



Troops rescuing women and children from the flood-stricken areas

Rajouri and Akhnoor. These rapidly restored road connectivity between key towns, essentially from Srinagar to Sonamarg, Srinagar and Baramula, the Jammu to Poonch road and the Jammu-Srinagar highway.

As the floodwaters began to recede, sanitation and hydration became the most pressing concerns, while RO (reverse osmosis) water purification plants were put in place at Srinagar.

2,451 relief sorties had been undertaken by this time, with over 3,000 tonnes of relief materials dropped. A total of 224 Army and 148 NDRF boats were actively involved in the rescue operation.

Tens of thousands of blankets and tents for creating temporary shelters were distributed which had been donated by Ministry of Textile, Red Cross Society and the governments of Jharkhand and the Punjab. The Armed Forces established 19 relief camps in and around Srinagar and Jammu and to restore road connectivity, five task forces of Border Roads Organisation, which included 5,700 personnel, were deployed in Srinagar,



Elderly people, women and children after airlifting by IAF aircraft

Meanwhile, four Army Field Hospitals were established in Avantipur, Pattan, Anantnag and the old airfield where medical aid was provided to more than 60,000 patients.

The state of Punjab was an active participant in these relief operations, which true to the spirit of the Khalsa, pledged to help the flood ravaged people. After inaugurating relief distribution camp at a Gurdwara in Baghat Barzulla at Srinagar, a Sikh spokesman said, "We will help the people and the Jammu and Kashmir Government in all possible ways. No discrimination will be displayed on the basis of caste and religion in distribution of relief and helping the flood affected people".

Following a phone call from the Jammu and Kashmir chief minister Omar Abdullah on 12 September to his Punjab counterpart Parkash Singh Badal to provide food and shelter for thousands of starving families of the flood-hit state, the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) organised langar for around 50,000 flood-affected people of Srinagar. This was sent from the Sri Guru Ram Dass Jee International Airport at Rajasansi by a regular flight of SpiceJet airways with several SGPC sewadars on board. The food items were prepared by devotees at Darbar Sahib in Amritsar, Gurdwara Ber Baba Buddhaji near Chabal (Amritsar) and gurdwaras in Khadoor Sahib, Goindwal Sahib and Tarn Taran. Devotees remained busy all night at these gurdwaras, preparing the langar.

Some 25,000 food packets were prepared at the Golden Temple, each packet wrapped in aluminium foil containing four large-sized paranthas cooked in desi ghee with vegetables and pickles, each packet meant to feed two persons.

The entire SGPC staff also donated an amount equivalent to two days' salary to the J&K government's flood relief fund. Thereafter, the Indian Air Force (IAF) deployed a transport aircraft for airlifting the SGPC relief material to Srinagar, prior to which, the gurdwara committee had paid charges of Rs. 27 per kg for the air-transportation.

By 17 September, Army Engineers, after successfully opening the national highway between Jammu and Srinagar, restored connectivity between Rajouri and Budhal as well, by constructing a 180-foot Bailey bridge over the river Ans. This ensured that relief and rehabilitation support could now reach the most remote parts of the state. Approximately

10,000 personnel from the Army Engineer Corps and Border Roads Organisation (BRO), equipped with over 400 bulldozers, excavators and earthmovers, were involved in the mammoth reconstruction efforts.

As the pace of military operations in the region slowed, in the evening of 19 September the Army declared that the *Megh Rahat* rescue operations were complete but that relief and medical assistance in the region would continue. Restoration of road networks was largely completed, and efforts were underway to improve the condition of recently restored roads. Troops of the Army's Northern Command remain committed to provide support in close synergy with the civil administration and the police.



The Delhi Sikh Gurdwara Management Committee despatched truckloads of relief supplies to Kashmir, with loaded trucks seen here at the Rakabganj Sahib Gurdwara

On 6 September 2014, the Kashmir Valley was ravaged by unprecedented floods and two days later, the capital city of Srinagar was inundated after continuous heavy rainfall compounded by a breach of the embankment near the BadamiBaug Cantonment.

Commodore Dalbir Singh Sodhi, of the Indian Navy, belonging to the state of Jammu & Kashmir, and in view of the catastrophic situation, took a conscious individual decision to proceed to Kashmir on leave to join the search and rescue operations being conducted by the Indian Army.



During his stay in Srinagar from 11 September 2014 to 20 September 2014, he was responsible for saving the lives of some one hundred persons, gratefully acknowledged by the citizens and reported by National media. After the rescue operations he continued to stay on in Srinagar for distribution of the relief material.

Kashmiri Sikh Organisations in flood relief

Hundreds of flood-victims in Jammu and Kashmir who found shelter at various gurdwaras across the state were grateful to the Sikh community for their contribution in the rescue efforts. For instance, Abdul Rasheed stayed on in Gurdwara Shaheed Bunga for three weeks ever since he along with his family was rescued from his marooned house in Jawahar Nagar here. "Floodwater did not spare any community, everybody was equally affected, but we are thankful to the members of the Sikh community" he said.

Expressing gratitude towards the Sikh community, the flood victims, of whom a majority were Muslims, said they would remain indebted to the community as they helped them without discriminating on the basis of religion. "I had never been to Gurdwara before and I am overwhelmed to see the love and care these people gave us. Without being bothered about our religion, they allowed us to live inside the main hall of the gurdwara," Maqsood Ahmed, a resident of Bemina locality, said. Besides setting up relief camps at gurdwaras, several members of Sikh community also volunteered in rescue efforts.

"A sardarji used his turban to pull my drowning family out. We owe our life to him, he even used the turban cloth to stop the bleeding of my daughter's wounds," said Shabeer Ahmed another resident of Jawahar Nagar. Various Sikh organisations from across the country and the globe too have extended help for the relief and rehabilitation of the flood affected residents.

"UK-based Khalsa Aid and US-based United Sikhs were among the first few charitable organisations which rushed their men and equipment to carry out the relief work in the Valley," a government official stated.

The Delhi Sikh Gurdwara Management Committee (DGMC) and the Amritsar-based Shri Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee (SGPC) had set up 24-hour free Langer (community kitchens) at various places across the Srinagar city. "Besides establishing Langers at several places in Srinagar, we have been providing packed food for more than 70,000 people daily," DGMC member PS Chandok revealed.



Meanwhile, reaching out to the flood torn people of Jammu, a team of Jammu Kashmir Sikh Professionals (JKSP) under the aegis of Khalsa Aid (UK) visited Nowshera on 27 September 2014, wherein they took stock of the damage and met suffering people.

During the course of the visit volunteers of JKSP and Khalsa aid also visited flood victims of border areas and estimated loss suffered by already poor people. "Our teams visited Nowshera and adjoining areas to take stock of the situation to know the exact quantum of damage occurred due to recent floods that wreaked havoc in the border areas in Jammu as well as Kashmir valley," said Ranjit Singh, a member of the JKSP.

He said that after talking to various flood victims, they came to know that huge losses have been incurred by the people. "We witnessed that besides huge loss of movable and other property, several structures were also damaged, which need immediate reconstruction," said Ranjit Singh.

JKSP and Khalsa Aid volunteers assured the flood victims of all possible help. "Our volunteers promised flood victims at Nowshera and adjoining areas of reconstruction of houses at priority," he said, adding that till now some eight houses have been identified, which need immediate relief for restoration. We are sending base material to Kashmir and reports are that volunteers are equally distributing this among victims irrespective of religion and caste," stated Ranjit Singh.



Source: PTI / Newspoint Bureau

Celebrating the Sikh Turban



Two London-based photographers celebrate their heritage through 'The Sikh Project'. This photography initiative by third-generation Sikhs in London celebrates the Sikh turban, as reported by Vandana Kalra.

With even the unlikeliest of fashionistas sporting the hipster beard in the West, it's hard to miss the new wave popularising facial hair. But one of the most uncanny outcomes of the trend perhaps is *The Sikh Project*, a photography initiative that celebrates the Sikh turban. Last year, Amit and Naroop, London-based photographers, were on the streets of their neighbourhood scouting for Sikhs who made for interesting subjects. "It's now

considered cool to have a beard. What we want to do is celebrate it as part of our culture. It's part of our identity and reflects our heritage," says Naroop, a third generation migrant.

The cousins decided to invite the protagonists to their studio, where tightly focussed portraits of each were taken. Some are young and trendy, others elderly and experienced — from a magician to a comedian, a filmmaker to a highway planner.



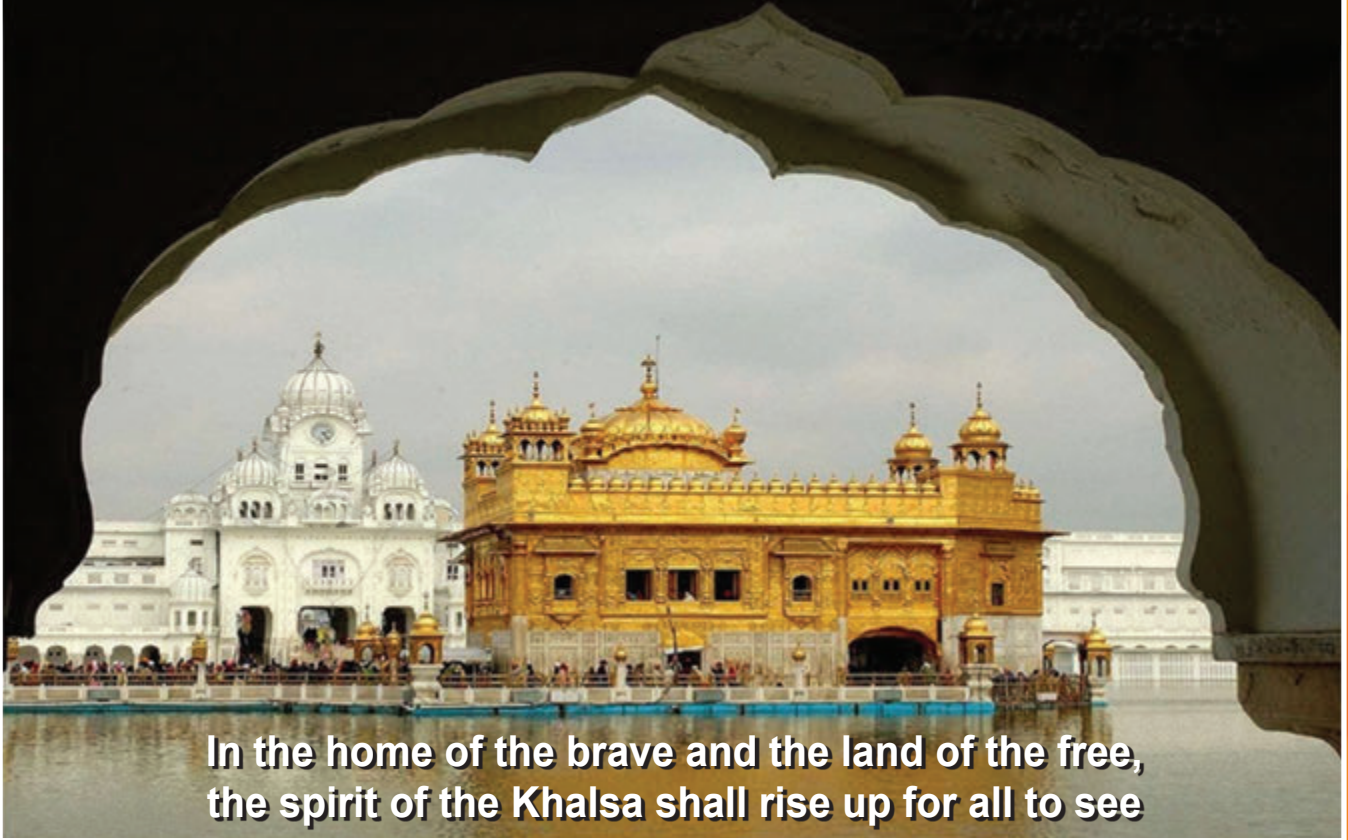
If polo player Gurbir Singh turned up in his sports jersey and stick, student Ishtmeet Singh Phull dressed the part with his linen shirt, saffron turban and kirpan. It all began, though, from 80-something temple volunteer Balbir Singh. "With our broken Punjabi, we had a tough time communicating with him, but the peace his face reflects made all the effort worthwhile," say the advertising professionals, who have also worked with artistes such as Tinie Tempah, Jay Sean and Tinchy Stryder.

Complete with editing and shortlisting photographs, the duo is finalising the venue for their first exhibition. "It'll be in September in Central London," says Naroop. India too is on their mind.

"We are in touch with people in Delhi, we should be there soon," he says.



The Chardi Kalaa Foundation



In the home of the brave and the land of the free,
the spirit of the Khalsa shall rise up for all to see

Strategies for True Happiness – Naam Simran

- ❖ Naam Simran – leads to a state of equipoise and Chardi Kalaa, transcending pleasure and pain

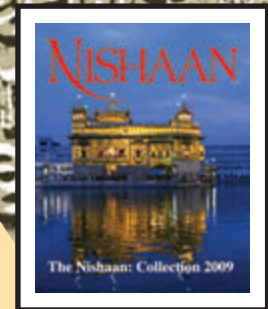
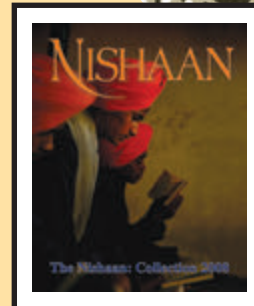
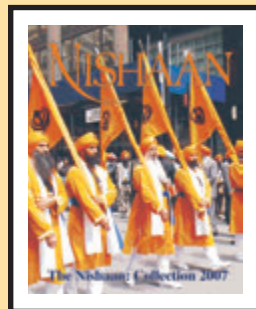
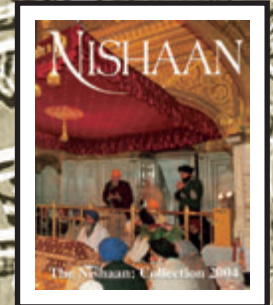
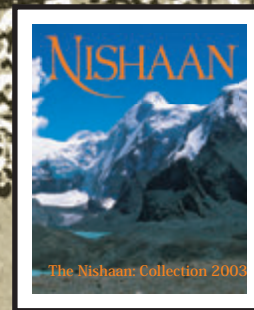
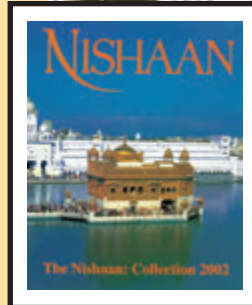
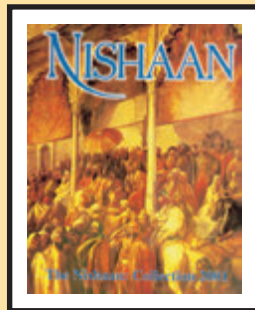
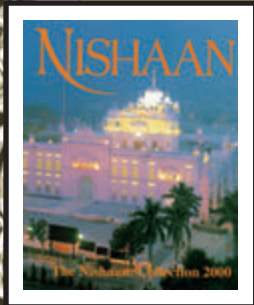
ਕਬੀਰ ਹਰਿ ਕਾ ਸਿਮਰਨੁ ਜੋ ਕਰੈ ਸੋ ਸੁਖੀਆ ਸੰਸਾਰਿ ॥ Kabeer,
whoever meditates in remembrance on the Lord, he alone is
happy in this world.

ਇਤ ਉਤ ਕਤਹਿ ਨ ਡੋਲਈ ਜਿਸ ਰਾਖੈ ਸਿਰਜਨਹਾਰ ॥ ੨੦੬ ॥

Protected by the Creator Lord, he shall never waver, here or here-
after ॥ 206 ॥ - Kabeer, SGGS pg.1375

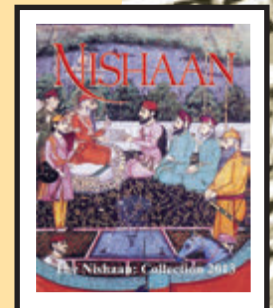
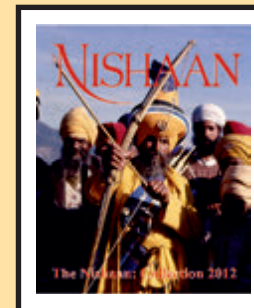
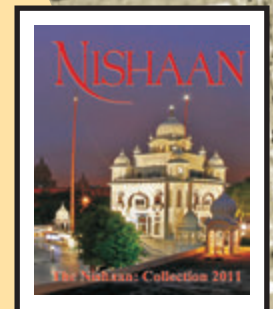
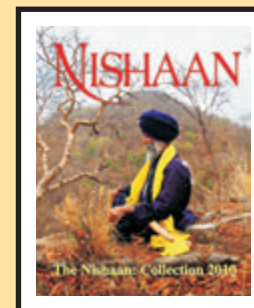
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