

I/2012

# NISHAAN

NAGAARA

The 50<sup>th</sup> Issue  
Jewels from  
earlier Nishaans

Gurmat Sangeet

The Moment of the Khalsa

The Gift of Truth

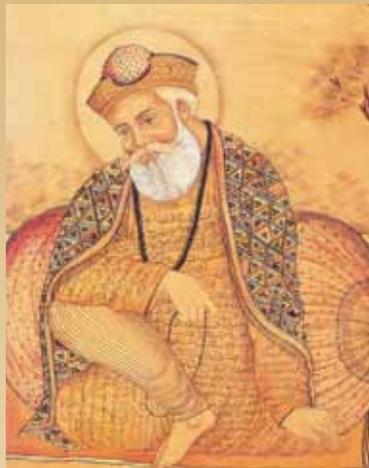
The Sikh Worldview

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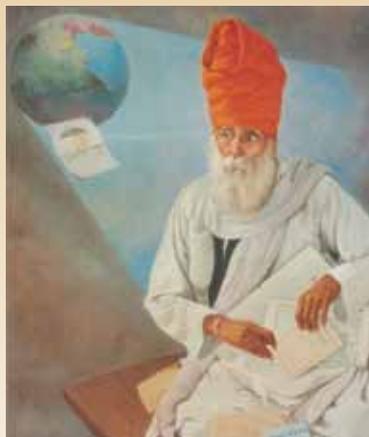
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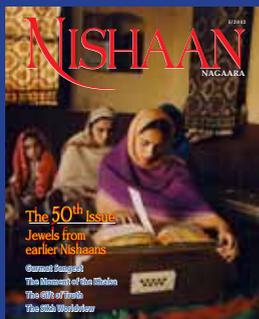
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This is the fiftieth Issue of the Nishaan, illustrated Journal of the Sikhs. Launched at the tercentenary of the birth of the Khalsa in April 1999 by the Nagaara Trust, the Nishaan was designed to become a standard bearer for the community, both in India and in all its diaspora worldwide. The Nagaara Trust itself was conceived from the deep sense of faith of those committed to preserve, project and propagate the uniqueness and glories of the Khalsa Panth.

To commemorate this milestone in the Nishaan's journey, we have selected themes for readers who may have joined the Nishaan family later, and thereby missed these evocative articles. These are being republished in this special Issue—and there are more to follow in the next. (Ed.)



Cover : Keertan by young girls at Nankana Sahib (Photo by Malkiat Singh)

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# Editorial

# NISHAAN

## THE SANDS OF TIME

You hold in your hands the 50th issue of *Nishaan*, a remarkable magazine.

Not much to say about time: it flies too fast or it hangs too heavily. One can rue it or celebrate it. In retrospect one wonders where it went; there is nothing timely about its passage.

I have been associated with *Nishaan* for a few years but I never knew that it nearing its 50th issue until now, when it was time to take note of the event.

We have a conflicted relationship with the steady relentless march of time. There is the age when we want to hurry it along and the times when we want to slow it down to a snail's pace or to even stand still. Ever notice how a three year-old takes the measure of time. It's not even a day past his birthday and if asked how old he/she is, the response is a quick, "I am going to be four soon." This, when there are 364 out of the 365 days still left before the fourth birthday comes. The parent, if asked his or her own age would gloss over the facts like a trooper and likely will remain 29 until forced to confess to have crossed 30 perhaps a few years earlier.

And then comes a time when maturity is self-evident; when in people and their projects, for instance, institutionalisation has occurred. There is a semblance of assurance that a plan or a person's work would outlive its founders. And then one can even brag about age. This is like Fauja Singh or Khushwant Singh who have no reason to hide their age. They have lived well and fully, and continue to do so productively.

Their footprints in the sands of time will surely outlast them. And that's the only good measure of a life, personal or institutional. Says Gurbani, *Eh sareera merya, iss jug me aaye ke kya tudh karam kamaya*, Guru Granth Sahib, p. 922. What is true of people is equally true of their products like the *Nishaan*.

Fifty issues of *Nishaan*, at four issues a year, would make the magazine barely inching into its teen years. But the point really is not the yearly notches on its belt, not how many issues or years speak of its existence, but where it has been and which way it is headed. Institutions, too, with age, acquire vision, wisdom and stability and when they do, they attain bragging rights.

In my growing up years, *Nishaan* didn't exist. When I found it, it was barely cutting its teeth. *Nishaan* is almost there; yet ample growing up remains. I hope it will always have that need whether it is in its 100th issue or its 100th year of publication.

In my younger days in India the only continuously published English magazine on Sikhs and Sikhism was a monthly, *The Sikh Review* (from Calcutta). It was only seven

years old in 1960 when I left India. My knowledge of Sikhi then was close to nil and my interest in it even a bit less. How I wish that *Sikh Review* had been more accessible and *Nishaan* had been born then.

But in life we have to play with the cards that we are dealt. And now here I am, at times writing for the both of them. I look back in time and it all seems almost unreal but an absolute delight, nonetheless. In my charmed existence in this matter I have little reason to complain; except for the wish that *Nishaan* had taken birth a few decades earlier.

*Nishaan* is one of a kind. It owes its existence and its magical life to the deep pockets of a few dedicated Sikhs, largely based in and around Delhi. Their cause is Sikhi and the determination that never will there be any compromise in quality. It is meant to capture the eye, the faith and the intellect. It is both an aesthetic as well as a learning experience.

And it fills its mandate handsomely.

Shockingly, but most pleasantly, the deep pocketed patrons of this expensive and complex undertaking remain pretty much off the pages; their egos seem to need no additional massage or boost than the satisfaction of doing what is good, useful and necessary. The quality of their work speaks for itself.

Style it has, better than any Sikh publication from India or internationally that I have ever seen. But unencumbered style alone is like a man wearing an expensive suit and then he may become an empty suit. There are many such people whose life is measured in coffee spoons, in the words of T.S. Eliot. Clothes make a man but he has to be more than coffee spoons to define his existence.

*Nishaan* comprehends this well and unmistakably. In my experience it has the both the style and the substance. The two enhance each other; they create a whole greater than the sum of the parts. It is like body and soul. Without the body a soul has no home; without the soul a body is but rotting flesh.

Why was it born so late? Where was it when I needed it most? But, as the Bible reminds us, there is a time and a place to everything.

Time flies when you are having fun, and in my connection with *Nishaan* I am having absolute fun. *Nishaan* excels in first rate art and its reproduction. History has identified the martial antecedents of Sikhs. *Nishaan* has a particular fascination with Sikh martial history.

Let's take a closer look at it.

The political geography of India is instructive. Its northern border is guarded by the Himalayan ranges that are

as good a barrier as nature could design. The triangular rim of the Indian subcontinent, protected by the sea, remained largely impenetrable until the Europeans came in large numbers in the sixteenth century.

For untold millennia, only the Punjab and Punjabis faced yearly invasions. Every invader – from the Caucasians to the hordes under Alexander the Great; the Mongols and the Mughals, the Pashtuns and the Iranians, and sundry tribes – all hurtled through the risky Khyber Pass and landed in Punjab; the same Pass continues to make dangerous history for the United States today.

The Punjabis of that time are not remembered for their resistance to these annual invasions.

We often forget that Sikhs are the sons of the same Punjab that offered little or no resistance to invaders. In fact an invasion of India through the Khyber Pass was almost a yearly raiding party, not unlike a trip to the shopping mall for the young today, for every two-bit tinhorn despot, who was feeling his oats – almost a rite of passage.

Sikhs share the same DNA as the other Punjabis who were so successfully cowed and their spirit entirely broken over the millennia. Sikhs are not a different race; for some anthropologists and scientists to classify them so is an error. Then what changed them into the fearless warriors who put a stop to the yearly decimation of Punjab and Punjabis? Then what made them the noble fighters that their enemies, Muslims and British, sang their praises as high spirited and principled fighters, who were willing to lay their head on the line while they recognised the humanity of their enemies?

Of course, it was the message of Sikhi that transformed them. But keep in mind that Sikhi is only a little better than 500 years old.

We need to keep in mind the biological dictum that not every gene expresses itself fully at the same time. Gene penetration and gene expression depend on a complex interplay of nature and nurture. And for Punjabis the revolutionising nurturing ambience was provided by Sikh doctrine, teaching and practice.

The world today rightly celebrates the Sikh martial tradition. The British classified them as a martial race. Their Muslim foes recognized Sikhs as noble fighters who treated the enemy fairly and did not rape or loot the women of the vanquished.

Such reputation was won by blood, sweat and tears and came to us from the early battles that were led by the Founder-Gurus and defined Sikh character; from *Zafarnama*, the epistle penned by Guru Gobind Singh that laid out the rules of war; the time of Banda Singh Bahadur, the intrepid Sikh general, who shook the Mughal empire to its core; the Sikh Raj that reigned over a vast territory of northwest India with great aplomb and justice; finally during when the British ruled the rest of India and later the struggle to free India of the British; the time when Sikhs won laurels for battles like Saragarhi, for fighting against Nazi ideology and finally in defending independent-India in its many wars since 1947.

This rich tradition lives today, and *Nishaan* has singularly celebrated it since this magazine's birth. It is fitting, therefore,

that *Nishaan* took birth in 1999, the year that marked 300 years of the creation of the Khalsa.

But *Nishaan* is more than an ode to Sikh courage or a compendium of battles won or lost. It splendidly captures this glorious part of our history and preserves it. Don't forget that history can teach, inspire and light our way forward. The past is a prologue to the future if only we would let it.

*Nishaan* has from its beginning also excelled in capturing Sikh history, and particularly art. This is more than just eye candy. It is a unique tribute to the rich tradition of art that has occupied us from the very beginning of Sikhism. Today it gives life to Sikh history and culture.

Over the years, some of the best photographers and artists have graced *Nishaan* with their beautiful and inspiring works of art. Army generals, like Kripal Singh Randhawa, who exchanged their guns for pens have provided us vignettes of war and peace, even analysis of famous battles and Maharaja Ranjit Singh's military strategy. Historians and journalists have informed us and carried the discussion forward. Eminent scholars and writers, like Khushwant Singh and Jaswant Singh Neki, have graced these pages with their cogitations. And scholars like Darshan Singh Maini have contributed first rate classically penned prose.

What all this does is to make *Nishaan* a unique presence in our lives. It is not a throwaway, for it never was one. It always was much more than a coffee table ornament – a collectors' item. Often a given issue focuses on a specific topic of Sikh history or life. It then becomes something to treasure; it exists to inform and inspire, and does so remarkably well.

*Nishaan* has the beauty to catch the eye and the charm to hold it.

In some ways, 50 issues is a small step. Humans are at their prime or even past it at fifty years of age. Four issues a year now situate *Nishaan* at the beginning of its teen years and the attendant angst. But magazines are not people. Fifty issues is the beginning of maturity in a magazine, when it has defined a place for itself, and that *Nishaan* has done.

I don't want this to be a paean of praise. There remain wrinkles in its appearance on the expected day and time; they need to be worked out.

We are the people of a Book. Words and publications are important to our being and becoming Sikhs. Between *Sikh Review* and *Nishaan*, and the multitude of Sikh sites on the Internet, let's leave no heart untouched and no Sikh sitting by the sidelines. I also see that in this widespread and complex global presence of Sikhs, *Nishaan*, *Sikh Review* and the many websites capture largely different readerships with minimal overlap. I celebrate that.

I am honoured to offer *Nishaan* my greetings, best wishes and hopes for many more years and lifetimes. I also offer it an old advertising jingle from 40 years ago:

"You have come a long way baby, but you have a longer way to go."

Dr IJ Singh

# Imprimics

**I**n the inaugural issue of the *Nishaan*, an international quarterly journal launched by the *Nagaara Trust* to mark the tercentenary of birth of the Khalsa in April 1999 now in the hands of select readers in India and abroad, it is surely the time to reaffirm its *raison d'être*, its rationale, its line of thought and vision, its format and form. In a way, perhaps, this is not quite necessary, as the premiere issue and its commissioned articles and features are themselves a fairly transparent philosophy of the magazine. For, as the modern linguists argue, the very language or idiom and the mode of the narrative carry a whole freight of both spoken and unspoken thought. And if as McLuhan puts it, the medium is the message, then, I trust, the *Nagaara Trust's* progenitors and trustees should be most pleased to see their offspring, a child of love, devotion, duty and reverence, take off so splendidly and become a visible and viable project of immense promise. As future issues see the light of day, the contemplated blueprint and the projected panorama of Sikh thought, culture, literature, worldview and, inevitably, politics, as also the problematics of modernism in relation to the community in India and abroad would, I believe, get constitutively structured into our discourse. For the magazine is so conceived and designed as to carry its dialectic in a free, open, unbiased manner, unburdened by overt or covert pressures. Since it is seen as a vehicle fit and ready to accept the challenges of the new millennium and offer articles from persons of authoritative, independent and candid mindset, we may expect the *Nishaan*, symbolic in name and redolent of Sikh history, to emerge as a definitive manifesto embodying in word and picture, the grand dream of the Khalsa at this bend in our history.

The reader is assured of a pleasing diversity and plurality of thought since the magazine in its seed and sod, in its make-up and meaning comprehends such a passage. In fact, we would ideally like the *Nishaan* to become a forum for fruitful discussion on almost all the issues that we have inherited from history, and all the issues that the assault of reality presents today. And this is only possible when we allow what the Russian linguistic thinker, M.M.Bakhtin, calls the "dialogic imagination" to colour our discourse. That is to say, opinions and views and thoughts of everchanging hues would find hospitality in these pages so long as the nuclear vision of the *Nishaan* is not violated wilfully. In fact, the dialogic mode is, at best, a mode of plurality and undermines all forms of the Establishment—of interests, ideas and doctrines.

And to achieve such a discourse it is necessary to link word to deed, thought to action, communication to consummation. In the premiere issue, several writers have forcefully underscored the concept of consecrated action as seen in the life, *bani* and vision of the Tenth Master, Guru Gobind Singh. For mere thought or argument ends up in what John Keats called "cold philosophy". Not intellection or ratiocination as such can bring out any change in our conduct, or in our responses to reality. Abstractions always get lost *enroute*. Thus, an affirmative, positive, committed

form of discourse would be the aim in so far as it is possible to carry all the ambiguities in a dialogic form.

In *What is Literature?*, Jean-Paul Sartre quotes a French colleague to define the basic concern of an artist or writer: "He knows that words, as Brice Parrain says, are loaded pistols. If he speaks, he fires. He may be silent, but since he has chosen to fire, he must do so like a man, by aiming at the target ....."

So in this journal we do mean to offer not only thought, but also agendas of action, not only polemics but also the positives of life. And the basic religious-humanistic concerns of all mankind should eventually converge in the mandate and the message of the *Nishaan*. That is why we foresee a larger readership outside of the Sikh and Punjabi and Indian communities as our target. As I have argued, like some others in the premiere issue, Sikhism is known for its Catholicism, prodigality of concerns, and for its hospitality to diverse strains of thought, theological doctrines and so on.

Since the aim of the magazine, as we have spelt out, is to make the common reader conscious of the thought that supports a structure of facts, our effort would then be to go beyond the immediate reality and put our finger on the pulse of things, on the nerve that hurts. Mere facts or stately statistics remain a despairing exercise if the energies or the poetries animating those statistics remain continually out of our line of vision. In short, an event, a personality, a policy or a doctrine needs always to be seen in relation to the text and the sub-text. And such a process often involves echoes and analogies, on the one hand, prognoses and projections, on the other.

One word more. I do not believe that there is anything like "white prose" or "neutral writing". Each writer in the end is tied to a vision of reality which is his experience. Still, he too is obliged to link it to that grid of moral energies and spiritual endowments which flow from the larger racial or communal reservoir. The *Nishaan* writers are then expected to keep the voice within the Voice, the word within the Word.

With the second issue, we are, we trust, already launched on a high dream. It is the maiden issue which presents the problems of nativity and christening in a manner of speaking. There is, as Oscar Wilde affirmed, pain at the birth of a star as at the birth of a child. Our labour-pains are now behind us and we look forward to a brisk, fruitful and vigorous future.

**Darshan Singh Maini,**  
Editorial Director

**Darshan Singh Maini,** Formerly Professor & Head, Department of English, Punjabi University, visiting Fulbright Professor (Harvard), Visiting Professor (New York University), British Council Visitor (U.K Universities), Visiting Scholar to the Northrope Fry Centre" University of Toronto, and the U.G.C. "National Lecturer", has continued to write extensively for Indian and foreign papers, periodicals and journals since the early fifties.

[This first appeared in *Nishaan* I/2000.]

# “The Teacher of Mankind”

There have been several prophets in the world who have taught and propagated religion. Saint Guru Nanak was one of them. He was not only the founder of the Sikh religion, he was a great poet, philosopher, humanist and a powerful social reformer. Rabindranath Tagore called him the teacher of mankind.

A teacher like Guru Nanak is a guide not just of a single religion but to all humankind. Swami Vivekananda said of him, “The Guru’s superb love of mankind is amazing. He opened his arms to embrace not only Hindus but also Muslims”. At this time when there are a lot of war clouds gathering, important teachings of Guru Nanak come to mind. A lot of what he said was meant for us to attain peace and serenity in our lives. The most important thing, he said is ‘God’ and he preached throughout his life that ‘God is One’.

Some of his teachings were that one should not live on others’ earnings; there can be no untouchability; all are God’s children; kindness, contentment, patience and truth are important; God loves those who feed the hungry and those who give their clothes to the needy.

Nanak said that one need not become a *sanyasi* sacrificing one’s family, to please God. Those who practice devotion, whose mind is pure and who have sympathy, patience and honesty, are in no way inferior to a *sanyasi*. He considered that all human beings were high-born; no one was low. He stressed, “Do not ask about one’s caste; those whose devotion is accepted by God are good people. God appreciates those who have conquered the ‘I’ and ‘greed’. Nanak washes the feet of those who concentrate their minds on God, the source of truth”.

The doctrines taught by Guru Nanak are the foundation of the Sikh religion, which has spread not only in India but all over the world. The main philosophy of the Sikh religion is that Nanak, who propagated a firm faith that there is only one God, taught that Hindus, Muslims and people of all religious denominations are children of the same God, that they should develop love and brotherly feelings; that external dress and decorations do not represent any religion and that superstitions and meaningless principles and practices come in the way of understanding the formless God. Remembering Him and



praising him with a pure heart is the road to salvation.

In this religion that began in the name of the ‘disciple’, the teacher has the highest place, a place of reverence. This ‘teacher’ does not wish to be called God. He calls himself the disciple of the ‘first teacher’. Influenced by the school of devotion of Kabir, Namdev, Beji Jayadeva, Ramananda and others and having assimilated the philosophy of Sufism and Islam, Guru Nanak gave a new form to his religion. He composed *bani*, a gem of religious doctrine, and incorporated it in *Guru Grantha Sahib*. The basic source of the Sikh religion is the *moola mantra* or the first sacred verse and all of Nanak’s verses start with this *moola mantra*.

Sikhs do not worship the picture of the master and do not display the picture of any other teacher near the *Grantha Sahib*. They revere *Grantha Sahib* but do not worship with flowers, vermilion and turmeric. The sacred text contains the verses and auspicious words composed by the 10 gurus of the Sikh religion. It contains the compositions of other Hindu and Muslim scholars and devotees.

To those who are greedy and amass wealth, Nanak said, “Remember, only the merit that you earn by giving charity will follow you to the other world. Your sins keep pushing you down to your doom. The wealth that you have amassed will not only trouble you throughout your life, it will be an obstacle in your journey to the other world. Somebody will inherit the wealth you have amassed. You will be destroyed, just as the stingy and cruel ancestors of yours were destroyed”.

Nanak said, “God is compassionate. Confession is atonement for sin. Distribute all the wealth that you have looted to the poor in the name of God. Be determined to follow the right path, God will forgive you”. For those who are thieves and dacoits, he said, “However bright brass may be, the hand that scours it turns dirty; no matter how many times you wash it, the dirt remains”.

Always Guru Nanak said, “I am not God, I am not even his incarnation. I am only a prophet spreading his message”.

A Deva Raju  
(From: The Times of India)

# THE MOMENT OF



*Sacred autograph of Guru Gobind Singh on a gutka given to Bhai Dharam Singh and now with his descendants at the house of Bagrian.*

**T**he evolutionary history of all organisms—individual, tribe, clan, community, race or nation—determines when, where and how such entities come into being, acquire character, identity and name before they are fully commissioned on behalf of a larger humanist dream.

The being and the becoming are, in reality, a question of time and energy, and the dialectic of this process is predicated upon the nature of the primal impulse in question. For becoming involves the massed spirit of a people to overcome the hazards and challenges of reality, a reality often obdurate, intractable and hostile. In that crowning of the impulse lies the secret, the key to the dynamics of its path to recognition—and permanence. To be sure, when we are thinking of large communities with a distinctive religious address, signature and iconography, we may see variations from community to community in their journey even though, in general terms, common features or traits of visionary evolution are fairly evident in each case.

Still, there is, in most cases, a moment of moments when the gathered energies, ordeals and ideas reach the point of criticality, to borrow a convenient concept from nuclear physics. It is then that the dream nursed over a period of time and travail comes of the age of annunciation and song. It is the moment of epiphany and illumination, of beauty and poetry, a moment whose hour has come at last. In short, a moment of sovereignty.

In this preamble to the birth of the Khalsa in its ultimate form in the year 1699, may be seen the *raison d'être* of the prodigious effort of the Sikh community to commemorate in great adoration and pride, in great style and form the 300th birth anniversary this year. To be sure, all centenary celebrations of this nature and character need a visible fanfare to affirm their momentous importance, but obviously the mere mounting of ceremonies on a grand scale, or the setting up of commemorative mansions and monuments, or the creation of certain foundations and councils etc. will, in the end, remain a splendid and spectacular exercise in which the spirit was lost in the letter. And that is something against which the Sikh scriptures have laid clear injunctions in soulful and heroic numbers, In other words, the year of the tercentenary ought to become a year not only of our renaissance, or the revival of the entire Sikh thought, culture and heritage, but also of a strenuous, agonising and insightful reassessment of the entire Sikh situation today—of its religious lapses, departures and derelictions, of its heroic but often complex and confused polity, of its place in the modern world, of the problems thrown up by the Sikh diaspora, among several other things. A time of soul-searching and 'spring-cleaning', in short. Both euphoria and nostalgia are legitimate states of a corporate sensibility also, and the historic moment does inveigle the imagination into the pastures of the past, and into the arbours

# THE KHALSA

## Vision, Values And World View



'Panj Pyare', the five beloved, at Anandpur Sahib.

of the future. All that is natural, but when a great community that had once graduated to a position of power and glory, and then lost a good deal of its earned values and insights en route, such occasions help create a climate of helpful debate or discourse. We, on the other hand, find a whole swarm of doubts invading the Sikh mind precisely because of the tragic loss of vision among the community's leadership. The Sikh Establishment,

like all entrenched power groups of elites and ambitious adventurers, are in the habit of turning everything to commodity—to profit and position. Thus, thoughtful Sikhs are called upon to salvage, refashion and reorient something of the pristine spirit in the context of the millennium in view. And to do so, it is necessary to go back to that moment of moments which as I have said earlier, gave this community its *sui genesis* character.

The Sikh history from the Founder of the creed, Guru Nanak, to the Tenth Guru again may be seen as a very unique journey, unique not in its native energies of will, spirit and sword to meet the assaults of reality—almost all great religions have had to encounter the entrenched orthodoxies of power and idolatry—but in bringing to consummation a dream in an uninterrupted chain of preceptors. For it's the common Sikh belief

supported by evidence in word and song that the primal  *jyoti*  or light is seen embodied in the nine successive pontiffs as a matter of design whose locus lies outside of our reach and understanding. No wonder, such a progression where each successive Guru composed, sang hymns in the name of the First Master had a touch of the divine about it. In sum, the 200-year journey from Guru Nanak to Guru Gobind Singh who finally closed the institution of succession, and instead invested the Adi Granth with that awesome authority could be regarded as a pre-ordained phenomenon. In “the extinction of personality”, and in submission to the imperatives of their inner selves, Guru Nanak’s successors affirmed not only the spirit of humility and gratitude, but also the power of the word to become Word, of the message to become mandate, of the vision to become incarnate. It was an illumination that proved in action the grand link of God, pontiff and believer, a spiritual bond of Father, messenger and man. It was a divine wheel come full circle.

The passage of Sikhism through fire and flame, through sacrifices and martyrdom, through a sustained, relentless struggle for survival in the face of the massed might of the Moghul empire, and of their local royal Hindu stooges and satraps of all manner is too well-known to need another recital here. It is well chronicled in history and sakhis, in our fables and folklore, and in our documents and diaries. And this indeed is an archetypal journey—nearly all religions face such ordeals of spirit and will—though in the case of the Sikhs the relative swiftness of events, the transparent annealing



*Illuminated bir of the sacred Guru Granth Sahib, at the House of Bagrian.*

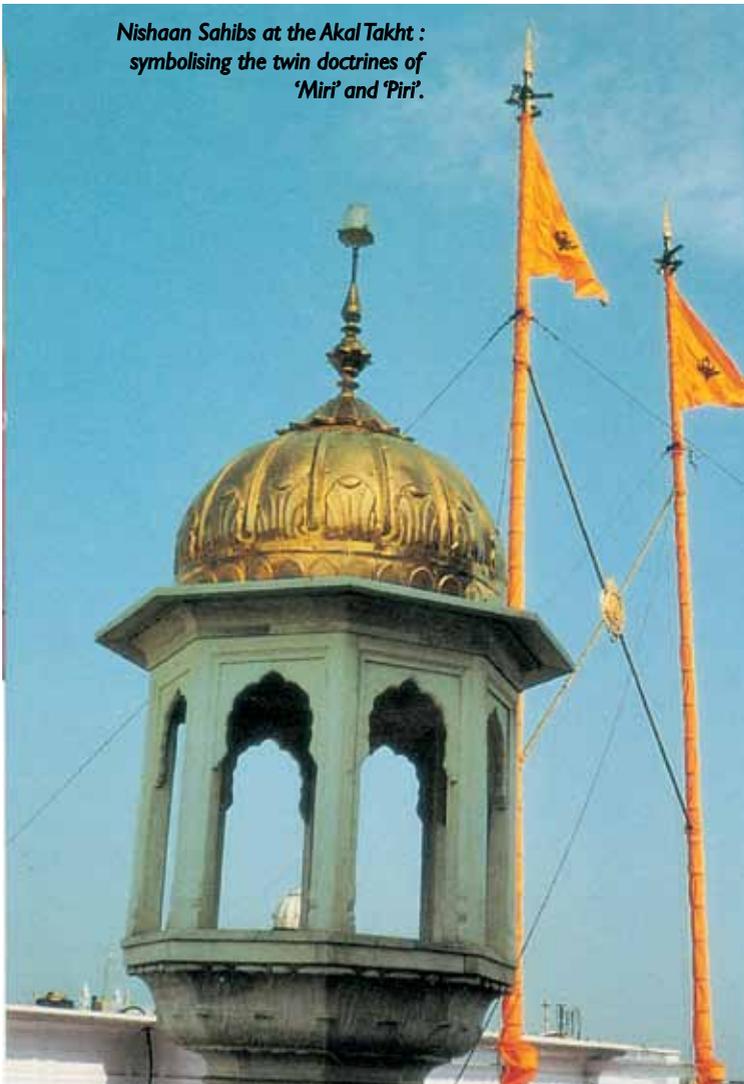
of their corporate psyche under stress and strain, and the marks of a community on the upswing, maintaining a state of equipoise and serenity in the midst of storms, and hoisting a flag of the spirit to announce its definitive identity and arrival, was something that no known community in the world has to show. Which reminds me of a little poem in Punjabi called *Sikhi* or “Sikhism” written by Mohan Singh in the early thirties of this century:

*Sikhism is verily a tree  
That puts out its blossoms  
In each place and clime,  
—in wastes and wilderness,  
in stony and rocky soils:  
And the more you prune it,  
The more it flourishes  
In that majesty and measure.*

This brings us, then, to that ultimate hour towards which the community drawing the milk of nourishment from its scriptures and stories has been marching resolutely, waiting, as it were,

for its date with destiny. That day is now at hand, and there’s a masterful hand to put the seal of finality upon it. To put it differently, we have the classic conditions that the French critic Taine’s trinity stipulates regarding the birth of a great idea, or a great book, or a great work of art : the coming together of the man, the moment and the milieu. So that day in the spring of 1699, March 29-30 or the 1st Baisakhi 1756 BR (now celebrated each year on 13 April) found the Tenth Master supremely primed for the historic mandate, and the conditions and the airs and the ambience ripe for the test and the consummation. Shakespeare uses two visionary ideas in his tragedies, *Hamlet* and *King Lear*—“Readiness is all” and “Ripeness is all”—to describe the state of a heroic soul on trial. In this case, the analogy is chiefly a linguistic extension, though the spirit in agony and triumph and the readiness to give battle to the forces of evil and tyranny

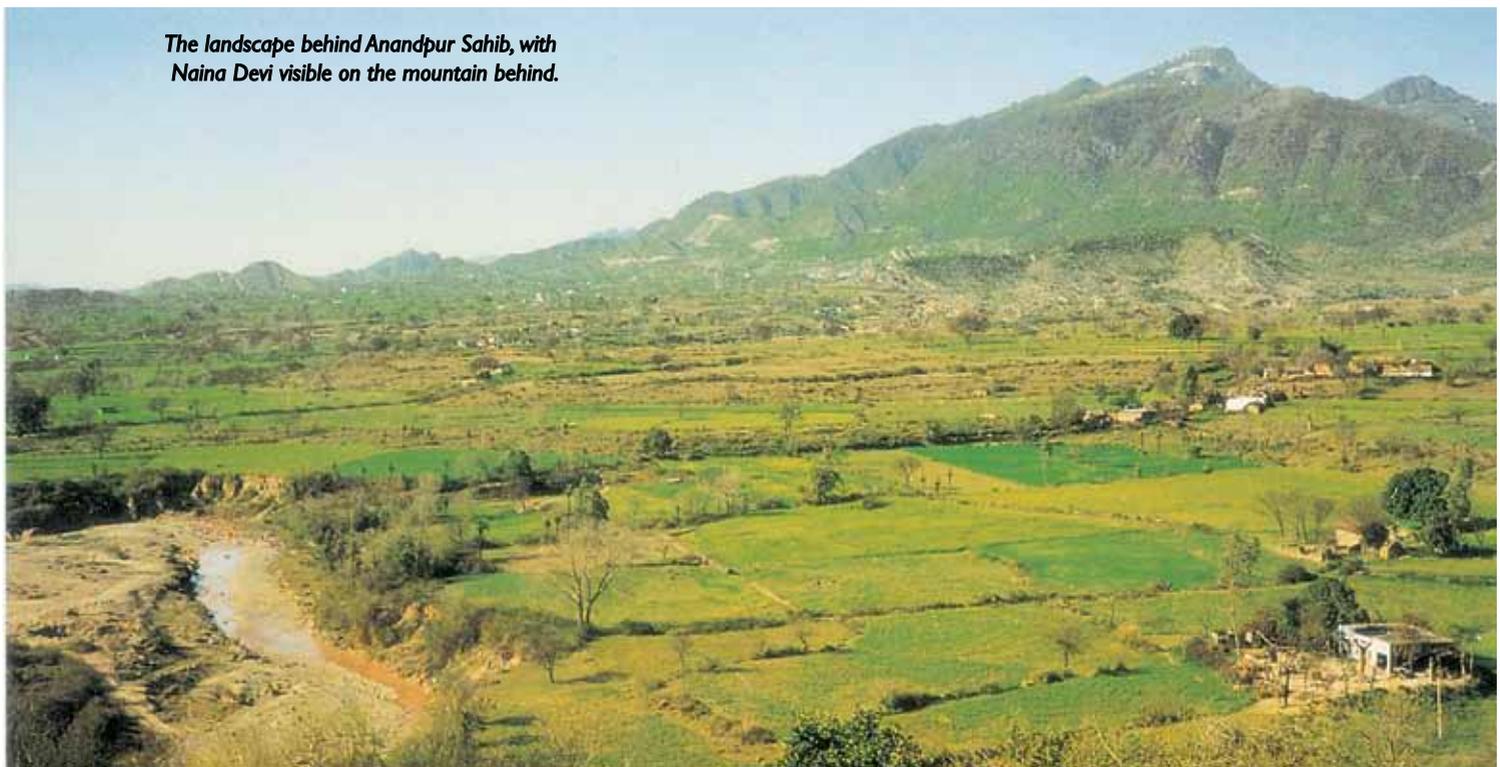
**Nishaan Sahibs at the Akal Takht :  
symbolising the twin doctrines of  
'Miri' and 'Piri'.**



he speaks of shows the ripeness of spirit to which the Sikhs had been brought by the preceding preceptors. Let it be affirmed, *inter alia*, that this hour of the enfranchisement of the community as a commonwealth of the Khalsa was adumbrated in the divine vision and hymns of the First Guru himself. And during the days of the succeeding Gurus, the martyrdom of the Fifth and the Ninth Gurus, and the proclamation of Guru Hargobind of the twin doctrines of *miri* and *piri* or "the temporal sovereignty" and "the spiritual sovereignty" earlier had, in no uncertain terms, spelt out the destined march of the faithful towards a goal perceived in advance. This kind of prescience is vouchsafed to all such as are elected by the Lord to carry His Word, and become the instruments of His Will. The "third eye" is a divine endowment.

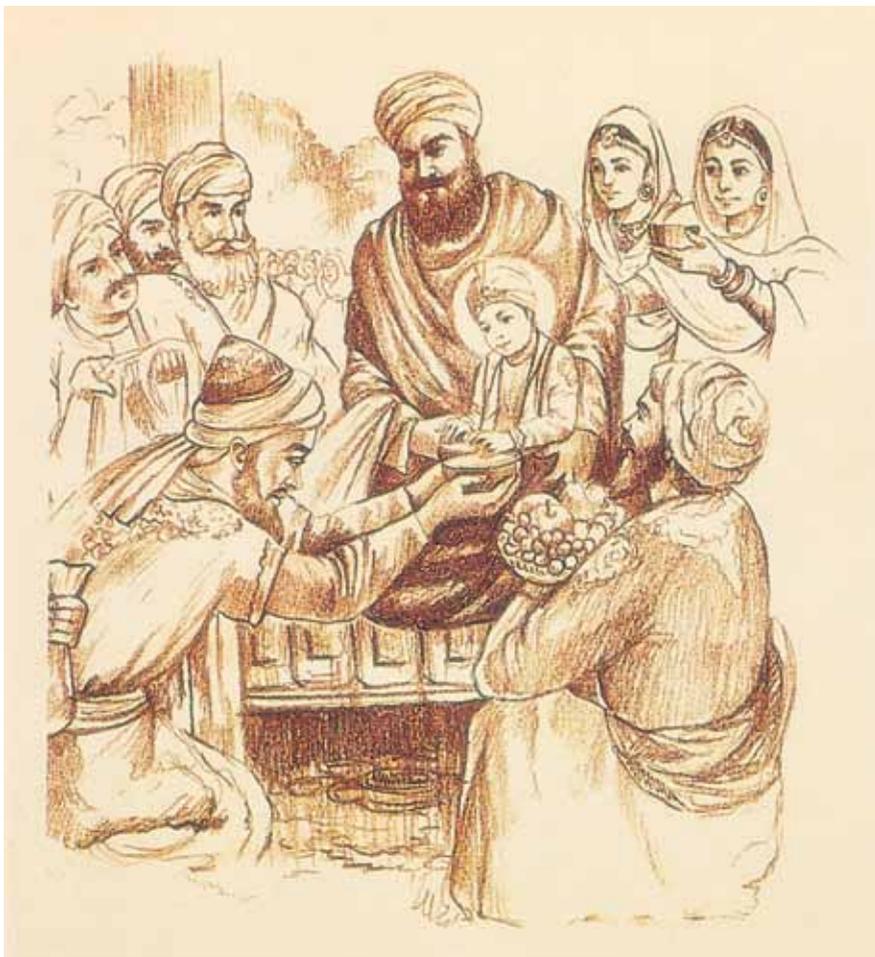
So, the intervening two centuries or so could be seen as a period in which the Sikh spirit was born, nursed, imbued with purpose and courage, filled with the lore of *dharma* or moral vision, and then set on the road that looked towards the far horizons in view. The day of baptism, of the administered amrit by the Master himself, was thus a day that hearkened back to Guru Nanak who had arrived on the Indian scene at a time of utter political and moral chaos in the country. The Hindu society in which he was born had become a

**The landscape behind Anandpur Sahib, with  
Naina Devi visible on the mountain behind.**



moribund body of disparate and demoralised, degraded elements under the onslaught of Islamic rule and monolithic, absolutist theology which put to sword all that came in its way of spiritual suzerainty and territorial lust.

Indeed, to reach down to the grid of the energies that galvanised the engines of soulful and moral action on a grand scale, we may have to interpret the symbolic story of the Tenth Guru's own nativity and its contextual coordinates. Thus the hermeneutics of his composition *Bachitar Natak* or 'The Wondrous Drama' (1698) which he wrote in the plenitude of his poetic power and vision, would suggest not only the rationale of his birth, and the story of his previous life, but also a whole range of possibilities posited in it. A ministry of moral and mystic symbiosis is commissioned. A religion now fully armed in spirit, complete with a body of inviolate scriptural verse, theological formulations and a socio-political world-view is set to take off, waiting as it were for the Great Engineer. From the birth of the star over Patna in the year 1666 A.D. and the ordained arrival on the scene of the Sufi Saint, Bhikham Shah, to bless the infant Gobind and pronounce him divine (reminiscent of the Bethlehem Story of Jesus Christ's nativity and the journey of the Magi) to the tempestuous saga of his life and muses we may see the making of a great mission. His sovereignty in the process assumes awesome majesty, and his poetry a magnificence in consonance with the imperatives of his splendid personality. The royal mien, robes and accoutrements reflect how matter impregnated with the spirit



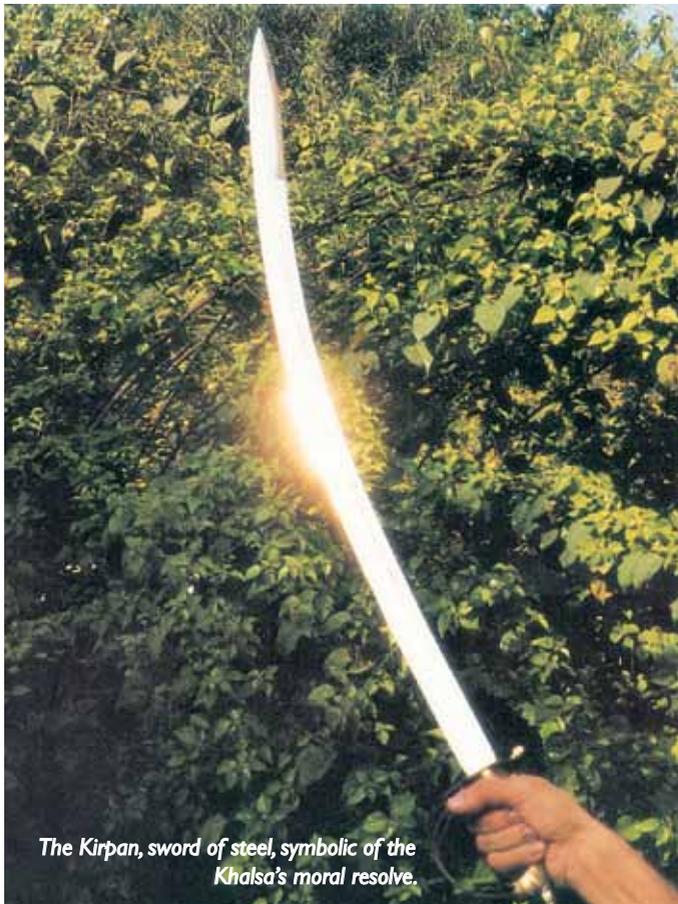
Infant Gobind at his birthplace, Patna in eastern India.

of divinity becomes an instrument of mandate and message. However, unlike other prophets and divines, he never claimed the station of God. On the contrary, he condemned all those to hell who called him *Ishwar* or *Akalpurkh*. Talking of the Guru's divine ministry, I am reminded of the Greek concept of *Kairos* or "the right time". As Paul Tillich in *The Eternal Now* puts it, "All great changes in history are accompanied by a strong consciousness of a *Kairos* at hand". Taken thus, the advent of the Tenth Master had its locus in time and divinity at once.

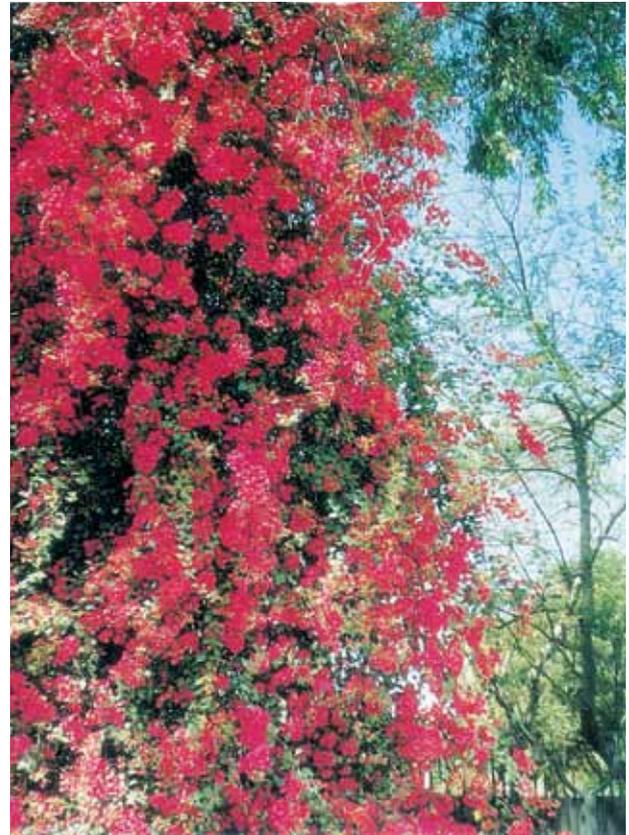
Before we turn, finally, to the Sikh values, vision and *Weltanschuuang* and to the future of the Sikhs as we see it today, a fanciful resurrection of the Great Day that saw the baptism and enfranchisement of the Khalsa as a sovereign community at Anandpur Sahib ("the Abode of Bliss") becomes a part of the grand tapestry. There are several accounts of that fateful day, and it is the imagination of loving and reverence, and the imagination of frolic and revelry that come simultaneously into play.

Imagine then the scene—a cool morning of late March with the spring breezes laden with the fragrance of myriad flowers, and of the good green earth, the schools of birds chirping in happy thankfulness, the aroma of ripe corn and the songs of harvesting, the village belles, "our queens of curd and cream" at their morning chores, the music of the

Persian wheels and the splendour of the surrounding Shivalik hills beneath which Anandpur Sahib rests as a place of peace with a distinctive “call”! And Guru Gobind Singh is seated on the *gaddi* in full regalia, sporting a plume and a hawk on his hand, and he surveys the assembled believers and faithful with an eye of keen insight and compassion. And then, amidst a congregation charged with high emotion and a dream of high destiny, the Master rises to announce the birth of the Khalsa in their finished form, and the ceremony of *amrit* is enacted after a symbolic act of trust and sacrifice. For that’s the meaning of the five goats slaughtered inside the tent to initiate the five *pyaras* or “The Beloved Five”, who had at the Guru’s command offered their heads. It was truly a unique order of baptism—a baptism of blood and sword. The steel had, so to speak, entered the spirit of the Khalsa, and given it a keen edge and power. However, the great moral of that symbolic episode was that the new Commonwealth of the Khalsa knew or recognised no distinctions of caste, colour or creed. “The Beloved Five” represented the entire spectrum of the then existing society—from the high-born to the lowly artisans.



The Kirpan, sword of steel, symbolic of the Khalsa’s moral resolve.



Flowering of the Sikh spirit at Baisakhi.

This flowering of the Sikh spirit around the time of the Baisakhi month, a month of joyous felicities brings forth that *joie de vivre* which is a characteristic feature of Punjabi life, and which springs from a deep-rooted attachment to the soil—to the blessedness and bounties of corn, milk and curds. It’s these virtues which the Master’s providential act brought to full fruition. The idea of *sada vigas* or unfailing high-spiritedness thus got structured into the Sikh sensibility.

Since the doctrine of the consecrated sword was then apotheocised at the time of the ceremonies associated with the moment of the Khalsa, there has always existed an element of question, of doubt about it in the minds of those outside of the faith. It was made mandatory by the Guru himself that the Sikh sword would only be unleashed or lifted against those tyrants and evil persons who had blocked all avenue of peaceful resolution. It was to affirm the principles of universal justice and moral law under all conditions and all circumstances. In his historic *Zafarnamah* or ‘The Epistle of Victory’, addressed to the Moghul Emperor, Aurangzeb, a couplet in Persian loosely rendered, reads thus:

*When the situation is past all measures and persuasion,  
It's thy rightful duty to lift the sword.*

In any account of the enfranchisement of the Khalsa as a body of men and women sworn to the highest ideals of the creed brought into being by Guru Nanak, and expanded, expounded and finalised by the later pontiffs and made ready for the charismatic stewardship of the Tenth Master, it is important to understand the drift of moral energies, the humanistic vision and the ultimate goal of God-realisation which the preceding generations of Sikh devotees had



*Early period artist's depiction of the Tenth Master.*

imbibed from their history, scriptures, given tenets, edicts, rules of governance, polity and so on. In a most comprehensive way, all these sources got subsumed in a grand metaphor of the Khalsa itself—a term that at once suggested multiple ideas and images of dharma and karma, and of sewa and sacrifice, of commitment and candour, of truth and righteousness, of divine acceptance and submission and, above all, of the mystery and mystique of martyrdom. Thus

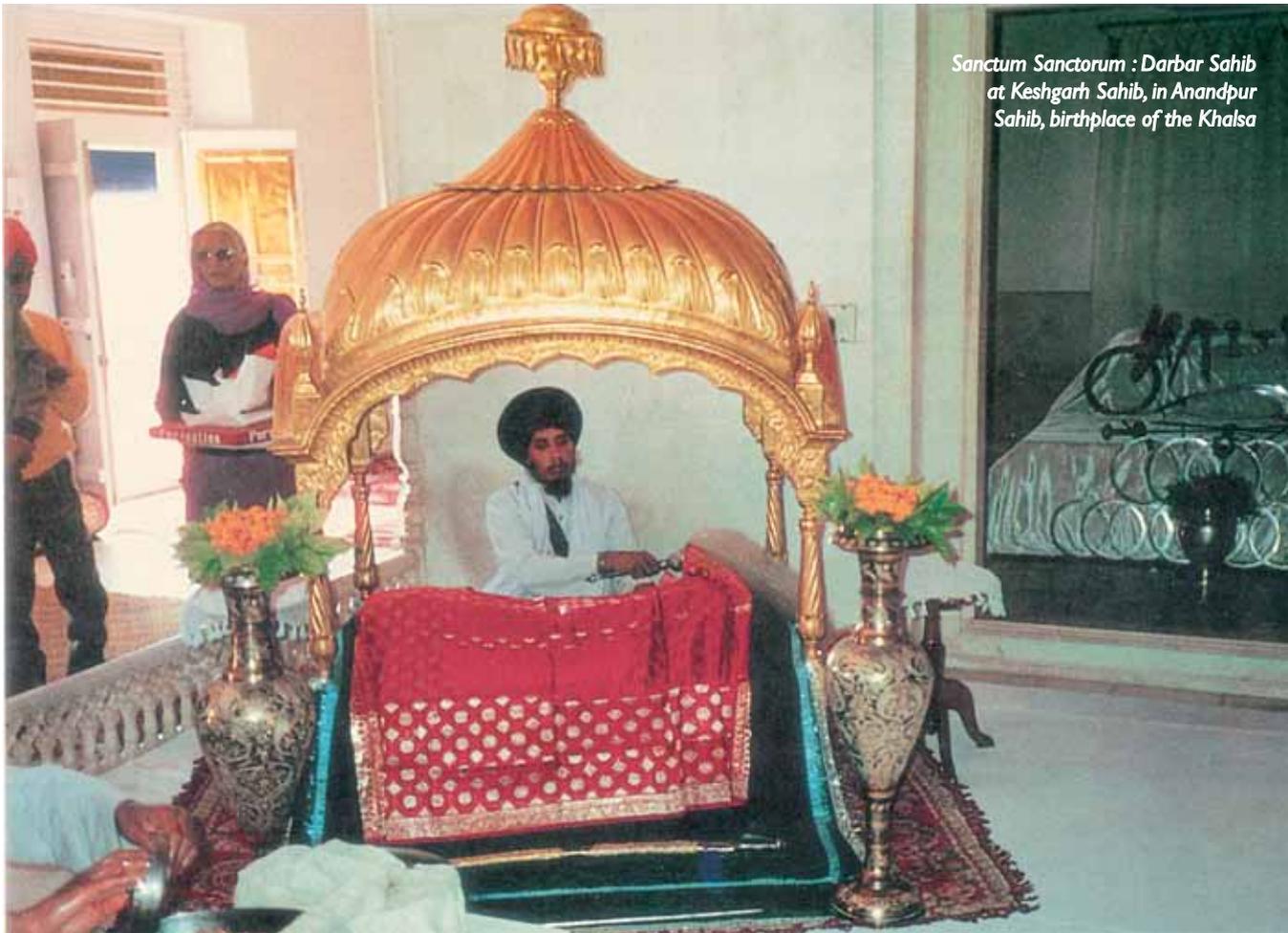
to sport the insignia of the Khalsa was to proclaim, in a way, the very essence of one's being. For that's how corporate images get laminated into one strong unforgettable *imago* in the Jungian sense.

To be more specific, the moral tradition of Sikhism from which we find both the leaders and the laity grievously alienated today in some ways, particularly since the wave of hedonism and consumerism in the country, there is a whole sum of values strong enough to suggest a residual, inviolate base. For the Sikh Gurus treated the world of the senses as *dharamsal* or "the house of moral conduct". Ironically, while the vile politics of power seems to have soiled the governance of the gurdwaras both in India and abroad, the concept of *dharamsal* (a term still in common use in the countryside) abides. And the moral values the concept implies includes, among other things, humility and extinction of *haumain* or ego, pity and compassion, service and sacrifice, hospitality and magnanimity, courage and valour and, above all, a vigilant concern for truth—the highest virtue in Guru Nanak's own words, higher even than right conduct. For truth is God's own attribute and, therefore, a transcendent value—supreme, immaculate, inviolate.

*"Truth is higher than everything else,  
But higher still is the living by truth."*

The question of *Rahetnamas* or "Epistles of Conduct" issued or enunciated by various saints, scholars and scribes has to be understood in the context of their origin and circumstances. Of course, the ethical vision of Sikhism will always remain central in relation to the scriptural values, though it was natural to see certain new proprieties and protocol evolved in the course of history as a kind of helpful grammar. It is in this way that Sikh ethics came to be institutionalised. It may be observed, however, that the Guru vision never permitted or envisaged an institutionalisation which could degenerate into a mindless orthodoxy. For that vision is at once fundamental and resilient, universal and contingent. One may go on to describe such a phenomenon as an example of visionary ambivalence. It appears, then, that the three key principles that emerge as a grid of Sikh moral energies are

*'Naam Japna' or the recitation of the Name  
Kirt karna or a life of fruitful labour, and  
Vand Chhakna or the sharing of life's fruits and riches  
and other bounties and blessings.*



Sanctum Sanctorum : Darbar Sahib  
at Keshgarh Sahib, in Anandpur  
Sahib, birthplace of the Khalsa

All other virtues, in a way, stem from this ethical trinity.

To trace and analyse the moral life of a community is, in a manner, to talk of its origin, evolution and arrival as an organic entity on the one hand, and to understand its spiritual urges, its existential concerns and its humanistic dreams, on the other. In this interaction of the numinous and the divine lies the locus of all value systems. And where a community has been trained on a diet of vast human aspirations as in the case of the Sikhs, its moral being or character achieved in action and engagement is integrally related to its world-view. It's thus that the word becomes flesh, or the thought consumed in praxis. In other

words, the text of history and the sub-text of faith and belief combine to produce a moral order. And the entire foregoing argument returns us thus to that moment of moments when through the vision and deeds of the Final Master a community's full life—of the senses, of the mind and intellect, and of the eternal mystic longing for the life beyond was given its first full expression.

If the moral values and the Sikh world-view found their profound consummation in the life and poetry of Gum Gobind Singh, it only proves that in the Guru's view there was never to be a hiatus between the ideal in view and the action involved. The meaning of his own life—the sacrifice of his own noble father, Guru Tegh

Bahadur, and the consequential martyrdom of all his four young sons in the name of *dharma*, truth and faith—a quartet of martyrdom unparalleled in the history of world religions—assumes a meaning beyond meaning. Where a life, a pen and a sword come together to form a paradigm of spiritual power of awesome magnificence, surely a divinity of purpose is at work. And when the ordained mission had been brought to its logical conclusion, and a brotherhood of the faithful established, the Mater gave yet another meaningful and far-reaching turn to the great drama. He accepted amrit, the water of baptism, from his own commissioned Sikhs, "the Beloved Five". The moment of resurrection

of a people fallen and gone astray was thus crowned with a regal act. The *Guru* and the *Chela* became an inseparable entity, and the Master's memorable utterance reminds us today of his ministry in this manner:

*Khalsa mero roop hai khas*

"The Khalsa brotherhood is cast in my own image".

No wonder, one recalls with awe that memorable couplet:

*Wah, Wah, Guru Gobind Singh*

*Apey Gur Chela*

(All praise be to Guru Gobind Singh,

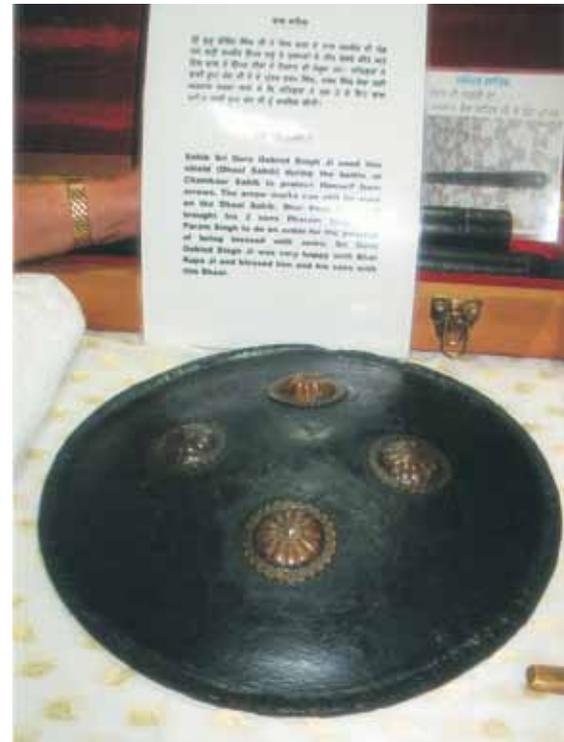
The Preceptor's also an acolyte.)

And, finally, when we talk of the Sikh *Weltanschuuang* or world-view, in a way, we are only summing up in a portmanteau German expression all that the Khalsa fraternity stands for—from its origin and tempestuous history to its visionary voyage through the Sikh scriptures, hymns, discourses and works of exegesis. The encyclopaedic character of the exercise involves a very large extended discussion. However, for our purposes here, the Sikh world view implies a few major, definitive and unvaried features of the community: its creed and culture, its polity and praxis, its style and stance, among other things.

To begin with, the reality of this world-view is grounded in two other realities of a higher nature—the reality of God and the reality of the world as we see it. It becomes necessary to emphasise the latter, since the Sikhs scriptures in consonance with some aspects of Hindu thought do speak of this world as *maya* or illusion, as "a dream" and "a bubble" (as in the soulful numbers of Guru Tegh Bahadur, to quote only one example), but a deeper and wider reading of all such references in the hymns of the Gurus, and in those of other divines does suggest certain subtle variations. There are,



*The Sikh marriage, 'Anand Karaj'*



*Guru Gobind Singh's shield used in the battle of Chamkaur Sahib*

indeed, clear statements within the sacred texts to treat human life as something unique and rare, and the world of nature, earth and animals as a place of wonder, enchantment and beauty. It is because divinity suffuses the given reality of this world and, indeed, is created by the Lord as "playground" for His own great *lila* or pleasurable game. No wonder, then, the sacred and the profane are equally worthy of our adoration. In fact, Guru Nanak regarded the human body as "a temple of God", and if we abuse it or desecrate it, it only shows how far we have travelled from the spirit of Sikhism.

Similarly, woman *qua* woman has received a most compassionate, soulful and reverential treatment in Guru Nanak's hymns, as indeed in the bani of the later Gurus, for she symbolises the eternal principle of creation. And woman, the spouse, is a recurring constitutive metaphor

in the Adi Granth where man's relation with his Maker is conceived in corresponding terms and idiom. So the man-woman relationship has a divine, mystic base, and any affront to woman as such is an affront to the Lord Himself. That's why *anand-karj* or marriage in Sikhism is regarded as a fulfilment and a consummation in more than one sense.

A world-view that comprehends the sublimity of human relationships is necessarily egalitarian, democratic and socialistic in essence. It regards equality of men, equality of religions and equality in the eyes of law as fundamental values whatever its uniqueness—and Sikhism has a distinct character—that uniqueness is never used as a means of aggrandisement, of aloofness, of proselytization in a militant manner. This could best be illustrated when we consider the composition of the Adi Granth by the Fifth Guru, Arjan Dev. It carries scores of hymns from Muslim sufi poets, Hindu divines, Harijan bards and *bhaktas*, and the languages used cover a vast variety of dialects in addition to the classical languages and vernaculars. This order of catholicity of the spirit and mind remains a singularly unique phenomenon in the world of religious scriptures or literatures.

Again, Sikhism, though recognising the 'royalty' of the human spirit does not recognise any kind of social hierarchy, any kind of elites. Guru Gobind Singh's own example, and his hymns, brimful of compassion for the lowly and the dispossessed, show what the achieved Sikh world-view can suggest to a world driven by conflicts, clashes and schisms of all manner. The Sikh scriptures again are full of what in the German language is called *Weltschmerz* or "world-pain".

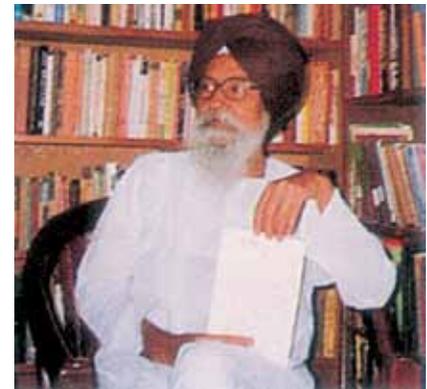
It remains, in the end, to ponder the future of Sikhism in the century ahead of us. It is true, apostasy in Sikhism has been, of late, on a large scale, what with the Sikh diaspora and the new forces of global "culture" mentioned at the outset. At the same time, it is also true that some of the Sikh scribes who predicted "the demise" of Sikhism in its original form by the end of the century now remain to regret the rashness of their view. For, it is now being realised even abroad that not only is Sikhism a vibrant world religion with a distinct identity but is also a faith that has endless possibilities for mankind.

And this point brings up the question of Sikhism and modernity. It has often been averred by the new generation of Sikhs in India and abroad that the Sikh image, practices and symbols militate against its acceptance in its present form. There's only some element of truth in it, for this thesis is not sustainable in so many other ways. Besides, there is, so far as India is concerned, no other community more wedded to the spirit of modernity than are the Sikhs. Their very lifestyle, their wholesale acceptance of western scientific farming, technology, education and the conditions of an advanced industrialised, entrepreneurial society would be able to sustain the Sikhs amidst all manner of challenges. There is an organic, inherent energy in them, and all we need is our true heritage and our vision. How best this could be effected is a matter that requires a vigorous insightful debate and deliberations. Among the vexing and complex problems that continue to bedevil the Akali party politics, and cause painful embarrassment to the community in India and abroad are the problems of the office and jurisdiction

of the Akal Takht Jathedar, and the question of mandatory edicts, orders and punitive actions associated with that high office. The effects of authority, of late, compels us then to ponder the problem in agonising earnestness. In sum, the moment of celebrations is also the moment of reassessment, readjustment and redefinition.

Assuredly, the moment of the Khalsa is best suited to give the coming generations a direction, an agenda and a machinery for action. The dialectic of the moment compels us to do so.

**Dr. Darshan Singh Maini**



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*Dr Maini was a Fulbright Visiting Professor at New York University (1988-90) and a permanent member of the Henry James Review editorial board.*

*He was first Editorial Director of the Nishaan. Dr. Darshan Singh Maini passed away in 2006.*

*[This first appeared in Nishaan's  
Premiere Issue.]*

# THE GIFT OF TRUTH



ੴ ਸਾਹਿਨਾਮ ਕਰਤਾ ਪੁਰ  
ਖਨਿਰਭ ਭਿਨਿਰਵੈਰੁ ਖਕਾਲ ਪੁਰੀ  
ਮਨੁ ਕੀ ਸੈਭੰ ਯੁਗ ਪ੍ਰਸਾਦਿ ॥ ਜਪੁ ॥  
ਆਦਿ ਸਚੁ ਗੁਗਾਦਿ ਸਗਾ ਹੋਰੀ ਸਚੁ ਨਾਨ  
ਕਰ ਸੀ ਭੀ ਸਦਾ ॥੧॥ ਸੇ ਚੰ ਸੇ ਚ ਨ ਹੋ ਵਈ ਸੇ  
ਸੇ ਚੀ ਲਖ ਵਗਾ ਚ ਪੈ ਰੁਪ ਨ ਹੋ ਵਈ ਸੇ  
ਲਾਇ ਰਹਾ ਲਿ ਵਰਗਾ ਚੁ ਖਿ ਆ ਭੁ  
ਨ ਭਿਰ ਵੀ ਸੇ ਖੰ ਨ ਪੁਰੀ ਆ ਭ ਰਾ ॥  
ਸਹਸਰਿ ਸਿਮਰਤੁ ਪਾ

## The Need For Truth

**W**hat is more important in life than knowing and being able to follow the truth?

Truth about the physical world, so that we may know and use physical laws to design medical wonder drugs, as well as technologies on which airplanes, computers and telephones are based. Truth about human health laws that allow us to eat good food, exercise our muscles, and reject crippling drugs, such as tobacco. Truth about our social interactions with others so a caring society can exist. And most importantly, truth about our spirituality, so we can be in a state of bliss, or *anand*, under all conditions. In the absence of truth, we fumble and stumble. Con-artists and pseudo-holymen exploit us and burden our lives. Indeed, truth lightens our loads in this journey through life, while falsehood burdens us with heavy loads, making this journey one of misery.

*How is Truth revealed? How is the veil of falsehood ripped?*

Even though human beings have been on this planet for several millions of years, the period of the 15th to 18th centuries was a very remarkable period in human

history. Two great concepts were developed and implemented during this period. These concepts answered the question: How is Truth revealed? How is the veil of falsehood ripped? These concepts were the scientific method, developed in Europe, and the Sikh method gifted to humanity by the Sikh Gurus in India. The scientific method allows us to distinguish between truth and pseudo-truth in the physical world, enabling us to design seemingly magical technologies and come up with medical breakthroughs. But these technologies are not based on magic—they are based on universal physical laws.

The scientific method, so important to our lives, still does not provide any answers related to human values : love, caring, nurturing, helping others have no place in this method. Indeed, the history of Europe in the twentieth century shows that many men who were highly trained in science and technology participated in unimaginable crimes against fellow humans. Nazism and Communism were products of highly advanced scientific societies, but incredibly barbaric crimes against fellow humans were committed under the patronage of these philosophies.



ੴ ਸਤਿਨਾਮੁ ਕਰਤਾ ਪੁਰਖੁ ਨਿਰਭਉ ਨਿਰਵੈਰੁ  
ਅਕਾਲ ਮੂਰਤਿ ਅਜੂਨੀ ਸੈਭੰ ਗੁਰ ਪ੍ਰਸਾਦਿ ॥

On Supreme Being. He is Truth. He is the Creator. Without Fear. Inimical to None. Beyond Time. Not Incarnated; Self-Created. The Enlightener. Realised by the Grace of the True Guru. Guru Nanak



The Sikh method tells us not only how to find truth in the physical world, but also in the social and spiritual worlds. The Sikh method goes well beyond the scientific method in providing humanity with truth. It is a path unbound by geography, nationality, race, creed, or time. It is a path that unburdens our lives and makes this life a blissful journey.

One does not have to be a scientist by profession to be influenced by the outcome of science and technology. It is important to be aware of how the scientific method works, since there is perhaps no one living today who has not, to some extent, been touched by the scientific method. The television and radio we enjoy, airliners and cars we use, high yield farm crops we eat—everything has been touched by this method. The scientific method is based upon the following articles of faith:

- The physical world is governed by scientific laws that are constant in time and space.
- The laws are revealed by careful observation of Nature.
- All intellectual discourses must submit to what is observed in Nature.

This last article of faith has been very difficult for intellectuals of various times to accept. There have been times in history when ‘pundits’ and other intellectual giants held great power. Elaborate intellectual thesis were woven by these powerful men and presented as the truth. Those who questioned these ‘legends’ were tortured or even eliminated. But, in the long run, truth has always prevailed. Indeed, how can truth be defeated by fantasy and how can it be subjugated to intellect which has no connections with reality? Understanding and use of the knowledge gained from the scientific - method has led to almost magical technologies. But an inevitable outcome of science has been that this has also exposed pseudo-scientists who claimed what amounted to virtual magical powers.

Thus, despite all of the benefits of science, it does not provide us answers to questions regarding human values and choices.

## The Sikh Method

Significantly, the scientific method can be regarded as consistent with the Sikh method. Unlike many other faiths, Sikhism is not at odds with science. Indeed, this is needed to provide direction to science and technology. The Sikh method addresses the issue of truth in our physical, mental, social and spiritual world. It provides us a lifestyle whereby the body, mind and spirit are in coherence, since truth—not superstitions and legends—are kept at the centre. The Sikh method should not be accepted just because someone has said so, but because it stands the test of experience. Let us look at the building blocks of this method.

## What The Search Is for : ‘Anand’

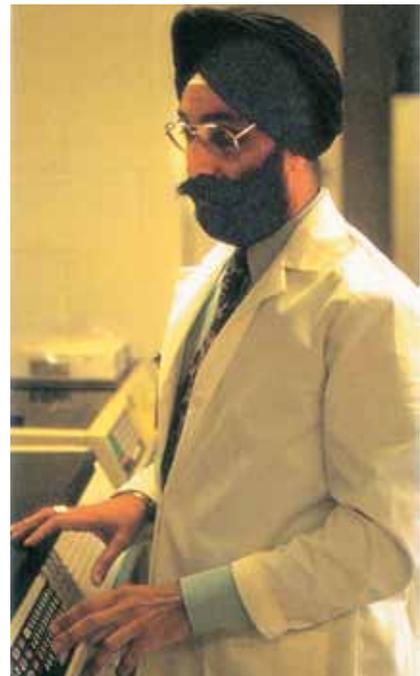
Who does not want to be happy?

It may be argued that at some level, all of our actions are taken to provide happiness. The problem is that often, such actions end up in bringing misery. *Anand*, the state of bliss—beyond the cycle of joy and sorrow—is what the seeker of truth is promised. In this state, the ups and downs of life do not create ecstasy and despair. How is one to reach this state?

The *Mool Mantra*—the core message of Sikhism—declares the Creator to be *Satnam* : Truth. Truth is beyond the grip of space and time. This truth is manifested to us as *hukams*, or laws. The laws that the scientists have found are but one small part of this Truth. The scientific laws govern the physical universe. They are capable of producing wonderful technologies, but are not capable of generating the state of anand for humans. The *hukams* that the Sikh path reveals go well beyond the physical universe. In resonance with these *hukams*, one enters into the state of *Anand*.

## The big obstacle : ‘Haumai’

*Haumai*, or “I-am-ness”, or ego, is what prevents humans from being able to decipher Truth of the Creator. Just as a scientific experiment in which the detector has too much ‘identity’ and so produces misleading results, our *haumai* interferes with our interaction with the Creator’s laws and misleads us into choosing burdensome paths.



## The great Haze : ‘Maya’

As we participate in the wondrous world the Creator has bestowed upon us, we perceive the world through the maze of *maya*. Unless the human being is enlightened, this web of illusion can lead him or her down what seems to be a blissful path, but which turns out to be a path filled with misery. There are many people who make their living exploiting the web of *maya* to trap innocent victims. Elaborate illusions are stitched together to ensnare humans into this *maya*. The degree of entrapment in *maya* is the influence which determines why some people view all obstacles with a cheerful view, while others view them as profound tragedies.

ਸਚਹੁ ਓਰੈ ਸਭੁ ਕੋ ਉਪਰਿ ਸਚੁ ਆਚਾਰੁ ॥

Truth is the highest virtue; Higher still is true living.  
Guru Nanak



On a physical level, *maya* can cause us to do miserable things. Surprisingly often, we do so willingly. Men and women mutilate their bodies, believing this can lead to a joyful life. Tattoos, body piercings and circumcisions are committed, destroying the beautiful natural body which the Creator has given us. People give up healthful foods, refuse to cleanse their body, smearing ashes and dirt on themselves. Others lead a gluttonous lifestyle, bloating the body. Diseases follow.

On a social level, *maya* can cause us to participate in and create social customs and taboos to degrade others. These customs can generate hatred against others who are not of the same race or caste. People who do not look like us, or belong to our group are to be degraded. This could produce a short-lived feeling of euphoria just as a hit of cocaine does. But, as in the case of cocaine, the end results are miserable for the person with hatred in his or her heart.

On an intellectual level, *maya* can cause us to believe in superstitions and falsehoods. Even in the face of evidence to the

contrary, people cling to such superstitions and legends. Once again, while these superstitions give temporary comfort, in the long run, they load us with heavy burden which we then carry in our journey through life. On a spiritual level, *maya* causes us to stray from the path of truth and search for spirituality in meaningless rituals, holy baths and mindless chants. The essence of spirituality—becoming a Universal being—is lost among the prattle.

## A Guru

A Guru is needed to shine light so that the web of illusion is ripped and the true blissful path is revealed. The benefits of walking on this path are felt right here in this life. The Sikh path is not one where misery is to be endured for some unprovable distant life in some far-away heaven. Sri Guru Granth Sahib embodies the essence of the ten Sikh Gurus and is the timeless Guru enlightening humanity. This Guru does not collect a list of dos and don'ts : which foods to eat, in which rivers to cleanse our sins, which rituals to fulfill. It describes how our thoughts and actions are to be brought into resonance with Truth to reach *Anand*. This path involves extending our ego to fill the entire Universe. From the duality of me and you, us and them, one is able to see that there is no duality and all creation is just the work of Waheguru—the Wondrous Lord.

The Sikh must also seek company of other enlightened people. Through the love and caring of such men and women—in the *sangat*—one's own behaviour and lifestyle becomes more universal.

## Jap and Simran

*Jap* is the exercise that a Sikh participates in to make the *hukams* a constant part of his or her living. Resonance with *hukams* is not sought during just some part of the day. Just as we are unknowingly aware of Earth's pull on us—gravity—at all times, so should we be in resonance with *hukams* at all times. At first, *Jap* may involve subtle reminders at various times of the day. Gradually, the reminding becomes involuntary. One does not walk the path of truth because another human being is watching. One walks this path because it produces a state of *anand*. The Sikh realises that the *hukams* (laws) of

the Creator are always in control. In resonance with these *hukams*, our life is unburdened. *Simran* (remembrance) of *Nam* or True Word gradually brings us to a state where even in our unconscious state we are in tune with Truth.

## Charhdi Kala

The Sikhs greet all with the salutation *Sat Sri Akal*—"Truth is beyond Time". This belief is central to the Sikh faith. It sustains the Sikh through hard times and good times. Temporary propaganda and intellectual "punditry" can create a smoke-screen whereby Truth seems to be diminished—but how can such punditry alter the fundamental truth?

During the dark ages in Europe, misguided theologians interpreted scriptures with rigid tunnel vision and even concluded that the Earth was flat and the Sun revolved around our world. Thinkers and scientists who showed that Nature's Truth was otherwise, were tortured and even burned at the stake. But all of this suppression and intellectual hot air did not flatten the Earth nor did it make the Sun revolve around us !

If the Sikh is on the path of Truth, then belief in the timelessness of Truth produces the state of *Charhdi Kala* in this universal being. The state of *Charhdi Kala* or "As is joy, so is sorrow." Always in bliss; never in woe.

ਤੈਸਾ ਹਰਖੁ ਤੈਸਾ ਉਸੁ ਸੋਗੁ ॥ ਸਦਾ ਅਨੰਦੁ ਤਹ ਨਹੀ ਬਿਓਗੁ ॥  
As is joy, so is sorrow. Always in bliss; never in woe.  
Guru Nanak

Guru Nanak blessed mankind with unbounded optimism, which makes discriminatory laws appear like challenges for character development. Just as an athlete faces hardships to develop his or her muscles, so do obstacles strengthen the Sikh's character.

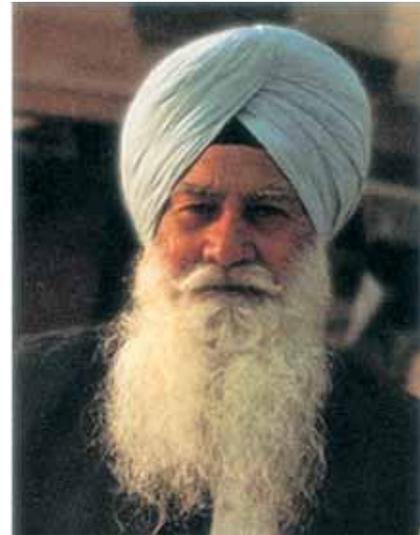
## The Five Privileges

The five privileges with which the Sikh has been blessed represent the beliefs which the Sikh must strive to embody within himself or herself.

### Acceptance of Nature's Beauty: *Kesh*

Maintenance of *kesh* has been identified as special privilege of the Sikh. Of course, this is a privilege that all humanity should enjoy. Acceptance of one's own self and one's own natural beauty is a step to encourage acceptance of another of the Universe's *hukams*. Why did great Indian sages, the Buddha, Jewish prophets, Jesus Christ, Mohammed, and even Native American Chiefs accept this wonderful gift from the Creator ? Women, the nurturers of humanity whom Guru Nanak describes as the originators of life, have naturally enjoyed this privilege. Why should men not enjoy this privilege too?

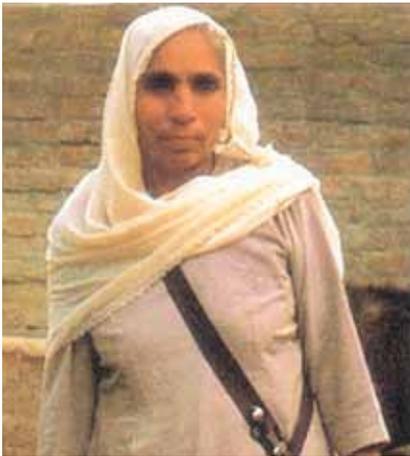
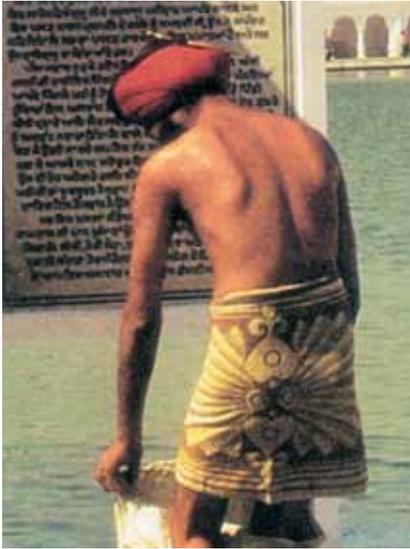
Acceptance of the *kesh* represents a level of self-acceptance that is often quite demanding. Anyone who accepts his or her own natural beauty is also able to extend this concept to acceptance of others and acceptance of Nature's beauty. For the last several centuries, advances in technology along with lack of a universal value system have caused man to wreak havoc on Nature's beauty. The once beautiful lakes are now polluted ponds; thick forests



have been stripped of trees; mighty rivers have been dammed, causing famine and deforestation. The effects of these assaults on Nature is felt not only by non-human species, but increasingly, also by humans. Rejection of body mutilation can create a state where the mutilation of Nature is also not tolerated.

### Nurturing of Nature's Bounty : *Kangha*

The *kesh* that the Creator has bestowed upon us are to be taken care of. It is



important that we do not leave this wonderful gift in a state of neglect. With the *kangha*, the Sikh takes care of his *kesh*. It reminds the Sikh that he or she is a steward of Nature's bounty. It is our responsibility that Nature is not demeaned.

### Coherence Between Thoughts and Action: *Karha*

It is often not so hard to accept the validity of truth as a concept. It is far more difficult to have the resolve to bring actions into harmony with thought. Most of us know the importance of honesty and truthfulness, the benefits of good, healthy food, regular exercise, meditation, and prayer. But the *maya* of life ensnares us into taking actions that are in contradiction

with our pure thoughts. The *karha* we wear on our wrist represents the resolve we must have in our life to bring harmony between thoughts and actions. The unbroken circle of the *karha* represents the integrity of our physical, social, intellectual and spiritual being.

### Joy of *Seva*: *Kachha*

Two very important concepts the Gurus have given: us are those of *sangat* and *pangat sangat* to create a caring, loving community; *pangat* to share our wealth—not just material wealth, but also spiritual wealth. A most important means of sharing is *seva*, or volunteer work for the good of all. The *kachha* is an embodiment of this volunteerism and joy of physical activity. The Sikh should not just be engulfed in intellectual discourse and debate—he or she should get out there and participate in physical activity. To feed people, to build houses, to participate in blood donations, to help people afflicted by natural disasters.

The *kachha* is also a reminder to restrain our physical desires—not to usurp what is not ours.

### Awakened Inner Warrior: *Kirpan*

It is easy to participate in a philosophy that is based upon "self improvement" where one lets others carry their own burdens. The Sikh philosophy encourages the Sikh to participate more actively in the world around us—often at some risk to one's own self. The Sikh may often find himself or herself in a situation where he or she sees the fellow human suffering under an unjust burden—the burden of racism, casteism, or sexism. Often he may see people being conned by powerful forces—political, religious, social—controlled by self-centred interests. Advertisements may be used to promote tobacco, alcohol, and other

drug use; social institutions may propagate traditions to keep women subservient and insecure.

Most young children have a clear sense of outrage when injustice is being committed. However, as they grow older, they subdue their inner warrior and conform to the motto, "Be afraid of the strong and intimidate the weak." The *kirpan* exhorts us to keep our inner warrior awake and to take a stand against injustice. Sikh history is replete with men and women who have taken great pains to take a stand.

### A Path for All Time and Places

The Sikh path is not a path to be followed blindly. It is a path of Truth and brings its follower into *anand*. It is not a path of the Punjab, or of the U.S.A. or of Canada or of England. It is valid at all places. It is not a path of the medieval age or of the twentieth century or of the coming millennium. It is timeless. It is the path with validity for the young and old, for man and woman. The special year— 1999—the tercentenary of the Khalsa—was a reminder of how acutely humanity needs this path.

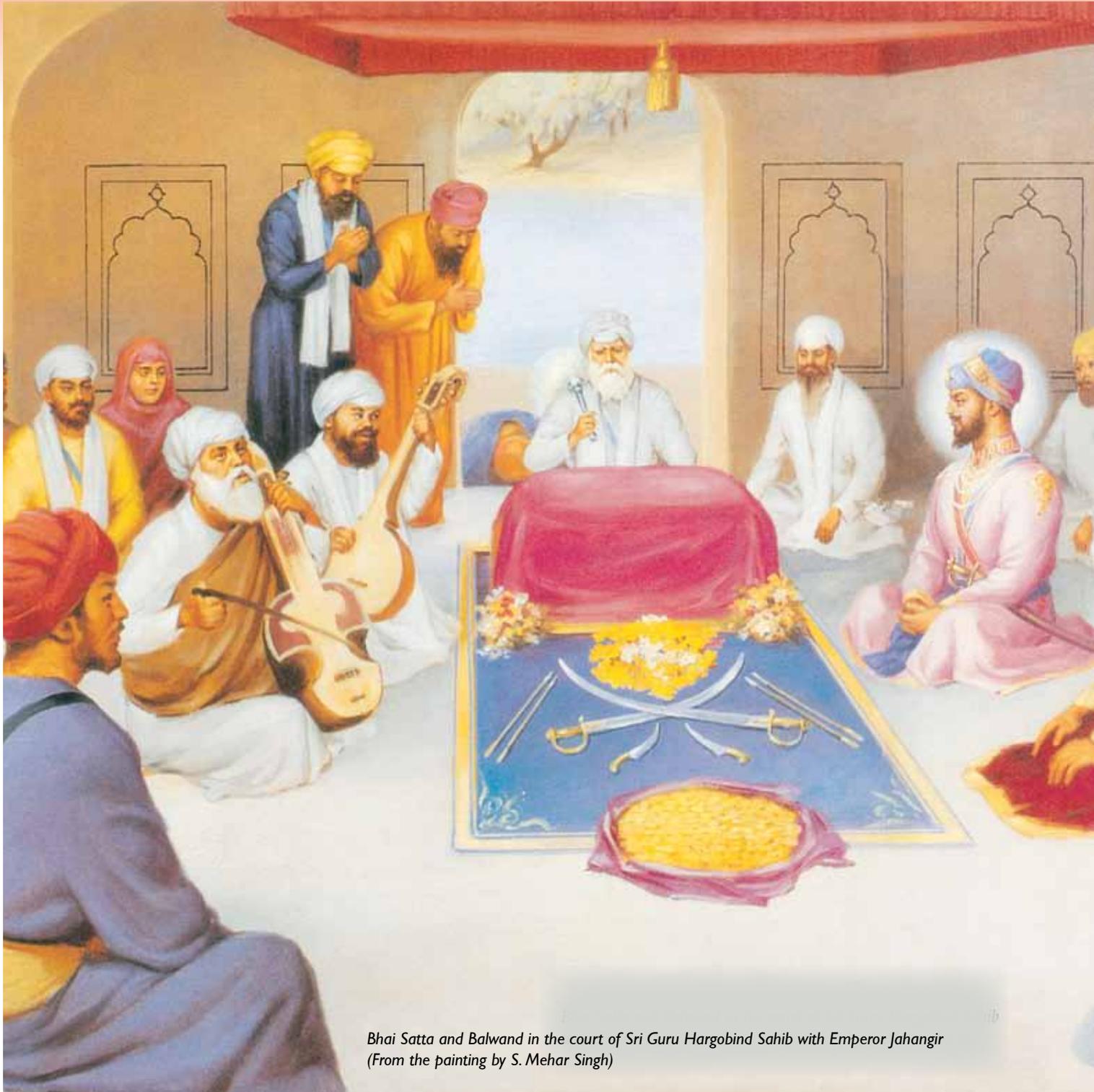
As science and technology provide humanity a greater ability to concoct and build more powerful webs of *maya*, the need for the Sikh path is critical. The Sikh path is as relevant today as it was centuries ago. Indeed, it may be argued that its need today is greater, since the haze of *maya* has only thickened.

### Jasprit Singh and Teresa Singh

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# GURMAT SANGEET



*Bhai Satta and Balwand in the court of Sri Guru Hargobind Sahib with Emperor Jahangir  
(From the painting by S. Mehar Singh)*

# Heritage

The importance of music as a vehicle of religious thought and its meaningfulness and efficacy in transforming the human mind and soul, is nowhere as predominant, in fact, primary, as in the Sikh way of life.

Sri Guru Granth Sahib, the embodiment of *Baani*, the *Shabad*, is divided into chapters under the headings of thirty one raags. Only the *Jap Ji Sahib*, in the beginning, and the *Mundavani* at the close, are two compositions which are not written under the heading of any particular raag. The rest of the holy Granth Sahib is compiled under raag indications. This is significant and purposeful, with a serious intent behind it.

In the Sikh way of life, Gurbani – the Sikh Scriptures, *Sahabad* the word, spoken or written – has a special and revered place. Just as in ancient Indian thought *Naad* is Braham, in Sikh theology *Sahabad* is Guru and Guru is *Shabad*. Consequently *Shabad Keertan* (sing of Sikh hymns), in the manner bestowed by the Gurus and practiced traditionally, is the sole form of worship given in the Sikh ‘maryada’. It is this ‘Ang’, this fusion of *Shabad* (hymn) raag and taal that we call *Gurmat Sangeet*.

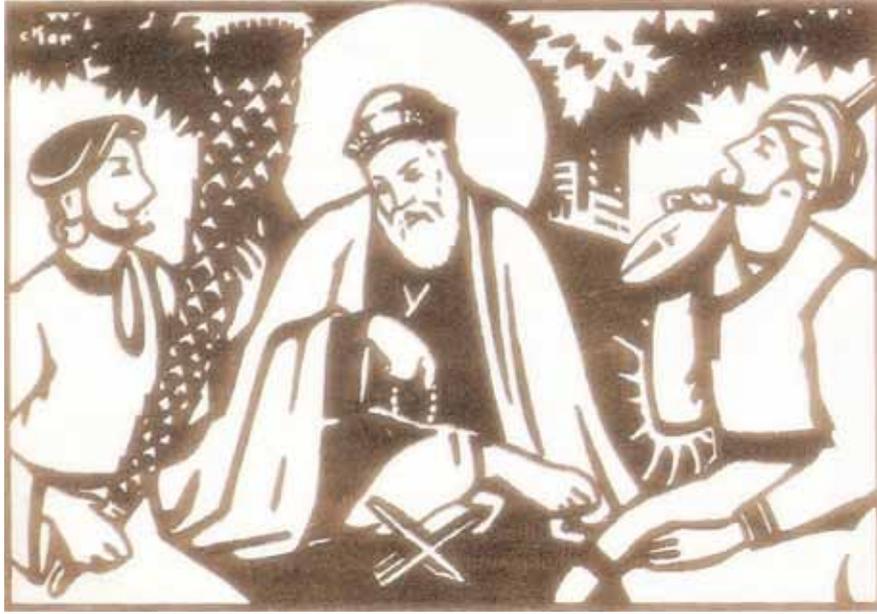
The Sikh religion, coming into being in the 15th/16th centuries in northern India, encompassed all aspects of man as a social being. It was a socio-politic-cum-economic regeneration which imbibed in itself the most humane and the best of the then existing elements of various religious thoughts. From them, was recast a composite concept of the Divine Being (God) in relation to man and his spirit, totally in harmony with the cosmos, as a manifestation of Divinity, to be realised on a socio-economic and cultural plane – a concept of redemption through noble living without the percept of a “hereafter”,



*Saranda, created by Sri Guru Hargobind Sahib*



*Sikh soldiers at Keertan in Flanders, during the Great War 1914-15.*



Guru Nanak Dev with his faithful disciples Mardana (with rabaab) and Bala.

a “day of judgement”, or a “heaven” or a “hell” or reward or retribution. The Sikh religion as such did not accept divinity in the mould of the existing religio-philosophic thought, nor did it subscribe to ritual and the existing forms of worship, deeming them as idle and not compatible with the evolved man and his rationalism. It had to break with the blind faith of the emotion-dominated non-scientific human limitations which compelled him to submit to various idols representing the phenomena of nature, elements of the universe and super humans contrived from myths and mythology. In the new thought Divinity became at one personal, finite and infinite, the timelessness

and the ultimate, for which the spirit of man could, and should, aspire.

In the opening stanza of *Jap Ji Sahib*, Guru Nanak Dev, after outlining that neither cogitation nor silence, nor penances nor intellectual interpolations can help man attain Divine acceptability (*Sachiaaraa*), raised the question as to how “His divine approval” (*Sachiaaraa*), can be obtained and states the fundamental postulate:

ਕਿਵ ਸਚਿਆਰਾ ਹੋਈਐ ਕਿਵ ਕੂੜੈ ਤੁਟੈ ਪਾਲਿ ॥

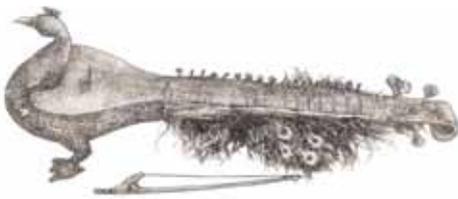
*Kiv sachiaara hoeaa,  
Kiv koorhay tutay paal*

To which the answer given is:

ਹੁਕਮਿ ਰਜਾਈ ਚਲਣਾ ਨਲਕ ਲਿਖਿਆ ਨਾਲਿ ॥

*Hukam rajaee chalnaa  
Nanak likhiana naal.*

But how then to acquire the state where one can live under the DIVINE WILL (*Hukam Rajae*)? The solution is given in the 5th Paurhee:



Taaos, successor to the Saranda

ਗਾਵੀਐ ਸੁਣੀਐ ਮਨਿ ਰਖੀਐ ਭਾਉ ॥

*Gaaveey suneeay  
Man rakheeay bhaao*

Sing His praises, Listen to them and feel His presence.

According to the legend (*Saakhi*) whenever Guru Nanak wished to communicate his divine message, he would ask Bhai Mardana, his companion, to play the rabaab as the Divine message (*Baani*) had come. Thus evolved *Gurmat Sangeet*, *Sahabad Keertan* of the Sikh tradition, with the Great Guru as the singer and Mardana the rabaabi, the first accompanist.

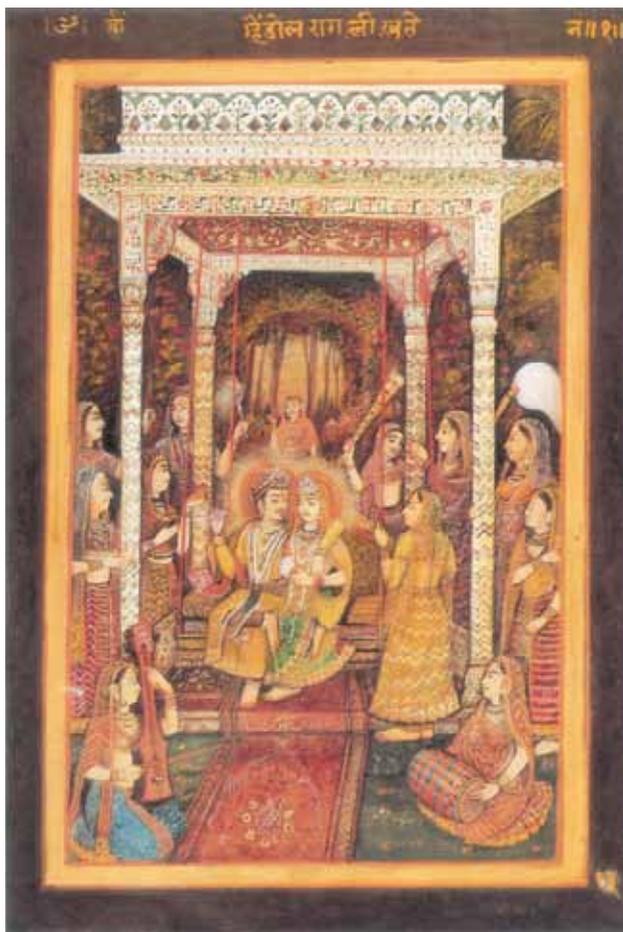
Signing of the Scriptures (*Baani*) in proper music form is perhaps the easiest way of bring the individual being into harmony with the Creator and the wonders of His created Nature (*Qudrat*). Such music (*Shabad Keertan*) in Sikh parlance is called *Gurmat Sangeet*.

The founders of the Sikh movement took to music and poetry as the most effective and efficient vehicles of communication of the Word (*Shabad*) is the Message Divine (*Baani*) and thus the Guru. It conveys eternal knowledge (*Gian*) and spiritual experience and rapturous thoughts which are at once mystic and ecstatic.

In Indian mythology Saraswati (the Goddess of knowledge and art) is said to have created music when she could not satisfactorily communicate her spiritual experience and knowledge through words. She subscribed to the use of “Sound Absolute” (*Nad Braham*). Hence was conveyed “Experience”, as pure

experience, without translating into the language form. The limitations of words and language were thus surpassed. This however had its own limitations. Experience communicated as nascent experience without words cannot be effective on the plane of rationality. The Sikh way of life, and thought, depends and operates on the plane of the rational, so resorting to the absolute form of communication, however noble, could not fit into the dynamic concept of emancipation and redemption through knowledge and action of man as a social being.

*Shabad Keertan* i.e., words (*Shabad*) set to raag and rhythm, embodies the “experience – communicating” ability of singing, “objectified emotions” character of raag, the “infinite concept” of *Taal* (rhythm cycles) and the purposeful, meaningful rationalisable and easily understandable character of *Baani* (Scripture) in the form of *Shabad*. Verse and music, when brought together, create beauty and sweetness and generate a power that



An artist's depiction of Raag Hindol.

by-passes the critical and calculative check barriers of intellect. This accesses the consciousness and lifts it into ecstasies and fills it with profound devotion and love, thereby bringing the listener into direct contact with the Eternal.

In Sikh theology, the God-head is perceived as Timeless (*Akaal*) and Formless (*Nirankaar*) Supreme being; the Eternal Truth (*Sat*), which is both absolute and Immanent, One and the Many manifest *Ek-Onkar*. Word (*Shabad*) is the Guru and the Guru is the Enlightener, Instructor, who shows the path and puts the mortal in direct communication with the Supreme Being. Thus praises of the Lord are sung only in the *Baani*, the *Shabad* as revealed by the Gurus. Besides spiritual enlightenment, the Sikh scripture imparts guidance as to how the human span of life has to be fruitfully and successfully lived, so that it receives divine approval, here and hereafter.

The entire structure of Sikh religious thought and practice is based on the concept of a Formless Being and consequently the Sikh worship form also uses a formless vehicle in the form of singing of the Scriptures. The Fifth Guru, Guru Arjan Dev who compiled the *Guru Granth Sahib*, and who established the practice of singing of scriptures at the Harmandir in Amritsar as the sole form of worship, states that after evaluating various prevalent forms and means of reaching the ultimate, he concluded that “singing of the God’s praises” is the best and only form of effective worship and thus acceptable in the Sikh religion.

ਪਾਠੁ ਪੜਿਓ ਅਰੁ ਬੇਦੁ ਬੀਚਾਰਿਓ ਨਿਵਾਲਿ ਭੁਭੰਗਮ ਸਧੇ ॥  
ਪੰਚ ਜਨਾ ਸਿਉ ਸੰਗੁ ਠ ਛੁਟਕਿਓ ਅਧਿਕ ਅਰੰ ਬੁਧਿ ਬਧੇ ॥

*I read the holy texts and dwelt on the Vedas, and  
Controlled my breath and cleansed my inner system,  
But I abandoned not the Society of five (desires) and  
Was bound to egohood more and more.*

ਪਿਆਰੇ ਇਨਬਿਧਿ ਮਿਲਣੁ ਠਜਾਈ ਮੈ ਕੀਏ ਕਰਮ ਅਣਕਾ ॥  
ਹਾਰਿ ਪਰਿਓ ਸੁਆਮੀ ਕੈ ਦੁਆਰੈ ਦੀਜੈ ਬੁਧਿ ਬਿਬੇਕਾ ॥ ਰਹਾਉ ॥

*O dear! These are not the ways to meet the God,  
I tried any, number of them.*

*So, prostrate at the Master's Door and pray  
"O God, Bless me with a Discriminating Intellect (Pause)."*

ਮੇਨਿ ਭਇਦਿ ਕਰਪਾਤੀ ਰਹਿਦਿ ਲਾਨ ਫਿਰਿਦਿ ਬਠਮਾਹੀ ॥  
 ਤਟ ਤੀਰਥ ਸਭ ਧਰਤੀ ਕ੍ਰਮਿਦਿ ਦਬਿਧਾ ਛੁਟਕੈ ਨਹੀ ॥

*I abide in silence and made of my hands the bowl, and  
 Wandered naked through the woods  
 And I visited all the pilgrim places and river banks,  
 Yes, the whole earth; but the sense of duality stuck on*

ਮਨ ਕਾਮਨਾ ਤੀਰਥ ਜਾਇ ਬਸਿਦਿ ਸਿਰਿ ਕਰਵਤ ਧਰਾਏ ॥  
 ਮਨ ਕੀ ਮੈਲ ਨ ਏਤਰੈ ਇਹ ਬਿਧਿ ਜੇ ਲਖ ਜਤਨ ਕਰਾਏ ॥

*My mind's cravings led me to abide at the holy places;  
 Yes, I chose to be sawn alive  
 But my mind's scum was not cleansed thus,  
 Howsoever I tried.*

ਕਨਿਕ ਕਾਮਿਨੀ ਹੈਵਰ ਗੈਵਰ ਬਹੁ ਬਿਧਿ ਦਨੁ ਦਾਤਾਰਾ ॥  
 ਅੰਨਬਸਤ੍ਰ ਭੂਮਿ ਬਹੁ ਅਰਧੇ ਨਹ ਮਿਲੀਐ ਹਰਿ ਦੁਆਰਾ ॥

*I gifted away gold, women and horses and elephants  
 To be acclaimed a man of charity,  
 Yea, I offered in alms food, clothes, and land  
 But did not get to the Lord's Door.*

ਪੂਜਾ ਅਰਚਾ ਬੰਦਨ ਡੰਡਉਤ ਖਟੁ ਕਰਮਾ ਰਤੁ ਰਹਤਾ ॥  
 ਹਉ ਹਉ ਕਰਤ ਬੰਧਨਮਹਿ ਪਰਿਆ ਨਾ ਮਿਲੀਐ ਇਹ ਜੁਗਤਾ ॥

*I performed worship, and made flower-offerings  
 (to the Gods)  
 Yea, I prostrated like a log and performed six kinds of actions.  
 But I was tied to my self and attuned not to my God  
 This way too.*

ਜੋਗ ਸਿਧ ਆਸਣ ਚਉਰਾਸੀਹ ਏ ਭੀ ਕਰਿ ਕਰਿ ਰਹਿਆ ॥  
 ਵਡੀ ਆਚਜਾ ਫਿਰਿ ਫਿਰਿ ਜਨਮੈ ਹਰਿ ਸਿਉ ਸੰਗੁ ਨਗਹਿਆ ॥

*I practiced Yoga, like a Siddha, and all the eighty four Postures  
 And achieved longevity, but met not the Lord and Kept on  
 Taking birth over and over again.*

ਰਾਜ ਲੀਲਾ ਰਾਜਨਕੀ ਰਚਨਾ ਕਰਿਆ ਹੁਕਮੁ ਅਫਾਰਾ ॥  
 ਸੇਜ ਸੋਹਨੀ ਚੰਦਨ ਚੋਆ ਨਕ ਘੋਰ ਕਾ ਦੁਆਰਾ ॥

*I ruled over lands and indulged in regal pleasures, and swelled  
 by ego, I issued commands.  
 Slept on luxurious beds perfumed with sandalwood scent, but  
 fell into hell at the end.*

ਹਰਿ ਕੀਰਤਿ ਸਾਧਸੰਗਤਿ ਹੈ ਸਿਰਿ ਕਰਮਨਕੈ ਕਰਮਾ ॥  
 ਕਹੁ ਲਕੜ ਤਿਸੁ ਭਇਦਿ ਪਰਾਪਤਿ ਜਿਸੁ ਪੁਰਬ ਲਿਖੇ ਕਾ ਲਹਨਾ ॥

*The highest deed is the singing of the Lord's Praises in the  
 Company of the Guru in the Baani (Sadh Sangat).  
 Sayeth Nanak; He alone attains it in whose lot it is so  
 Writ by God.*

ਤੇਰੇ ਸੇਵਕੁ ਇਹ ਰੀਗਿ ਮਾਰਾ ॥  
 ਭਇਦਿ ਕ੍ਰਿਪਾਲੁ ਦੀਨ ਦੁਖ ਭੰਜਨੁਹਰਿ  
 ਹਰਿ ਕੀਰਤਨਿ ਇਹੁ ਮਨੁਰਾਰਾ ॥ ਰਹਾਉ ਦੂਜਾ ॥

(ਸੋਰਠਮਹਲਾ ੫ ਪੰ: ੬੪੧)

*Thy Servant, O Lord! Is imbued thus with thy Love,  
 And Thou art kind to him, and he sorrows no more,  
 Inebriated with singing Thy Praise. (Second Pause)  
 (Sorath M.5 Page : 641)*



Keertan at the Darbar  
 Sahib "at Umritsizar"  
 (from a drawing by W.  
 Carpenter.)

In raag Bilawal, the Guru says:

ਜਤੁ ਸੰਜਮ ਤੀਰਥ ਚਲਾ ਜੁਗਾ ਕਾ ਧਰਮੁ ਹੈ ਕਲਿ ਮਹਿ ਕੀਰਤਿ ਹਰਿਨਾਮਾ ॥

*Celibacy, self-discipline and pilgrimages*

*Are the faiths of those ages*

*In the dark ages (Kal i.e. present) glorification*

*Of Lord's name is the only righteous deed*

It is again reiterated:

ਕਰਮ ਧਰਮ ਪਥੰਡ ਜੋ ਈਸਹਿ ਤਿਨਜਮੁ ਜਾਗਾਤੀ ਸੁਟੈ ॥  
ਲਿਥਾਣ ਕੀਰਤ ਨੁਗਾਵ੍ਹੁ ਕਰਤੇ ਕਾ ਨਿਮਖ ਸਿਮਰਤ ਜਿਤੁ ਛੁਟੈ ॥

(ਸੁਹੀ ਮਹਲਾ ਪ. ਪੰ: ੪੭੯੭ ॥)

*The rituals, religious rites and hypocrisies which are seen,*

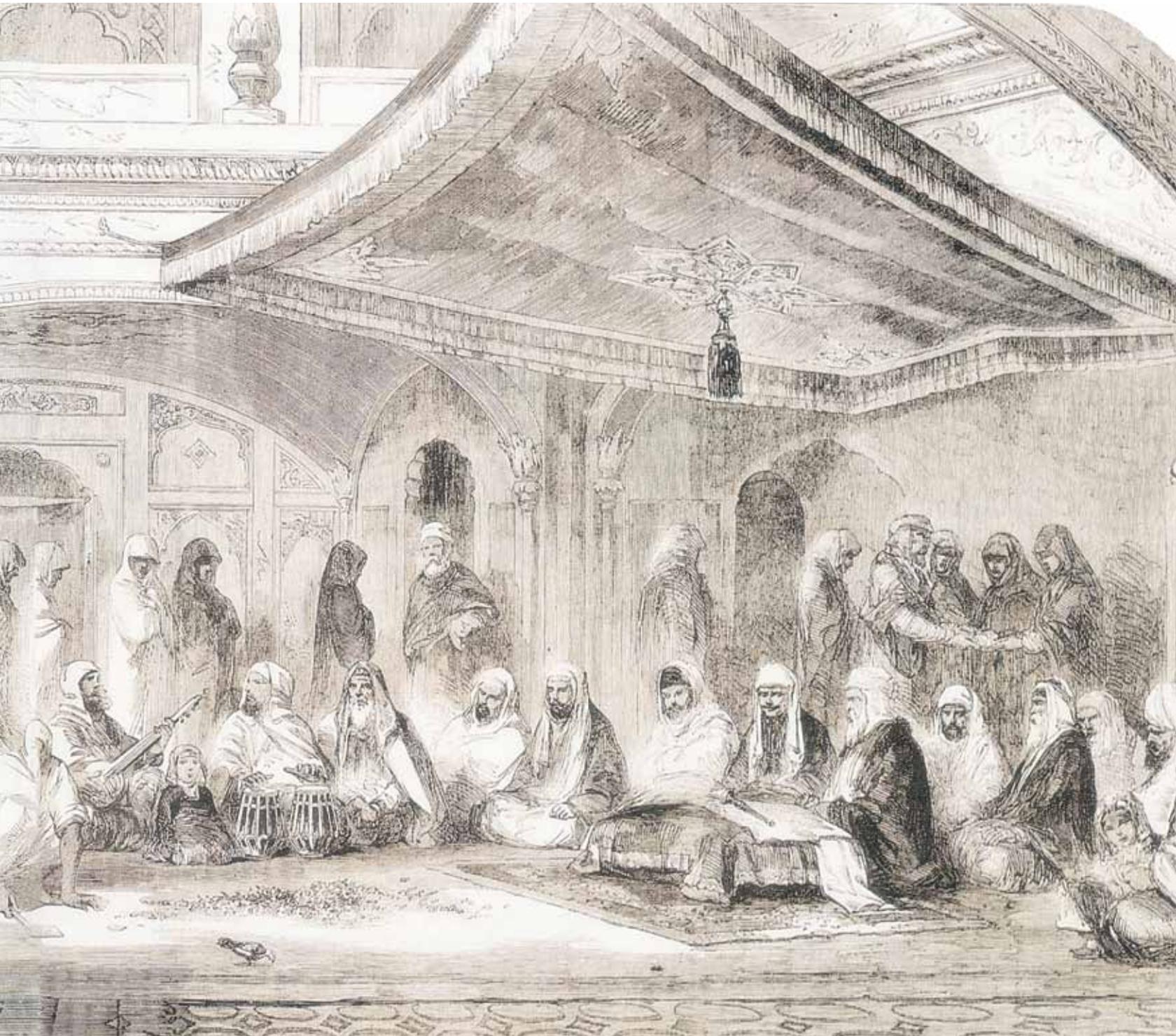
*Them plunders yama, the tax gatherer*

*Sing thou the pure praise of the Creator,*

*Contemplating whom even for a moment*

*Thou shalt be emancipated*

(Suhi M.5 Page : 4797)



For Sikhs, worship is not passive adoration. It is a masculine subscription of human-being (*Purakh*), towards his Master the Lord, the Timeless Man (*Akal Purakh*) whom he holds supreme. It is the devotion of a liberated man who does not stoop. His Songs are not an appeal to the sensual alone by being just lyrical. His singing portrays love, so it should be sweet, that is musical. But this is the spiritual love, the pure one. His songs must have a deep sense of longing (*Birhaa*) in the sense perceived in Indian classical music and not the bemoanings of modern day singing. This longing (*Birhaa*), the yearning of the individual soul for the universal soul (Divinity) from which it has been separated, is the essence and essential of relationship of man with God, and a key element of the Sikh prayer and worship. This longing for the *Akaal Purakh* is to be kindled within the individual by singing (*Keertan*) of the Word (*Shabad*);

ਬਿਰਹਾ ਬਿਰਹਾ ਅਖੀਐ ਬਿਰਹਾ ਤੂ ਸਲਤਨੁ ॥  
ਫਰੀਦਾ ਜਿਤੁ ਤਨਿਬਿਰਹੁ ਠਉਪਜੈ ਸੇ ਕੁਲੁ ਜਾਣੁ ਮਸਾਨੁ ॥

*Men talk of the Lord's love and its pang  
O' the Lord's pang, thou art the monarch of all,  
Farida, the body, in which the Lord's love swells up not,  
Deem thou that body to be the cremation ground  
He who loves, attains the Lord*



*Bhai Ajit Singh, dhadi jatha.*

Good music, even without words, must have a thought content, only then it enobles the Spirit, tranquilises and purgates the self in the Aristotelian sense of purgation. It is, therefore, essential that the composition of the song must be capable of enobling, or at least communicating chaste sensibilities. The sensibility of the 'composition' (*Reet*) and the style of singing must therefore be complementary to the 'intent' (*Bhaav* – meaning, *Arth*) of the 'words' (*Shabad*). In Gurbani we read about 'Sahaj Dhun'.

The Sikh *Keertan* not only takes this aspect of art into consideration but also goes one step further. It combines the Beat (*Taal*) Tempo (*Laiy*) the poetic meter and even the structure of the poetry with the structure of the classical Indian music.

The beat (*Taal*) is defined in many of the *Shabads* and mentioned as 'Ghar'. The *Shabad* construction and meter of the poetry is so set up that the pattern of the 'Beat' does not break up the sentence construction. In fact it accentuates its thought content. The 'Ghar' concept is indicative thereof, and the 'Partaal' *shabads* are a specialty of this aspect.

Then there is the Pause (*Rahaao*) in the *Shabad*. Almost all *Shabads* have the indicator 'Rahaao' mentioned after one of its sentences. This is significant. The aesthetes in Indian musicology define the structure of a composition (especially in traditional Dhrupad style) as consisting of *Asthai* or the 'burden', the *Antraa*, the *Sanchari* and the *Abhogh*, interpreted the thesis, anti-thesis, synthesis and limitation or 'ambit' or limitation, of the raag respectively. This very definition lifts the art of Indian music on to the plane of sublime. Like all great arts it becomes the resolution of the paradox. The Sikh poetic scriptures too being sublime in nature, the



*Kirtan by Prof. Paramjot Singh.*

initiators of the *Shabad Keertan* concept structured their poetry and their singing in such a manner that it completely fits into this pattern and it becomes enobling and effective.

It is an established principle in *Keertan* that the sentence before the pause (*Rahaao*) is required to be sung as the *asthai* or the 'burden'. It is so because this sentence, (the *tuk*) always contained the gist of the thought content of the *Shabad*, the hymn. Also the

sentence after the pause (*Rahaao*) elaborates, explains, puts forth and explains the other aspect of thought like the *antra*. Thus the whole concept is of an integrated approach of thought (*bhaav*), emotion, (*geet*) and the beat (*taal*), the flux of time in one inseparable whole.

Such is the importance of music and raags in *Gurmat Sangeet*, that the entire Sri Guru Granth Sahib is divided into chapters headed under the names of 31 raags of the Indian classical musical traditions. Beginning with Sri raag and ending with Jaijaiwanti, all compositions have the title of raag appended to it, signifying the raag in which the stanza was first composed and desired to be sung in by the Gurus.

*Keertan* envelops the personality on the sensual plane melody, on the intellectual plane in the rationale of the scripture, the *Baani* and on the emotional plane in the nobility and catholicity of the Indian classical music. Thus the experience becomes total, and the longing (*Birhaa*) links the One with the Ultimate. This worship thus is a total involvement of the human psyche. It is similar to the experiencing of His Creation on all planes and described in Gurbani the experience of His presence thus becomes total".

ਅਖੀ ਕੁਦਰਤਿ ਕੰਨੀ ਬਾਣੀ ਮੁਖਿ ਆਖਣੁ ਸਚੁ ਠਾਮੁ ॥

Whosoever sees the Lord's omnipresence  
With his eyes, hears the Guru's word  
With his ears, and utters the True Name  
With his mouth.

He attains the full wealth of honour  
And his attention is fixed on the Lord.

Thus when Hymns (*Shabads*) are rendered to purely sensual, erotic type of tunes, not only the

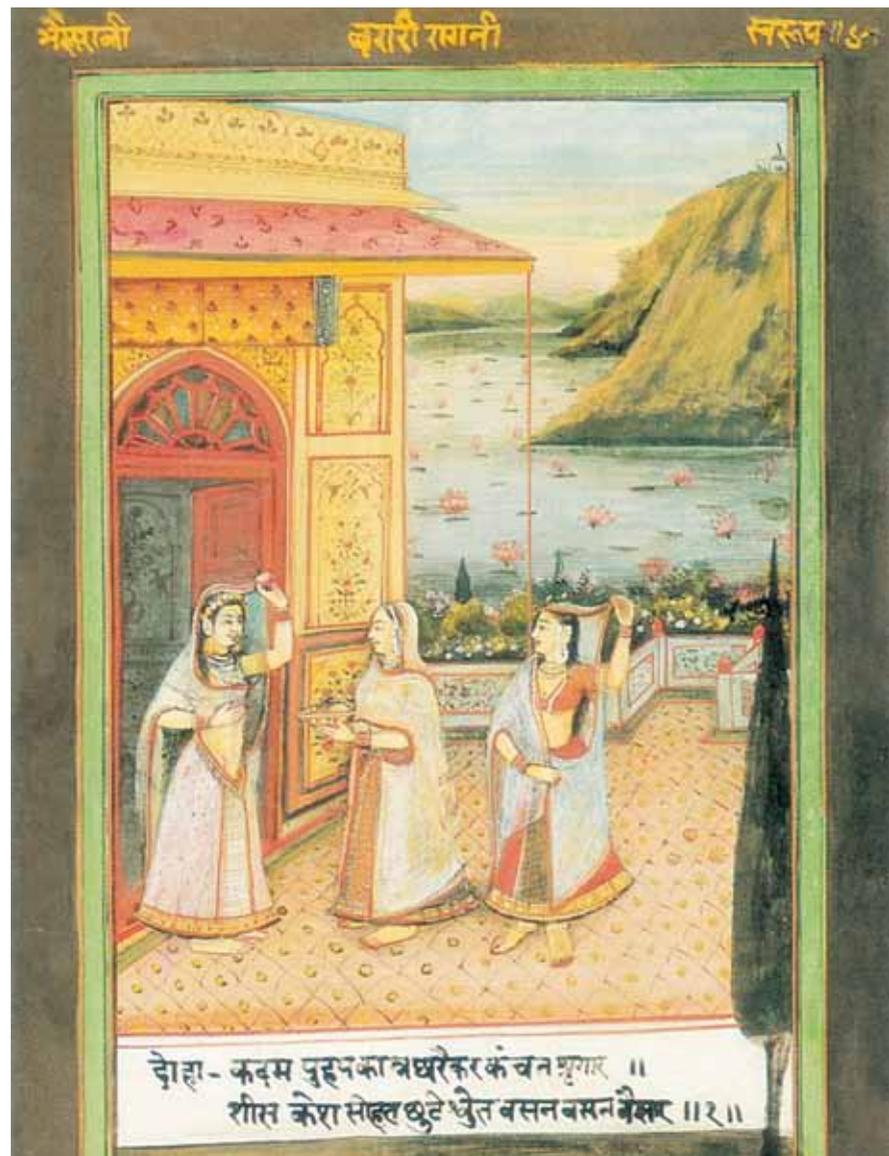
aesthetics but the very purpose, sanctity, and the sacremony of worship is violated in a most abject manner.

The Guru says:

ਮੇਰੇ ਮੋਹਨਸ੍ਵਣੀ ਇਹ ਠ ਸੁਣਾਏ ॥  
ਸਾਕਤ ਗੀਤ ਠਾਦੁ ਧੁਨਿ ਗਾਵਤ ਬੋਲਤ ਬੋਲ ਅਜਾਏ ॥

"Oh my beloved! Let me not hear the heretic degrades  
Who sing tunes and songs but speak unbecoming language".

The singing of the *Shabad* is not to subordinate the Word with the music. The Sikh *Keertan* has to be a judicious combination of them, with one end grounded on the earth and the other soaring high towards heaven and Infinity. It is the Word that must dominate. It is the spiritual aspect which is glorified so that the mind gets attuned with the Will of the Master and transcends into a state of peace and bliss.



An artist's view of Raag Bairari

Sikhism is a unique religion. Its symbols, practices, rituals (if so) and customs are also typical and unique. Whereas this religion operates on a socio-economic plane, the attainment of the Formless (*Nirankaar*) Wondrous Lord (*Wahe Guru*), is achieved through an absolute medium. This way of life is at once mundane and metaphysically spiritual. It is a common notion that the Sikh religion emerged from the Hindu way of thinking. However, it must be appreciated that a particular social culture can also

*Keertan* has been given the prime place in the Sikh tradition as this is the sole form of worship prescribed "To Sing the Praise of the Creator".

Even if *Naad* (absolute sound) was *Braham* (primary / absolute), *Geet* (emotion/song) first emerged as the voice of the soul and found expression in the feelings and emotions of humans, and in the songs of the folk lores and music of the society. This folk music, put in the crucible of the process of evolution of literary and artistic creations of intellect and subjected to the regimentation of organised

Granth Sahib) has been written and composed on the basis of folk tunes and lores of the contemporary Punjab, using popular folk lores associated with the day-to-day occurrences of common people. These folk lores were polished, burnished, refined and elevated with raags and set to suitable rhythm patterns. The psycho-mystic content of the then prevailant raags was fused with folk lores and a new social content was injected into the art form of music, which is much deeper in appeal and acceptance than common music and which



The legendary trio of Bhai Gurcharan Singh, Avtar Singh and Swaran Singh

emerge from a diametrically opposite ethos. Likewise when Guru Nanak Dev moulded the traditional Indian classical music into *Shabad Keertan*, it was a miraculous transformation, the result whereof was aesthetically perfect, and its intent and its effect on the mind became enobling and metaphysically liberating.

thought and expression, takes the form of classical music and arts. So also does Indian music tradition have its inseparable roots in folk music. Human social psyche too has its roots in and emotional ties with its folk culture – its psycho-anthropological roots.

Quite a substantial part of the *Baani* (Scriptures in the Guru

has far deeper influence and effect on the mind. Thus, various forms of folk music and poetry had been inseparably embodied in the Keertan tradition. Some significant forms of these are:

- (1) *Alaahaneaaa* (2) *Anjalee* (3) *Sud*
- (4) *Shohilla* (5) *Keharlay* (6) *Kaafi*
- (7) *Ghorhiaan* (8) *Chhant* (9) *Dekhaney*
- (10) *Birharhay* (11) *Vanjaaraa* (12) *Vaar*.

ਕਗੜ ਦੀ ਕੁਪਯੇ ਕਪਿ ਕਟਕ. ਬਗੜ ਦੀ ਬਜਨ ਖੱਜੀਯ ।  
 ਤਗੜ ਦੀ ਤੇਗ ਝਲਹਲੀ ਗਗੜ ਦੀ ਜੋਧਾ ਗਲ ਗੱਜੀਯ ।  
 ਸਗੜ ਦੀ ਸੂਰ ਸੰਮੂਹੇ, ਲਗੜ ਦੀ ਆਰਣ ਰੰਗ ਰੱਚਯੇ ।  
 ਸੰਸਗੜ ਦੀ ਸੁਭਟ ਨੱਝੇ ਸਮਰ, ਫਗੜਈ ਫੁੱਕ ਫਲੀਅਰ ਕਰੇ ।  
 ਸੰਸਗੜ ਦੀ ਸਮਟੇ ਸੁੰਕੜੇ ਫੁੱਕਿਯਤਿ ਫੁੱਕਿ ਫਿਰਿ ਫਿਰਿ ਯੇ ।

*Kagarh di Kupio, Kapi Katak, Bagash di Bajan Rann Bajio  
 Tagarh di Teg Jhalhali, Gagarh di Jodha gal Gajjiye  
 Sagarh di soor samohay. Nagarh di aaran rang rachey  
 Sangagarh di subhat nache samar  
 Phagarh dip hunk Phaniar karey  
 Sansagarh di Samattay sunkarhai Phanpat Phan Phir Phir  
 Dhare.*

*Shabads* sung in appropriate music are the quickest way to put the human soul into harmony with the Creator and the working of His created Nature. Such music in Sikh parlance is called *Shabad Keertan*.

In the words of the learned musicologist Raghav R. Menon:

“Sikhism is perhaps the only religion that uses music as ritual, liturgy, prayer and insights.

Hinduism is cautious and defensive on the subject of music and uses it sparingly in religious observance. There is, of course, the bhajan, but bhajan is not part of the essential ritual, most of the minutiae of the religious core of Hinduism are, in fact, based on tantric mudras (gestures) drawn from a subtly concealed and deeply hidden, esoteric inheritance. Sikhism, on the other hand, believes in subtly subverting the inner resistance of the human being, transform and regenerate him and trap him into an awareness of his inner essence. Indeed, Gurmat Sangeet is among Sikhism’s essential tools of transformation”.

**When liturgy and form of worship lose their integrated character, when its practice is alienated and contrary to the fundamental precept, then mere ceremony or the idle act becomes only a ritual. Ritualism has no place in Sikh way of life – in fact it is negated and to be decried.**

Such is the sublime plane and pedestal on which keertan in the tradition of Gurmat Sangeet was established and placed by the great Gurus.

This tradition and its purity was maintained by the community and preserved through the turbulent and dark days of the eighteenth century. Leaders of the Panth, attuned to the spirit of the Khalsa generated by the Gurus, practiced the precepts of the faith. The great chief Jassa Singh Ahluwalia, learnt Keertan and performed it in the presence of Mata Sundari Ji in Delhi, and was an accomplished *keertaneea*.

The nineteenth century saw establishment of the Sarkar Khalsa. During the glorious era of Sikh rule, Amritsar and the Harmandar Sahib in particular, were places of pilgrimage for lovers of spiritual music. Throughout the 19th century *Gurumat Sangeet* maintained its pristine purity, nobility and a character. *Rabaabis* and *raagis* performed Keertan with dedication, devotion and

commitment to the spirit and the meaningfulness given to this, what one may call liturgy and art form.

A general decline set in after the mid-twenties of the twentieth century. The previous generations, proponents of Keertan in its high tradition, aged into rarity. Patronage by the unknowing leadership, indifference to articles of

faith and pursuit only of pelf and power, meant that the great heritage of the community, *Gurmat Sangeet*, gradually degenerated into a state where, what is accepted as keertan by most of the raagis of today, is not even a faint shadow of its original self; nor does it seem to be the vehicle of what was intended to convey. It almost seems to have lost its purpose.

Keertan performed in the Gurmat Sangeet tradition is a form and means of worship, the only one prescribed for Sikhs. It is not a source of entertainment. This has to be understood. Putting it a colloquial way, classical music at best manifests *raags* and *raaginis* (as the emotional entity), prevalent Indian common music produces imagery of dance, love and performers on the silver and small screens. But Keertan must give us divine experience. The *Baani* thus sung must elevate us, put us into bliss and give peaceful mystic experience of being One with All – it must enoble us, it is food of the soul. Unfortunately, by and large, today’s Keertan does not come anywhere near this. It is therefore the obligation of the present generation, mindful of the survival and propagation of the Sikh way of life, its



*The Sarinda, Hoshiarpur, second half of 19th century. Carved teak inlaid with ivory. (Victoria and Albert Museum)*

traditions, its practises and the dictates of the great Gurus, to preserve and spread the correct liturgy.

A very prominent style of these folk forms in *Gurmat Sangeet* is the *Vaar-an* ode or a ballad. In folk tradition, Vaar's were sung in the memory and praise of deeds of warriors and heroes. This form was used to raise the morale of people by narrating deeds of their valour and honour. In consonance with the spirit of the emerging new faith that Sikhism was, and its commitment to aggressive propagation of the good and dynamic redemption of the people, the Gurus wrote *Vaars* (odes), singing the glory of

maimed King Asraj). The legend of Asraj was very popular in Rajasthan and the minstrels would sing this story in form of songs. Based on the metric construction and the style (*Ang*) on which its *Pauris* were composed, a format was established for singing this *Vaar* by the Gurus. It opens with the declaration:

ਅਪਨਿ ਆਪੁ ਸਾਜਿਦਿ ਅਪਨਿ ਰਚਿਦਿ ਲਉ ॥  
ਜੇ ਸਉ ਚੰਦਾ ਖੁਬਰੈ ਮੁਰਜ ਚੜਹਿ ਹਜਾਰ ॥ ਏਤੇ  
ਚਾਣੁ ਹੋਇਆ ਗੁਰ ਬਿਨੁ ਘੋਰ ਅੰਧਾਰ ॥

*Such is His glory, and so goes on the ode.*

These lores are to be sung in the old traditional style and are known

worship of the Absolute through sound, absolute *Naad Braham*, the religious practices of religion prior to Sikhism recommended worship out of the social context. They recommended renunciation and penances and soon by an individual in solitude. In the Sikh way of life religion is practised by participation at the socio economic level while living a normal life. The attainment of the Universal, the Timeless is recommended through deed, living and knowledge (*Gian*). Thus, in Sikhism path is taken by singing of the *Baani*.

The *Maryada* at the Golden Temple at Amritsar is that of constant and continuous music, *Keertan* divine and sublime, is carried on day and night by relays of *Keertan Jathas (Raagis)* except for a few hours at midnight when cleaning and washing of the Darbar Sahib is being done. At that time, too, those who do the service, keep singing *Shabads*. This practise was first established by the 5th Guru Arjan Dev and has continued ever since. No other prayer, ritual, discourse of any kind or preaching as such is allowed at the holy precinct of the Harimandar.

The Tenth Guru's contribution to Sikh music too was exceptional, as is evident from his compositions in the *Dasam Granth*. There are 9 different styles of poetry, (*Chhands*), totalling 73 compositions in the *Dasam Granth* that deal directly with music and are called *Sangeet Chhands*. One such in original, is given as it is, is impossible to translate their rhythm and beat. The beauty of these compositions can be appreciated only by one who is conversant with playing on the mridang.

## Dhuneean-Lores

**Vaar Majh** Malik Mathuree Tatha Chanderharhaa Sohia Kee Dhunee

**Vaar Aasa** Tunday Asrajay Kee Dhunee

**Vaar Gauri** Rai Kamaal Dee Maujdee Kee Vaar Kee Dhunee

**Vaar Gujari** Sikander Biraham Kee Vaar Kee Dhunee

**Vaar Vadhans** Lalaa Behleema Kee Dhunee

**Vaar Raamkali** Jodhay Veerai Poorbani Kee Dhunee

**Vaar Saarang** Rai Mehmay Hasnay Kee Dhunee

**Vaar Malaar** Raaay Kailaash Tathaa Maalday Kee Dhunee

**Vaar Kanhrhaa** Moosay Kee Vaar Kee Dhunee

the Almighty. There are 22 Vaars incorporated in the Granth Sahib. These Vaars are written under different raags/headings and 9 Vaars out of these are composed on basis of the popular prevailing folklores of the 15th and 16th century Northern India.

The most popular and significant of the *Vaars* is one in *Aasaa* raag, which is prescribed as the daily morning service in all Gurdwaras. It has the headings *Aasaa Mohalla 1 (Aasaa of the 1st Guru) Vaar Slokan Naal, Tunday Asraje dee Dhunee* (lore of the

as *Dhunees*, and are mentioned as subheadings on 9 out of the total 22 *Vaars* in the Guru Granth Sahib.

Each of these lores has a legend and a story of its own. Each of them has a different poetic metre, stanza, structure and embellishments with which they are sung. Traditional *raagis* (singers of *Gurmat Sangeet*) sang these lores (*Dhunee*) regularly till late. Now unfortunately, only a few of them are familiar with these traditional compositions.

Just as *alaap* singing of Indian classical tradition is said to be

# Keertan Maryada in Harmandar Sahib

The practice of continuous singing of hymms (Shabads) was established at the Harmandar Sahib by Guru Arjan Dev, where Keertan is performed for eighteen to twenty hours every day no discourse, speech or any other form of liturgy is allowed.

The tradition (*maryada*) at the Harmandar of performing Gurmat Sangeet is divided in *chowkees* (sittings). Originally, a team of 'raagis' consisted of four persons, one lead signer, two stringed instrument accompanists and one tabla accompanist. Each sitting or chowkee had four segments to it

- (i) At the beginning, a lehra on the stringed instruments is played to establish the environ of the raag, or a mangla charan or dandaot is sung in the alaap 'ang' to the accompaniment of a slow "theke" on the tabla.
- (ii) A shabad is sung in a dhrupad, or other vilambat tempo.
- (iii) A shabad or a reet (traditional composition) in a medium tempo in the shorter 'taal' is sung. This could also include parmaan (illustrations from Gurbani).
- (iv) the chowkee is concluded by singing a Paurhee in an appropriate raag for time of the day.

A round the clock liturgy at the Harmandar is divided into 15 chowkees :

- ⌘ *Before dawn Tin Pehrey Dee Chowkee: 2:45-3:50 a.m.)*  
Keertan begins
- ⌘ *Aasaa Dee Vaar Dee Chowkee : 3:50 to 7:15 a.m.*  
⌘ *Bilawal Deean Chowkeenan : 7:15 - 8:10 a.m.*  
Keertan usually begins in raag Bilawal
- ⌘ *Bilawal Dee Chowkee : 8:10 - 9:10 a.m.*  
(Keertan in Raag of the time)
- ⌘ *Bilawal Dee Chowkee: 9:00 -10:00 a.m.*  
(Keertan in Raag of the time)
- ⌘ *Bilawal Dee Chowkee : 10:00 -11:00 a.m.*  
(Keertan in Raag of the time)

- ⌘ *Anand Dee Chowkee: 11:00 -12:00*  
(Keertan is concluded with a Paurhee and Anand Sahib followed by Ardaas.)
- ⌘ *Charan Kamal Dee Chowkee : 12:00 -1:15 p.m.*  
(Keertan is begun in raag Sarang)
- ⌘ *Charan Kamal Dee Chowkee: 1:15 - 2:00 p.m.*  
(Keertan is raag Sarang and other afternoon raags.)  
[chowkee concluded]
- ⌘ *Charan Kamal Dee Chowkee : 2:20 - 2:50 p.m.*  
(Keertan in raag Dhanasri and other raags of the time, ending with the Shabads Charan Kamal Prabh Ke Nit Dhiavon and Gagan Main Thaal, followed by Anand Sahib (6 paurhees) Ardaas-concluding the chowkee.)
- ⌘ *Charan Kamal Dee Chowkee : 3:20 - 4:20 p.m.*  
(Keertan in raag of the time of the day)
- ⌘ *Sodar Dee Chowkee: 4:20 - 5:20 p.m.*  
(Keertan continues in-raags of the time. One shabad is sung in *Aasaa raag* followed by Sodar sung in the *Paurhee* form, *Rehrasa* is then recited and followed by *Ardaas*
- ⌘ *Sodar Dee Chowkee : 6:20 to 7:50 p.m.*  
(Shabads of *Arti* are sung followed by a brief *Ardaas*)
- ⌘ *Kalyan Dee Chowkee : 7:25 - 8:25 p.m.*  
(Keertan is begun in *raag Kalyan* or any other evening raag.)
- ⌘ *Final Chowkee (Sampati): 8:25 - 9:30 p.m.*  
(Shabads in raag *Kahnrrhaa* or other raags of the time are sung for half an hour followed by *Hukamnama* and recitation of *Keertan Sohilaa*; the ehowkee is concluded by singing the paurhee from *Kanharha Dee Vaar.*)

During the months of *Magh* and *Phagun*, from the middle of January upto Holi, every chowkee has to begin with a *shabad* in raag *Basant*, and all three *paurhee* of *Basant Dee Vaar* are to be rendered by each of the raagis.

During the rainy season, raag *Malhar* must be sung while raag *Sarang* is avoided by good raagis.

## Bhai Mardana

Mardana, born in 1459 A.D., the son of Badray and Lakho Mirasi (bards) in village Talwandi, and of Muslim parentage was a childhood friend and later life-long companion of Guru Nanak Dev. Being a devout Sikh, he acquired the title of 'Bhai'. He was an accomplished rabaab player and thus called *rabaabi*. He accompanied the great Guru in singing and travelled the world over in the Guru's company. He passed away in the town of Khuram, Afghanistan in 1534 A.D., where he was cremated by Guru Nanak Dev himself. The *keertanias*, following his tradition of singing shabads to the accompaniment of a rabaab, came to be known as rabaabis. So immersed was Bhai Mardana in the spirit of the Guru, that one of his slokas was included



*Bhai Mardana.*

in the Guru Granth Sahib by Guru Arjan Dev and two slokas addressed to him are to be found in the Vaar in raag Bihagrha.

## Bhai Satta and Balwand

The two were singers in the *rabaabi* tradition of shabad rendering during the times of Guru Arjan Dev and Guru Hargobind Sahib and were also accomplished poets.

They composed and sang Ramkali Dee Vaar at the time of anointment of the Fifth Guru to the Gaddi. This Vaar is known as Tikkay Dee Vaar (the Coronation Ode) and has the privilege of being included in the Guru Granth Sahib for its spiritual content.

## Bhai Abdulla and Nath Mall

Bards in the court of Guru Hargobind Sahib and accomplished singers in the Dhaadi tradition of ballads (Vaars) and the folk lores (Dhunnes) set to raga of the Guru Granth Sahib. Their ballad (Vaar), sung at the time of coronation of the Sixth Guru continues to be sung by the Dhaadis of Punjab.

## Jathedar Jassa Singh Ahluwalia

The illustrious Sardar who captured the Red Fort of Delhi was also an accomplished keertania. He acquired this tradition from his mother and had the honour of regularly singing Gurbani in the presence of Mata Sundri ji in his younger days. This reputed warrior was a unique combination of Shakti, Bhakti and Sangeet.

## Bhai Baabak

Besides being an outstanding *rabaabi*, he was also an accomplished soldier and dedicated Sikh of Guru Har Gobind Sahib. Precursor of the Khalsa tradition of Sant Sipahi, he demonstrated his valour and commitment in the battle of Amritsar. Passed on in 1640 A.D. at Kiratpur.

## Bhai Shyam Singh

A dedicated Gursikh keertania of Amritsar who lived for over 90 years, sang Gurmat Sangeet in its purest form to the accompaniment

of a Sarinda at Harmandar Sahib during the nineteenth century, and passed away in the early twenties century.

## Bhai Hira Singh (1879-1926)

An outstanding performer, his keertan was embellished in raag and vairag. A man of great charity and service to community, he was famous for his enchanting renderings.

## Mahant Gajja Singh (1850-1914)

Maestro of Sikh classical devotional music, had his early musical training from Mir Rahmat Ali of Kapurthala where his gurbhai (co-pupil) was Bhai Buba (Mahboob Ali) son of Amir Bahash Rabaabi, a direct descendant of Bhai Phiranda of Bharoana who had provided the first rabaab to Bhai Maradana.

Gajja Singh (later Mahant) was an accomplished 'beenkar' who later became an outstanding 'taaoos' player in the classical tradition, and singer of Gurbani – especially dhrupads, dhamars and parhtaals.



*Mahant Gajja Singh.*

Under patronage of the Maharaja of Patiala, he took up the

project of documenting original 'Reets' and 'Dhunees' as set by Guru Arjan Dev and preserved by oral tradition by Sikh minstrels, but he passed on in June 1914 leaving his work in-complete.

### Bhai Samund Singh (1901-1972)

An outstanding exponent of keertan during his times, he came from a family of Sikh theologians and keertanias. Apart from his father, he acquired his talent from



Bhai Samund Singh.

Bhai Sher Singh of Gujranwala and Bhai Piara Singh Rabaabi. His understanding of the scriptures and his enunciation were as accurate and impeccable as his mastery over the raags.

His forte were the *chhota khayal*, *thumri* and *tappa* 'Ang'. His musicality extended to *dhumpad* and *dhamar* 'ang' of keertan which he also sang on occasions.

An exemplary Gursikh and most melodious keertania, Bhai Samund Singh was an epitome of melody and classical music from whose voice Gurbani flowed incredibly sweetly. His 'laikaari' was unmatched, without distorting the shabads.

### Bhai Jawala Singh (1872 – 1952)

A renowned exponent of the Gurmat Sangeet, whose musical lineage dated back to the times of Guru Arjan Dev and his ancestors had taken Amrit at Anandpur on the first great Baisakhi of 1699.

He had at his command an abundance of traditional and classical composition (*reets*) some



Bhai Jawala Singh.

of which date back to times of the Gurus themselves. He had a vast treasure of *dhunees* (lores), *parhtaals* and other traditional compositions of the Sikh tradition in his repertoire.

A leading member of the Singh Sabha movement courted arrest in the movement for recovering the keys of the Golden Temple treasury taken away by the British and in the Baito Morcha. He presided over the first all India Raagis Conference held in Amritsar in 1942.

### Bhai Chand

An exponent of the *rabaabi* tradition of Gurmat Sangeet, he occupied a prominent place in the galaxy of keertanias during the second quarter of the 20th century, following the traditions



Bhai Chand

of Bhai Mardana, the first rabaabi accompanist of Guru Nanak. Despite being of the Muslim faith, rabaabis were devout singers of Gurbani and expert musicians.

Bhai Chand was a store-house of old compositions (*reets*) and a superb exponent of Gurbani, and was a regular singer at the Harmandar. After partition, he was obliged to move to Pakistan where he passed away in June 1949.

### Bhai Santa Singh (1902-1966)

An outstanding keertania of the post-independence period, Bhai Santa Singh was an



Bhai Santa Singh

accomplished musician with a gift of effective and emotional rendition of *Shabads* and *raags*. A learned classical musician whose purity of rendition of raags was discernable. He was the resident (Hazoori) raagi of Gurdwara Sis Ganj, Delhi.

### Bhai Balbir Singh (1933 - )

Coming from a family with a tradition of Shabad Keertan, Bhai Balbir Singh is a doyen of *raagis* in the present times. Having learnt



Bhai Balbir Singh.

the Gurmat Sangeet tradition from his father Giani Santa Singh of Tarn Taran and his uncles, he enriched his art by learning from Pandit Krishan Rao and Ustad Faiyaz Khan. He performed keertan for 36 years at the Harmandar Sahib. His forte is the exposition of the Dasam Granth Baani in the traditional style and has mastery over *laiyakaari*.

### Bhai Dilbagh Singh and Gulbagh Singh



Bhai Dilbagh and Gulbagh Singh.

The brothers are an example of classical emphasised Keertan. Their singing is a pleasant mixture of qawali and *rabaabi* style of singing.

### Dr. Jagir Singh (1949 - )

Scion of the well-known traditional keetania of Patiala, Bhai Uttam Singh Patang, Dr. Jagir Singh



Dr. Jagir Singh

belongs to the new generation of raagis who has a deep sense of commitment to the purity of Gurmat Sangeet and at the same time has imbibed the seriousness of Indian classical music. His singing is marked by *shudh swar* and he has a melodious voice, catholicity of the raags sung with a somber temperament. He got his doctorate in Gurmat Sangeet from the Punjab University.

### Bhai Tej Pal Singh and Surinder Pal Singh



Bhai Tejpal Singh and Bhai Surinder Pal Singh.

Known as the Singh Bandhus, the brothers are well known exponents

of Hindustani classical music. They acquired their musical expertise from their brother Principal J.S.Sardar and later from the renowned Ustad Amir Khan. The duo are masters of raag, sur and taal. Their Shabad singing is rich in devotion and classical Indian musical tradition, especially the Chhota Khayal 'Ang'.

### Bhai Amrik Singh Zakhmi

He represents the old rabaabi tradition of Keertan acquired from his learned father Bhai Dharam Singh Zakhmi and his uncle Bhai Shamsheer Singh. He comes from a family of Keertanias where in their



Bhai Amrik Singh Zakhmi.

earlier days Bhai Dharam Singh and his three brothers used to perform as a Chowki (foursome) in the old traditional pattern. Bhai Amrik Singh acquired his familiarity with Persian Shabads of the Gurbani and of Bhai Nand Lal from his father who was well versed in traditional languages of the scriptures including Persian. His singing is remarked with 'Parmaan' (illustrations from Gurbani) singing and effective use of rhythm. The family tradition is alive with his brother and his son now forming the team.

# Element of Folk Music and Songs in Guru Granth Sahib

## Allahneena

Songs of sorrow in memory of dearly departed, composition of Guru Nanak Dev in raag Vadhans.

## Anjali

Songs of offering in raag Maaroo.

## Sud

Yearning, song of longing sung in folk tunes the Punjab. Composition of Baba Sunder in raag Raamkali.

## Sohilla

Songs of joy sung at times of births and at weddings. Guru Nanak Dev has given a composition (Shabad) in raag Gauri.

## Kahralay

Songs of camel riders: Guru Ram Das has given two compositions (Shabads) in raag Gauri.

## Kaafi

Love songs of Muslim and Sufi faqirs. The burden of the song is sung repetitively. Kaafis are found in raags Aasaa, Tilang, Soohi and Maaroo. This folk lore later on took the form of a distinctive raag.

## Ghorian

Songs sung by sisters of the groom when he rides the horse to leave for the bride's place. Guru Ram Das used this folk lore in raag Vadhans.

## Chhant

Special love songs, sung by women. These stanzas are composed in various raags.

## Dakhnay

These are Slokas usually written in Lehndi dialect (Western parts of the country including Sindh). Folk drum (dhol) is called 'Dakhna' in the dialect. These compositions are found in Guru Arjan Dev's Maaroo raag and five of the compositions of Sri raag.

## Birharnay

Songs of separation found in raag Aasaa of the Fifth Guru.

## Vannjaara

Folk lore of travelling traders, sung in stretched-out yearning notes. Guru Amar Das has composed Shabads on these lores in Sri Raag.

## Vaar

Odes or ballads of legends, of battles and warriors sung by minstrels, and extremely popular in southern Punjab, bordering Rajputana in medieval times. The Gurus created 21 such odes (Vaar) and the 22nd was composed by the Guru's musicians Bhai Satta and Balwand and they are inscribed in the Guru Granth Sahib.

Nine out of the 21 odes have subtitles indicating folk lores based on which these were composed. The most well-known ode (Vaar) is the one in raag Aasaa and indicated to be sung in the Dhunee (folk lore) of Tunda Asraja as inscribed on the subtitle in Guru Granth Sahib.

## Aasa Dee Vaar

This ode or ballad (Vaar) written under the heading of raag Aasaa was composed by Guru Nanak Dev and is one of the 22 Vaars in Sri Guru Granth Sahib.

### Raags in Sri Guru Granth Sahib

◇ Sri	◇ Maajh	◇ Gaurhi
◇ Aasaa	◇ Gujri	◇ Devgandhari
◇ Bihaagrhaa	◇ Vadhans	◇ Sorath
◇ Dhanasri	◇ Jaitsri	◇ Todi
◇ Bairarhee	◇ Tilang	◇ Soohi
◇ Bilawal	◇ Gaund	◇ Raamkali
◇ Nat Narain	◇ Maali Gaura	◇ Maaroo
◇ Tuakhaaree	◇ Kedaaraa	◇ Bhairo
◇ Basant	◇ Sarang	◇ Malhaar
◇ Kanhrhaa	◇ Kalyan	◇ Parbhati
	◇ Jai Jai Vantee	
◇ Raamkali	◇ Sorath	◇ Kalyan
◇ Bilawal	◇ Devgandhari	◇ Tilang kafi
◇ Paraj	◇ Kafi	◇ Soohi
◇ Saarang	◇ Gaurhi	◇ Dhanaasri
◇ Tilang	◇ Kedaara	◇ Maaroo
◇ Bhairo	◇ Basant	

## Structure of a Vaar

Primary structure of a Vaar consists of a paurhee (stanza) and this Vaar has 24 paurhees written by the first Guru. Later some sloks (staves) were interpolated into it by the second Guru, Guru Angad Sahib, to which some Chhants (quartains) composed by Guru Ram Das, also in raag Aasaa, were added.

The practice of singing Aasaa dee Vaar in the early mornings was started by Guru Angad (then Bhai Lehna) in the presence of Guru Nanak Dev.

This Vaar is written under the sub heading of 'Tunday Asraajay Dee Dhunee'. The folk-lore story of the maimed prince Asraj was a popular ballad of the time. Young Asraj was a victim of vendetta by his step-mother, his hand was cut off and he was sent into exile. Asraj was successful in becoming ruler of the neighbouring principality and later was able to regain due status in his own state.

The last stanza of original folklore runs thus:

*Jit Paaee Asraaj Ji Shahee Ghar Saajay  
Haon Vaarian Vaar*

Respected Asraaj regained His Royal Status

I am sacrifice to this Ode

This stanza was sung in the folk lore

*Jit Paaee Asraaj ji, Waa Ie Waa, Shahee Ghar Saajay*

And the opening Pauhri (Stanza) of Aasa Mahalla I, in Aasaa Dee Vaar is sung by the traditional raagis as:

*Aapinay Aap Saajeo, Aapinay  
Waa-a-a-Waa  
Waa Rachia Naaon*

This structure has further been simplified by common raagis as:

*Aapinay Aap Saajio  
Aapinay e-e-e-Rachia Naon*

For the ending (cordetta) "Haon Vaarian Vaar", the words "Sri Wah-e-Guru" or "Wah-e Guru, Wah-e-e-Guru" are used by the raagis.

The variation in rhythm and melody is so beautifully interpolated and varied, that even in a recital extending to upto more than two and a half hours, interest of the devotee listeners does not slack and the mind stays absorbed, attuned to the thought content and the subject of the ballad.

With the passage of time the emphasis and the rhythm of this Vaar are now being lost, disregarded and shades of the original Dhunee are rarely heard. Much of the spirit and effect depends on the proper handling of the music and rhythm. The Gurus were meticulous in preserving it. Most unfortunately, now, out of sheer ignorance, this priceless heritage is being lost.

## Bhai Avtar Singh Ragi

Born on 8 January 1926, in Village Saidpur in the former Kapurthala State, Bhai Avtar Singh was the 11th generation singer of an illustrious family of Raagis who have successfully preserved and practised this original unique 'ang' (style) of religious music. Alongwith his brother Bhai Gurcharan Singh and their nephew Bhai Swaran Singh (on the tabla) they had been performing Keertan since 1946.

His family association dates back to the Third Guru, Guru Amar Das (1479-1574) who resided in Goindwal. The Keertan tradition started in their family during the times of Guru Arjan Dav (1563-1606). His repertoire of old compositions (Reets) had the stamp of the styles and structure of the singing practised during the times of the Gurus (1690-1705). He was perhaps the sole exponent of the true style of rendering the *Parhtaals* a unique variant of Dhrupad singing, originated by Guru Ram Das.

Bhai Avtar Singh Ragi started his training at the age of 10 years and acquired the knowledge of art and music from his father, Bhai Jawala Singh (1872-1952) who was a most venerated Keertan singer of his times, and had the benefit of learning from two famous 'raagis' of the 19th century, Bhai Sarda Singh and Bhai Rangi Ram. From Bhai Rangi Ram came the music of Udaasi (Asectic) tradition which had its roots in the lineage of Swami Haridas, and which was passed down to Bhai Avtar Singh by his father.

Apart from rigorous Swar Saadhana and correct rendition of most intricate "reets" (old compositions -*Kritees*) Bhai Avtar Singh had also mastered the rare bow and string instrument of 'Taoos', a melower version of the present 'Dilruba'. His singing was marked by an emotionally intense spiritual yearning (*Pukar*), rooted in deep spiritual longing for the Eternal, Tuneless (*Akaal Purakh*), having an effect of intense *Virha* - so essential in Shabad Keertan in the Gurmat Sangeet tradition.

He had been reciting the keertan independently from the age of 20 and was the senior most and perhaps the only *raagi* who had the full knowledge of the total tradition of Gurmat Sangeet. In the year 1978 he recorded 500 odd traditional compositions for the Punjabi University, Patiala for their Archives. These were annotated by him and also published in book form titled *Gurbani Sangeet Pracheen Reet Ratnaavalli*.

Bhai Avtar Singh's music was a frozen heritage of the 15th and 16th century music tradition of Northern India. He belonged to a rare category of 'raagis' of the Sikh tradition, who were fully conversant with and proficient in singing all the raags, lores and variants of the music contained in the Guru Granth Sahib. Bhai Avtar Singh passed away in 2006.

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# Philosophy

In order to understand the Sikh worldview, it is necessary to answer a number of questions, namely, \* What is the spiritual experience of the Gurus about the Fundamental Reality? \* What are the logical implications of that religious experience? \* How do these implications or ideas differ from those in other religions? \* Did those ideas govern the course of Sikh religion? and \* What future does the Sikh worldview hold for man? In answering these questions, we shall confine ourselves entirely to the baani in Guru Granth Sahib and historically accepted facts about the lives of the Gurus. Many of the misrepresentations about Sikhism arise from the failure of writers to understand Sikhism on the basis of its thesis, or to define Sikhism in terms of doctrines in the Guru Granth Sahib. Obviously, in this short review we shall only given an outline of the Sikh worldview. We shall start with a definition of the Fundamental Reality or God in Sikhism.

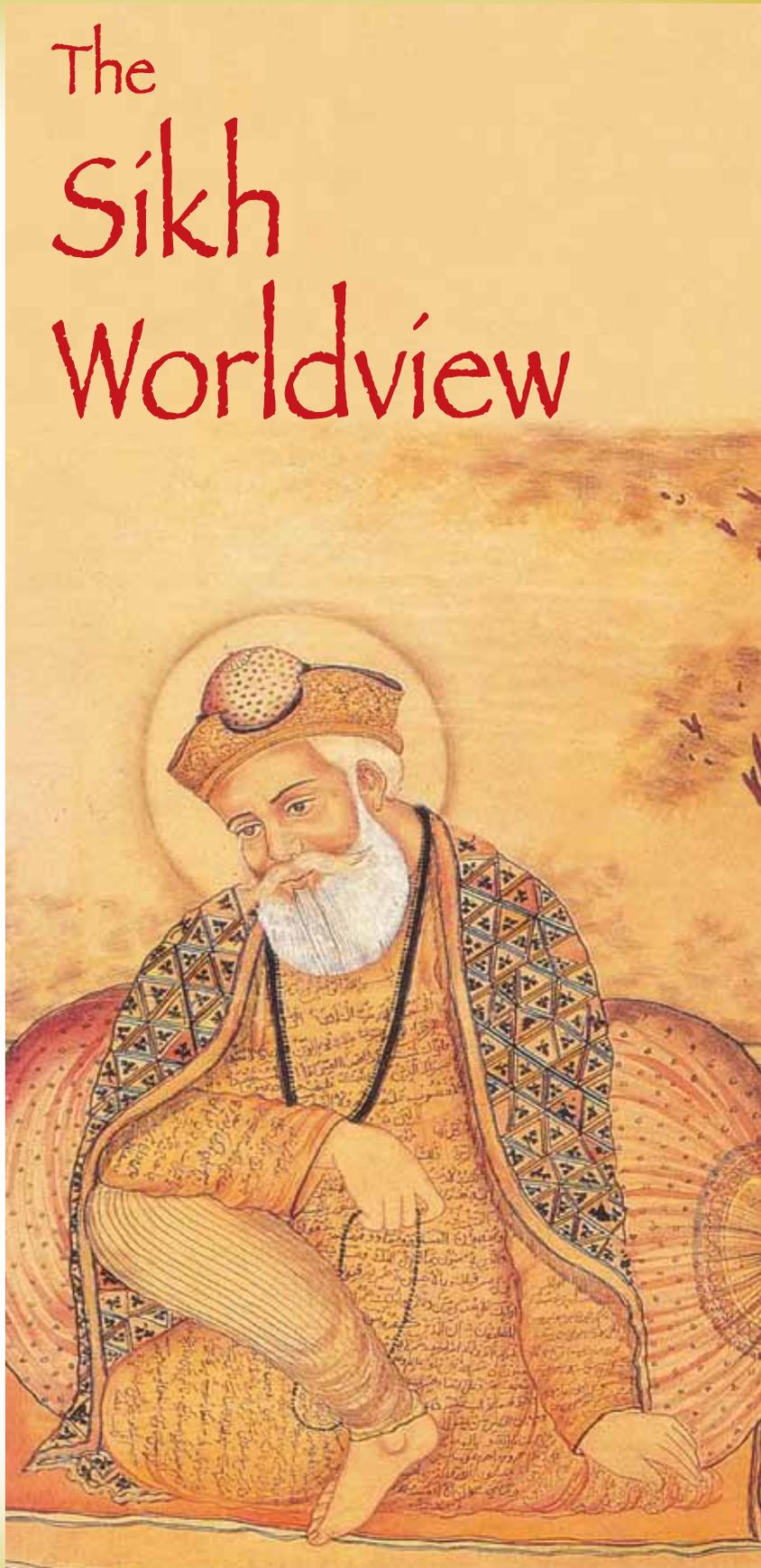
## God in Sikhism

The Reality or God has been profusely defined in the Guru Granth Sahib. Guru Nanak calls Him "Karta Purkh" or Creator Person, the world being His creation. Apart from being immanent in the world, He is the Ocean of Virtues: He is a God of Attributes. In defining the fundamental nature of God, the Guru says, "Friends ask me what is the mark of the Lord. He is all Love, the rest He is Ineffable". Thus, the key to understanding the Sikh worldview is that God is Love. And Love has four clear facets: it is dynamic; it is the mother of all virtues and values; it is directive or has a will; and it is benevolent towards life in which He is immanent; i.e., it generates neither a dialectical movement, nor a class war, nor suicidal competition or struggle.

## Corollaries of 'God is Love'

This spiritual experience leads to five corollaries. First, it ipso facto gives status, meaning and reality to the world and life, because Love and God's Attributes can be expressed only in a becoming universe. For, when God was all by Himself, the question of love and devotion did not arise. In unambiguous words, the Guru says, "True is He, and true is His creation". Second, it clearly implies that the religious man has to lead a life of creativity and activity. Consequently, a householder's life is accepted and monasticism

# The Sikh Worldview



is spurned. Third, it gives spiritual sanction to the moral life of man, indicating thereby that it should be of the same character as the loving nature of God. For, "Love, contentment, truth, humility and virtues enable the seed of *Naam* (God) to sprout." This clearly prescribes the methodology of deeds. Fourth, it unambiguously points out the direction in which human effort should move, and the yardstick with which to measure human conduct. This sets the goal for the seeker, or Godman. Fifth, it shows the gracious interest of God in human affairs and activities. An important attribute of God is that He is 'Guru' or Enlightener who gives both knowledge and guidance, i.e., spiritual experience is noetic. The Guru's God being a God of Will, one feels confident that one is working in line with His altruistic Will. For, God is perpetually creating and watching the world with His Benevolent Eye. And, He rewards every effort to become divine. For that matter, it gives man hope, strength and optimism.

### Implication of 'God is Love'

Here it is necessary to stress that the definition that God is Love, is extremely important for determining the category of Sikh religion. For, all systems in which God is Love, are life-affirming, and there is an integral combination between the spiritual life and the empirical life of man. And, as in the case of Abu Ben Adam, love of one's fellowmen, is the primary and essential counterpart of the love of God. But, in life-negating systems, there is a clear dichotomy between the empirical life and the spiritual life of man. And *sanyasa*, asceticism, monasticism, withdrawal from life, pacifism or *ahimsa* and celibacy are the normal modes of the spiritual path. Sikhism, Judaism, Islam and Christianity belong to the first category. Jainism and most other Indian systems belong to the second category.

In fact, differences in approach to life are due to the basic difference in the spiritual experience. In the second category of systems like Vaisnavism and Vedanta, God has been defined as *sat-chit-ananda* (truth-consciousness-bliss). This is far from being a dynamic concept. Stace has made a detailed survey of the description various mystics give of the nature of their spiritual experience of the Ultimate Reality. They all give blessedness, tranquility, holiness, unitary consciousness and ineffability as the nature of their spiritual experience. No mystic mentions love as the characteristic of that experience. The distinction is not arbitrary, but real. Huxley says, "The Indians say, the thought and the thinker and the thing thought about are one and then of the way in which this unowned experience becomes something belonging to me; then no me any more and a kind of *sat-chit-ananda* at one moment without *karuna* or charity (how odd that the Vedantists say nothing about love) ..... I had an inkling of both kinds of nirvana - the loveless being, consciousness, bliss and the one with love, and above all, sense that one can never love enough". He also says, "Staying in this ecstatic consciousness and cutting oneself off from participation and commitment in the rest of the world this is perfectly expressed today in powerful slang, in the phrase 'dropping out'. It completely denies the facts, it is morally wrong, and finally of course, absolutely catastrophic." "Absolutely Catastrophic". Hence, the religious system laid down by the Gurus is radically different from the earlier Indian systems.

### Consequent Differences with Other Religious Systems of India

As it is, the Guru's concept of God is quite different from the concept of many of the quietist mystics, or from the Indian concept of *sat-chit-ananda*. We find that Guru Nanak's system follows strictly his spiritual experience and his view of the Attributes of God. And as a Godman; he seeks to follow the line of expression of God's attributes in the world of man. Consequently, in the empirical life, this concept has important implications which stand emphasised in the bani and life of Guru Nanak. Hence, Guru Nanak's system and its growth are entirely different from his contemporary religious systems and their growth.

First, it means, as already pointed out, the reality of the world and the life-affirming character of Sikhism. For, God is not only immanent in the world. He also expresses His Love and Attributes in the empirical world, and casts a Benevolent Eye on His creation. But in Vedanta and other Indian systems, the world is either *mithya*, an illusion, a misery, or a suffering. Second, Sikhism being life-affirming, this, inevitably; involves an integral combination between the spiritual life and the empirical life of man. This constitutes the foundation of the *miri-piri* doctrine laid down by Guru Nanak in his *bani*. In other words, Guru Nanak's system is a whole-life system like Islam and Judaism, which also combine the spiritual and the empirical lives of man.

Third, in consequence of it, monasticism, *sanyasa*, asceticism, pacifism and withdrawal from life are rejected, and a householder's life is accepted as the forum of spiritual activities and growth.

Logically, monasticism and celibacy go together, and Guru Nanak categorically rejected both of them. Obviously, God's qualities of being 'Shelter to the shelterless,' 'Milk to the child,' "Riches to the poor," and 'Eyes to the blind,' can be expressed by the Godman only by being a householder and participating in all walks of life, and not by withdrawing from them.

The fourth difference follows as a corollary to this and to the rejection of celibacy namely, equality between man and woman.

In contrast, we find that in life-negating systems, and more especially in the Indian systems, the position on all these four points is essentially different. For them, life is far from real or an arena of spiritual endeavours. The spiritual path and the worldly path are considered separate and distinct. Whether it is Vedanta, Jainism, Buddhism, Vaisnavism or Nathism, asceticism, monasticism, *ahimsa*, *sanyasa* or withdrawal from life into *bhikshuhood* is the normal course. In consequence, celibacy is the rule, and woman is deemed to be a temptress. Dighambra Jains believe that a woman cannot reach *kaivalya* (spiritual summit), and has first to achieve male incarnation. In Buddhism, woman *bhikshus* are deemed second grade compared to male *bhikshus* who are considered senior to them". A male *bhikshu* is not supposed to touch and rescue a drowning woman, even if she were his mother. Sankara calls woman 'the gateway to hell'. Both Ramanuja and Shankaradeva (a liberal Vaisnava saint) would not admit a woman to be a Vaisnava. The latter stated, "Of all the terrible aspirations of the world, woman is the ugliest. A slight side glance of hers captivates even the hearts of celebrated sages. Her sight destroys prayer, penance and meditation. Knowing this,



the wise keep away from the company of woman". Bhagat Kabir, we know, is considered a misogynist and calls woman 'black cobra', 'pit of hell' and 'the refuse of the world'. It is well-known that even today in Catholic Christianity, a woman is not ordained as a priest. Against this, Guru Nanak not only sanctioned a householder's life but stated as to, "How can a woman be called impure, when without woman there would be none".

All this has been explained to stress that the basic perceptions about the nature of the spiritual experience and the ontological Reality being different, the spiritual paths, under the two categories of systems, become automatically divergent.

Further, the acceptance of a householder's life has important empirical and socio-political implications. Except for Guru Harkrishan, who died at an early age, every Guru married and led a householder's life. By way of demonstration, this step was essential, otherwise, the entire Indian tradition being different, Guru Nanak's system would have been completely misunderstood and misinterpreted. We are well aware that it is the Naths who questioned Guru Nanak as to how incongruous it was that he was, wearing the clothes of a householder, and at the same time claiming to follow the religious path. Guru Nanak's reply was equally cryptic and categorical, when he said that the Naths did not know even the elementaries of the spiritual path. For this very reason, the Guru did not make his son, Baba Sri Chand, a recluse, his successor.

Regarding the fifth important difference about the goal of life of the religious man, Guru Nanak has made the position very clear in his Japuji. After putting a specific question as to what is the way to be a *sachiana* or a true man, the Guru, while clearly rejecting the method of observing silence, coupled with continuous concentration or meditation, replies that the right method and goal are to carry out the Will of God. And, God being Love and the Ocean of Virtues, His Will is Altruistically Creative and Dynamic. The Sikh goal of life is, thus, to be active and live a creative life of love and virtues. The goal is not personal salvation, or merger in Brahman, but an ever active life of love. It is in this context that Guru Nanak gives the call, "If you want to play the game of love, then come to my path with your head on your palm; once you set your foot on this way, then find not a way out and be prepared to lay down your head". For him, life is a game of love. It is significant that the same advice was given by Guru Arjun to Bhai Manjh who was then a Sakhi Sarvarya and wanted to be a Sikh of the Guru. "You may go on with the easy path of Sakhi Sarvar worship, because Sikhism is a very difficult path, and unless you are willing to be dispossessed of your wealth and to sacrifice your very life, it is no use coming to me". Exactly, the same call for total commitment and sacrifice was given by Guru Gobind Singh on the Baisakhi Day, 1699, when he created the Khalsa and administered amrit to the Panj Piaras.

The goal being different, the sixth implication is as to the method to achieve that goal. In Sikhism, the emphasis is on the methodology of deeds. Guru Nanak has made this point very clear when he says in Japuji: "Man's assessment in His court is done on the basis of one's deeds" and "It is by one's deeds that we become near or away from God". In order to stress the fundamental spiritual importance of deeds, Guru Nanak says, "Everything is lower than Truth, but higher still is truthful living". In fact, when the Guru defines the gurmukh or the superman, he calls him: "One who always lives truthfully".

## Essentials of Sikh Life and Its Differences with Other Systems in Matters of Social Responsibility

The basic difference between a whole-life system and a dichotomous system is that in the former, every field of life of operation of God, is also the field of operation and responsibility of both the Godman and the seeker. This is the broad approach. Having defined the nature of God and the goal of man, the important issue is what are the essentials of the religious life. In the context explained above, Guru Nanak has fixed specific duties and responsibilities of the religious life. The first is of accepting equality between man and woman. Guru Nanak clearly states, "Why downgrade woman, when without woman there would be none". And "It is she who gives birth to great persons". When the Third Guru created *manjis* or districts of religious administration, women were appointed in charge of some of them. The second responsibility is of maintaining equality between man and man. This was a direct blow to the social ideology of Varn Ashram Dharma which gave scriptural sanction to the hierarchical caste system. Guru Nanak found fault with that ideology saying, "The Vedas make a wrong distinction of caste", and "One cannot be a Yogi by mere wishing; real Yoga lies in treating all alike". He demonstrated the primary importance of treating all as equal by taking, after his enlightenment, Mardana, a low cast Muslim, as his life companion. This meant a total departure from the then existing religious prejudices, not only against lower castes, but also against Muslims who were regarded as malechhas. He made it clear that anyone wanting to join his society, had, at the very start, to shed all prejudices against interreligious or inter-caste dining and social intercourse. The revolutionary character of this step could be gauged from the fact that a Ramanuja would throw the entire food as polluted, if anyone cast a glance on it while he had been preparing or eating it.

The third social responsibility, Guru Nanak emphasises, is the importance of work. This too, we find, was something opposed to the then prevalent religious practice. Evidently, other worldliness, *sanyasa* and monasticism excluded the religious necessity of work and sustaining the society. In fact, the Naths who were then the principal religious organisation in Punjab took a vow never to engage themselves in any work or business. But Guru Nanak says, "The person incapable of earning his living gets his ears split (i.e., turns a Nath Yogi) and becomes a mendicant. He calls himself a Guru or saint. Do not look up to him, nor touch his feet. He knows the way who earns his living and shares his earnings with others. The Guru deprecates the Yogi who gives up the world, and then is not ashamed of begging at the door of the householders. The fourth social responsibility Guru Nanak stresses is about the sharing of wealth. He states, "God's bounty belongs to all, but men grab it for themselves". "Man gathers riches by making others miserable." "Wealth cannot be gathered without sin, but it does keep one's company after death." All this clearly condemns exploitative collection of wealth. The story of Guru Nanak rejecting the invitation of Malik Bhago, a rich person exploiting the poor, but accepting the hospitality of Lalo, a poor labourer, illustrates the same point as stressed in his bani.

Thus, the twin ideas about the brotherhood of man and the sharing of wealth to eliminate poverty and maintain equality in society are stressed by Guru Nanak. Even after his missionary tours, Guru Nanak took to the role of a peasant for the last 18

years of his life. It is significant that till the time of the Sixth Guru, when social and military duties of the leadership and organisation of the Sikh society became quite heavy and absorbing, every Sikh Guru had been doing a vocation or business to support his family.

The fifth social responsibility, where Guru Nanak radically departed from all the contemporary religious systems, including Sufism, Santism and Christianity, was his approach towards injustice and oppression of all kinds in society. He made a meticulous study of injustice and corruption, aggression and incongruity in every field of life. He pointed out the greed and hypocrisy of Brahmin priests and Mullahs, the 'blood thirsty corruption' and injustice by lower and higher-rung officials in the administration, the misrule, oppression and irresponsibility of the local rulers, their inability to give security, fairplay and peace to the people, and brutal and barbaric butchery of the people. All this was not just idle rhetoric, but a diagnostic assessment of the prevailing turmoil and conditions in the society, which the Guru felt, needed to be changed. It needs to be emphasised that in Guru Nanak's ideology, there was nothing like private or personal salvation. Just as God of Love is benevolently looking after the entire world, in the same way, the Godman's sphere of activity and responsibility is equally wide, and is unhedged by any self-created barriers. This is, as we shall see, a fundamental difference between a salvation religion catering for individuals, and a universal religion catering for the spiritual well-being of society as a whole.

Here it is very relevant to give, as recorded by Bertrand Russell, the contrasted approach of St. Augustine, one of the greatest exponents of the Christian gospel and author of City of God. Russell concludes: "It is strange that the last men of intellectual eminence before the dark ages were concerned, not with saving civilisation on expelling the barbarians or reforming the abuses of the administration, but with preaching the merit of virginity and the damnation of unbaptized infants. Seeing that these were the preoccupations that the Church handed on to the converted barbarians, it is no wonder that the succeeding age surpassed almost all other fully historical periods in cruelty and superstition". Whereas Guru Nanak meticulously points out every dark spot in the religious and socio-political life of his times, St. Augustine is simply unconcerned with socio-political conditions of his period. For, "Augustine's City of God (426) attacked both Christians who expected the world to get better and pagans with a cyclic view of history. Augustine did not believe that the spread of Christianity would ensure political and economic improvement. The earthly city of self-will would continue to exist amidst the rise and fall of states and empires."

Another important fact is Guru Nanak's criticism in Babar Vani of the brutalities and massacres perpetrated and misery caused by the invaders. He condemns them in the strongest terms and complains to God for allowing the weak to be trampled upon by the strong. This hymn has an extremely important lesson, which many of us have missed. For, anything which is within the sphere of His creation and the responsibility of God, is certainly within the sphere of responsibility of the Godman. The hymn has

four implications: first, that injustice and oppression are violative of the Order of God; second, that as the Master and God of Love, harmony has to be maintained by His Will; third, that, as the instrument of God, it is the spiritual duty and responsibility of the Godman to confront all kinds of injustice; and, fourth, that, as such, resistance to oppression was a task and a target laid down by the Guru for the religious society he was organising. Because, it is Guru Nanak who defines God as 'Destroyer of the evil doers', 'Destroyer of demonical persons', 'Slayer of the inimical', and 'Protector of the weak'. Such being the God of Guru Nanak, it is equally the responsibility of the Godman, gurmukh, or the Sikh to carry out His Will which is just and altruistic.

In short, in Guru Nanak's system to ensure equality and fair play and to react against injustice and aggression, become the religious duty and responsibility of the Sikh. Since the dawn of civilisation, the greatest oppression and injustice have undeniably been done by the rulers, the State, or the Establishment who have possessed all the instruments of power and coercion. It is impossible for individuals to confront such power. This leads to two important inferences. First, that in a whole-life system like Sikhism, which combines spiritual life with the empirical life of man and accepts the miri-piri doctrines, the religious man must as a religious duty, resist and confront injustice, wherever it takes place. Second, that such a religious man should not only be cognisant of such injustice, but also organise a society that should be in a position to face the challenge of such injustice and oppression. This follows logically both from Guru Nanak's *bani* and his system. This also explains why from the very beginning of his mission, he started organising the Sikh societies at places which he visited and how the societies were logically linked and developed by his successors into the Panth. These aspects are very significant and important about his society and religion. It is obvious to every student of the Adi Granth that so far as the ideology is concerned, it had been completely laid down in the *bani* of Guru Nanak.

But what was lacking was the presence of a properly motivated and responsible society that should be in a position to successfully discharge the responsibility of reacting against injustice and oppression prevalent in his times.

There is another important and related issue. Having cast on his society the responsibility of confronting injustice, again it is Guru Nanak who eliminates the hurdle of *ahimsa* or pacifism that stood as a bar against the religious man or a religious society trying to confront socio-political aggression. Among Vaisnavas, Jains, Buddhist Bhikshus, Naths, or Radical Saints like Kabir, *ahimsa* is deemed to be a cardinal virtue and meat eating is a prohibition. These religious persons are all from life-negating systems, with personal salvation as the ideal. But a society that has to accept the social responsibility of confronting injustice cannot remain wedded to the hurdle of *ahimsa*. For, reason and force are both neutral tools that can be used both for good and evil, for construction and destruction. That is why Guru Nanak says, "Men discriminate not and quarrel over meat eating, they do not know what is flesh and what is non-flesh, or in what lies sin and what is not sin", and that "there is life in every grain of food we eat".



## Role of Later Nine Gurus

In a country, which for over 2000 years had been trained in religious systems involving clear dichotomy between spiritual and empirical life, and which had accepted *ahimsa* as a fundamental value and individual salvation as an ideal, it was no easy task to create a mature society with the new motivation of religious responsibility of always fighting injustice and oppression in all spheres of life.

It is very significant that Guru Nanak laid the foundations of every institution that was later developed and matured by his successors. By starting the institution of *langar* (common kitchen) and taking Mardana as his life companion, he gave a heavy blow to the divisive institution of Varn Ashram Dharma, pollution and caste. He created a separate Sikh society with their own dharmasalas as centres of religious worship and training. He sanctified the role of the householder as the medium of religious expression and progress, and made it plain that work was a necessity of life, and idleness a vice. He emphatically made it clear that to fight injustice and oppression is an essential duty of the religious man and the religious society. For that end, while he created a new society with a new ideology, he also removed the hurdle of *ahimsa*, so that his society could discharge its socio-religious responsibility without any unwanted inhibitions and impediments in its path. And since the new society had not yet been fully organised and developed, and had yet to be properly oriented to enable it to discharge its responsibilities, he also created the institution of succession. It is very significant of the social and societal aims of Guru Nanak that after passing the succession to Guru Angad, when he found him to be living a somewhat solitary life, he reminded him that he had to be active since he had to organise a society or Panth.

In the time of the Second, Third and Fourth Guru, four important steps were taken. Through the creation of 22 *manjis* or districts of religious administration, the Sikh society was organised into a separate religious Panth. But, the most important and difficult part of the task was the creation of new motivations and the acceptance of the 'new life-affirming religious ideals of Guru Nanak. For, these were radically new in their approach, implications and goals. The stupendous nature of the task of the Gurus can be judged from the fact that even today great Hindus, like Jadunath Sarkar, Rabindra Nath Tagore and Mahatma Gandhi, and Christians like McLeod, Cole, Toynbee and the like, all coming from pacifist traditions and conditioned by them, find it difficult to understand the spiritual role of the Sixth and the Tenth Master.

The Third Guru created new institutions which had the dual purpose of weaning the Sikhs away from the old Hindu society and of conditioning them in new values, ideals and practices. For example, while Guru Nanak had bypassed his recluse son, Sri Chand, for the same reasons, the Second and the Third Guru avoided persons of ascetic tendencies from entering the Sikh fold. The institution of *langar*, with the dual purpose of feeding the poor and of eliminating the caste and status prejudices and distinctions, was strengthened. Finally, the important religious centre of Darbar Sahib and the town of Amritsar were founded and developed for the periodical meetings of the Sikh society and visits of the Sikhs to the Guru. The object of all this was to establish a separate historical identity of the Sikhs and to wean them away from the traditional society, its centres of pilgrimage, and its religious practices and rituals. Not only had

they to be trained in the essentials of a new religious system, but they had to be taken out of the strangle-hold of the Brahmin priests claiming to be the sole medium of religious growth, practice and interpretation.

Then came the stage of the Fifth Guru who created and installed the Sikh Scripture as the revealed and final doctrinal authority. The system of *daswandh* (giving 10% of one's earnings for the cause of the community) was organised. Sikhs were initiated into trading in horses, so that the transition to the next stage of militancy could become smooth. As the instrument of God on earth, the Sikhs called their Guru, 'True Emperor.' In the time of the Fifth Guru, the Sikh society had become 'a State within a State', and had developed a social identity which had caught the eye of the Emperor, who considered it an unwanted socio-political growth. By his martyrdom, the Guru not only strengthened the faith and determination of the community, but also sought confrontation with the Empire, leaving instructions to his son to begin militarisation of the Sikhs. In the process, the Sixth Guru even recruited mercenaries to train his people. This phase of martyrdom and confrontation with the Empire was continued by the subsequent Gurus till Guru Gobind Singh did, as recorded by his contemporary Kavi Sainapat, the epitomic work of starting the institutions of *amrit* and the Khalsa. Having felt that the Panth had become mature and responsible enough, the Guru created the Khalsa in 1699, and requested the Panj Piaras to baptise him. It is significant that at that time all the Guru's sons were alive, meaning thereby that Guru Nanak's mission had been completed and thereafter the succession was not to be continued. And finally, the Guru made Guru Granth Sahib the Everlasting Guru of the Sikhs.

Let us have a rapid look back to find out if the five tasks indicated by Guru Nanak had been accomplished. First, the Sikhs had been formed into a distinct new religious society with a Scripture of its own, being the full repository and complete and final guide of the Sikh ideology and its way of life. This separateness was made total by Guru Gobind Singh's Nash doctrine of five freedoms - *Dharam Nash, Bharam Nash, Kul Nash, Karam Nash and Kirt Nash*. This means freedom from the bonds of old religions and traditions, of earlier superstitions and prejudices, of earlier acts and of restrictions in choice of trade or calling, or in professional mobility. The Tenth Master made a complete break with the earlier traditions and societies. Second, it was a society of householders, rejecting all kinds of otherworldliness, idleness and monasticism. Third, it was a casteless society with complete fraternity among its members. Men from the lowest and Sudra castes rose to be its leaders. The contrast is evident from the fact that while the Sikhs have never had Brahmin leaders, in India after Independence in 1947, the Prime Minister and practically every Chief Minister was a Brahmin. Four, it was a society which was fully earthaware; and habits of work, production and service became ingrained among its members. Begging was considered a disgrace in its social ethos. The fifth social responsibility discharged by the Sikhs was to free the country from the curse of a thousand-year wave of invaders from the North-West. Though the Sikhs were subjected over the years to the worst persecution in Indian history, yet they suffered it and emerged triumphant. They have been trained to react against wrong, injustice and oppression. A society had been created with the ideal of a Sant-Sipahi (Saint-Soldier).

## Manmukh to Gurmukh: the Guru's Concept of Evolution of Man

Here, it is necessary to state the *manmukh-gurmukh concept*, which is essential for understanding the Sikh worldview. As the Gurus say, over millions of years life has evolved into man from a tiny speck of life. The Guru says, "For several births (you) were a mere worm, for several births, an insect, for several births a fish and an antelope." "After ages you have the glory of being a man." "After passing through myriads of species, one is blest with the human form." "God created you out of a drop of water and breathed life in you. He endowed you with the light of reason, discrimination and wisdom." "O man, you are supreme in God's creation; now is your opportunity, you may fulfil or not fulfil your destiny." At its present stage of development, man is, without doubt, better equipped than other animals, in so far as he has a higher sense of discrimination. But, as an ego-conscious being, he is still an animal, being a *mallmukh*. This implies that whatever be human pretensions, man is basically and organically a self-centred being. His psyche is governed by an egoistic consciousness, that being his centre of awareness, control and propulsion. Because of his present inherent limitations of ego-consciousness, it is virtually impossible for man to avoid conflict, aggression, and wars. But the Gurus clearly hold out hope for man. There are four stages of evolution or development. The Guru says, "God created first, Himself, then *haumain*, third, *maya* (multifarious things and beings) and fourth, the next higher stage of the gurmukh who lives truthfully". The Gurus clearly say that it is human destiny to reach the fourth stage and to meet God, or to be a gurmukh, or one who is in tune with the fundamental Reality or Universal Consciousness, God, Naam, or Love. His ideal is not merger in God or salvation, or union as an end in itself. Being the instrument of, or in touch with God's Altruistic Consciousness, he is spontaneously benevolent, compassionate, creative and loving. It is very important to note that the gurmukh or superman is not a quietist, he 'lives truthfully.' He lives as did the ten Gurus. For, Guru Nanak was called just a gurmukh. This is the next higher stage of evolution towards which life is striving and not towards darkness and death as materialist scientists would have us believe. Nor does Sikhism accept any concept of the basic sinfulness or fall of man from grace. It only indicates the constitutional weakness, immaturity or imperfection of man at his present stage of the evolutionary process or development. Hence, it gives us an ideology of optimism and hope, invoking and exhorting us to make moral effort.

## Survey of Higher Religions

Before we draw our conclusions, let us make a brief survey of some religious ideologies of the world and find the place of Sikhism among them. There are four clear religious ideologies that are current today.

## Dichotomous Religions

First is the category of religious systems like Buddhism, Jainism, Nathism, Vaisnavism and Vedanta, in which there is clear dichotomy between the spiritual life and the empirical life. Monasticism, sanyasa, otherworldliness, celibacy, yogic

meditation and ahimsa are the common but important features of this category. They hold out no hope for man, except by withdrawal from life and yogic or one point meditation. In each case, it is a path of personal salvation without any involvement in the socio-political affairs of man. Practically, all the Indian religions, except Sikhism, belong to this category.

## Judaism

Second is Judaism which has a long and chequered history. Basically, it is a system in which there is no dichotomy between the religious life and the empirical life of man. Prophet Moses who got the revelation, was both a religious and political leader. His Torah or Commandments and Laws prescribe and govern the entire gamut of the spiritual and temporal life of the Jews. It is a system that prescribes rules governing the conduct of prayer, rituals, sacrifices and their socio-political life. The renowned Hillel, when asked to explain the 613 commandments of the Torah, replied, "Whatever is hateful to you, do not do to your neighbour. That is the entire Torah. The rest is commentary, go and learn it." In short, it is basically a life-affirming system. It makes no distinction between the spiritual and the socio-political life of man. The Torah governs every aspect of it. As to the means of resistance, Judaism recommends the use of force by saying, "Eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth", and indicates rules for a righteous fight. But, over its long history including the period of the prophets, this aspect of its principle has, to an extent, been altered, or changed at least by some sects of the community. At the time of the Babylonian attack (Sixth Century B.C.) on Palestine, Prophet Jeremiah strongly recommended non-resistance or pacificism. He asserted that the attack was God's punishment to the Jews for their non-observance of His Laws. His assertion was something like Mahatma Gandhi's statement that the Bihar earthquake was a punishment to the Hindus for their practice of untouchability.

However, over the centuries thereafter, many religious sects of Jews like Essenes, Kabbalists, Hasidists, Therapeutics, and even some Pharisees accepted the principle of non-resistances, pacificism, withdrawal and otherworldliness. Even monastic and celibate cults appeared among Jews, discarding both the world and the use of force. This important change, in a basic religious principle, we believe, came about in this religion in later parts of its history, when Judaism was unable to cope with challenges from the socio-political environment, and their religious fervour had been exhausted. Practically, all these otherworldly sects appeared after the destruction of the First Temple and the fall of Jerusalem, when thousands of Jews were driven out as exiles and slaves to Babylonia. We wish to stress that these fundamental changes in Judaic ideology, including otherworldly or monastic sects, appeared only during the lean period of Jewish history. This happened about eight centuries after the revelation of Moses, and after the heydays of Jewish life in the times of David and Solomon. But, it is very significant that despite the presence of somewhat pacifist or otherworldly cults and sects in Judaism, and despite about 2500 years of suffering and travail, the idea of Zionism, a virtual revival of earlier non-pacifist ideals, strongly reappeared in Judaism in the last century. And it is an important



fact that Einstein, who says that his life was spent 'between politics and equations' was a staunch Zionist. So much so, that when Israel was formed he was offered its presidency. However, apart from this apparent doctrinal ambivalence in its ideology, Judaism is a highly exclusive religion, not quite universal in its character, affinities and approach.

## Christianity

The Judaic heritage of Christianity is undoubted. As in Judaism, in Christianity, too, there is, in principle, no dichotomy between the spiritual life and the empirical life of man. For, Christ emphasises both loving God with all one's heart, and loving one's neighbour as oneself. But like Buddha, he also emphasises the pacifist principles, 'resist not evil' and 'turn the left cheek if hit on the right'. Religious history demonstrates that pacifist religions almost invariably become otherworldly, even if they were life-affirming in the beginning. Because of their religious pacifism, the Christians declined to take up service in the Roman army. In fact, historians like Gibbon and Sir James Frazer have mentioned Christian otherworldliness as one of the major causes of the fall of the Roman Empire. It is obvious that Christianity, which, like Judaism, was a religion of householders, showed, by the beginning of the 4th century AD, clear monastic trends. Increasingly, monasteries and nunneries appeared as a significant development in the Christian religion. This life of monasticism, asceticism and nunneries led, on the one hand, to otherworldly quietist mysticism, and, on the other hand, to corruption and malpractices in the Catholic Church.

Consequent to this schism in the life of the Christian Church, ultimately arose the Reformation, causing a major blow to the supremacy of the Church and its role as the guiding moral force in the life of the Christian society. Lutheran and Calvinist reforms not only shattered the universal character of the Church, but also brought about its subordination to the national State. In addition, because of Luther's leanings towards the feudal princes, he took a very hostile and feudalistic stand against the rights of the peasantry. This landslide in the fortunes of the Church caused its gradual waning as a major moral influence in the socio-political life of the Christian societies. After the rise of science, which was considered to be the new elixir, it came to be believed that it would, in course of time, cure most human ills. The net result is that in the last 300 years, renaissance, scientism, empiricism and secularism have virtually eliminated religion from the moral life of man in the West.

Toynbee says, "This transfer of allegiance from the Western Christian Church to the parochial Western secular state was given a positive form borrowed from the Graeco-Roman civilisation by the Renaissance." "This unavowed worship of parochial states was by far the most prevalent religion in the Christian society." Since the loss of supremacy of religion in the Christian society, Western life has lost its moral moorings. Nationalism, communism and individualism have been the unstable offsprings of this broken home. "Together with Darwinism, secularism and positivism, they have dehumanised the Western culture, reducing liberalism to a self-serving, highly competitive individualism." By relegating religion to the background and having lost the moral

springs of the Western culture, either utilitarian ethics has been accepted as an expedient substitute or a reductionist search has been made to find appropriate ethical elements in the life of the animals, or in the material base of man which is considered to be its fundamental constituent. And this search has finally come to the dismal conclusion that all ethical life is 'a defence mechanism' or a 'reaction formation' to the impacts of the environment. After the Second World War, a third of the population of the world was living under the Communist system. As the century is closing, these countries find that despite the myth of dialectical movement and synthesis, the system has been unable to make any synthetic values or devise a system of ethics which is able to maintain cohesion within these societies. And it is the existence of this moral vacuum that made the Foreign Secretary of the Soviets proclaim that 'universal values should have priority over class, group or other interests.' The warning remained unheeded, and the Russian Empire has collapsed, purely because of its inability to build internal cohesion. At the ethical plane, this decries, in a way, the validity of Darwinism, and its struggle for existence, and Marxism with its dialectical movement of class struggle. It involves equal condemnation of economic wars, cut-throat competition, consumerism and increasing disparities in capitalist societies.

From the point of view of internal cohesion, the position in the capitalist countries of the West is no better. Mounting numbers of divorces, broken homes, drug addiction, alcoholism and individualism have created such a situation in North America, which made the Christian Church raise a strong voice saying that secularism was a common danger and needed to be eliminated as a social force, and that Christianity should seek the co-operation of other religions to combat its evil influence. Christianity had given to the empirical life in the West its cohesion, strength and elan; the divorce of religion from politics and the empirical life, has left secularism a barren institution without any hope of a creative future. This is the tragedy both of communism and capitalism. It is this tragedy with its dark future that the North American Churches wanted to avoid. But in the temper of the times, this voice of sanity was drowned in an exhibition of suicidal egoism of the European Churches who felt that "Secularisation, not secularism, is the primary process. It is a process in which some of the values of Christian faith have been put into a secular framework, bringing about a powerful force which is destroying all old ideas. Hence, secularisation is an ally, because it will destroy Hinduism, Islam and other forms of what they considered to be superstition. So, we should ally ourselves with secularisation and see it as the work of God." Later, it was again repeated: "We do not feel that we have anything lacking. And so we are opposed to a dialogue unless it is for the sake of testifying to Jesus Christ." "That was it. Then they passed a resolution saying that under no circumstances should multi-religious dialogues be undertaken because multi-religious dialogues put Christianity on the same level as other religions, and this is unacceptable. So, because the European Christians had that point of view, the World Council of Churches has not been able to engage in multi-religious dialogues for quite some time."



This is the state of affairs of the moral life of man in Western countries that lead the dominant culture of our times. Recently, however, some priests in Latin America have raised a voice for an integrated and composite culture of Liberation Theology, invoking the Bible in support of a revolutionary struggle to help the poor. Father C.Torres states, "The Catholic who is not a revolutionary is living in mortal sin." Theologian Moltmann says, "Political theology wants to awaken political consciousness in every treatise of Christian theology. Understood in this way, it is the premise that leads to the conclusion that, while there may be naive or politically unaware theology, there can be no apolitical theology." He concludes, "The memory of Christ crucified compels us to a political theology." But these are still minority voices in the Christian world.

Islam started with a full-blooded combination between the spiritual life and the empirical life of man. It is this combination that swept everything before it and created an epoch which is unrivalled in its achievements. It is a religious system and culture, which is, in many respects, more comprehensive and unified than the parochial culture of the city states of Greece. It is hardly complimentary to the Christian world of the West that while today it seeks to fashion many of its cultural institutions on the basis of Greek classical models, yet these, but for the interlude of the Islamic epoch which preserved most of the Greek thought, would have been lost to posterity. Never was the concept of human brotherhood advanced, in thought and deed, on a scale as during this epoch. It speaks volumes for the liberalism of Islamic culture that the heydays of the Judaic literature, philosophy and thought synchronise with the countries and periods of Islamic rule. Not only were some of the Jewish classics written, but Maimonides, the king of Judaic philosophy, also flourished and wrote during the Muslim rule. As against it, under Christian rulers, the Jews suffered periodical massacres, persecution and the segregated life of the ghetto. Admittedly, the Muslim rulers were, by comparison, quite liberal towards the followers of other religions. Islamic contribution to the scientific thought of the day was significant. But far more important is the contribution of men like Al Aushairi, Al Ghazali and Arbi to the religious thought of man.

There is, however, little doubt that mystic quietism and otherworldliness of Sufis is a growth that appeared during the time of later Caliphs, when they indulged in luxurious and un-Islamic living. It has happened in the case of Judaism and of Islam, both whole-life religions, that in times when religiously sensitive souls found it difficult to face the social or socio-political challenges, they withdrew themselves into the shell of quietism, otherworldliness, monasticism and asceticism. Sufi sects appeared all over the Muslim world, but they never posed a challenge to the oppression and misrule of the Muslim emperors or kings. In this respect, the Jewish prophets were quite bold in their criticism of Jewish rulers, including David and Solomon.

It is very significant, and shows the lofty spiritual status of the Sikh Gurus and the basic ideological affinity between the two religions, that a Sufi saint like Pir Buddhu Shah fought and sacrificed two of his sons for the cause of Guru Gobind Singh.

But it was the Sikh Gurus and not the Sufis who challenged the growing Mughal tyranny. This instance demonstrates that although as an organisation, Sufis had become otherworldly and failed to confront the major challenge of societal oppression in the Muslim empires, yet when the Sikh Gurus had actually taken up the challenge and the ideological struggle was on, the Sufi saint made it clear that, considering the tenets of Islam, on which side should be the sympathies of a pious person.

There are, however, some scholars like Iqbal and Abdus Salam who believe that like the otherworldliness of the Christians, as in the case of the Roman Empire, Sufis also became a significant cause of the decline of the Muslim cultural supremacy in the world. For, there is considerable truth in Dr. Mohammad Iqbal's couplet: "Whether it be the facade of a great republic, or the domain of a glorious empire, if its polity is divorced of the religious component, the system is reduced to sheer Changezian barbarity and tyranny." Thoughtful and saner elements in the Muslim world seem to be disillusioned with the bankrupt Western Secularism, and are trying to revert to a reformed and composite culture of Islam.

## Religious History and Creation of the Khalsa

In our brief survey, we have indicated four categories of religious systems. The Indian systems are all dichotomous. To the second category belongs pacifist Christianity which, though it originally suggested the love of one's neighbour as oneself, has gradually but ultimately reduced itself to sheer Secularism, Individualism and Consumerism, bereft of any religious component. To the third category belong Judaism and Islam which started with a full-blooded combination of the spiritual life with the empirical life, but ultimately, under pressure of circumstances, bifurcated, on the one hand, into Sikhism belongs to a different or a fourth category of the religious systems. For the purpose of understanding, clarity and comparison, it will help us if we recapitulate the salient features of Sikhism. The Gurus say that the Basic Reality is creative and free. It has a Direction and a Will. It is the Ocean of Values, Destroyer of evil-doers, Benevolent and Beneficent. That Reality is Love and we can be at peace with ourselves and the world only if we live a life of love and fall in line with the Direction of that Reality. Though ego is God created and man is at present at the ego-conscious (*manmukh*) stage of development, it is his destiny to evolve and reach the stage of Universal or God consciousness and work in line with His Altruistic Will, i.e., achieve the *gurmukh* stage of development, when alone he can 'be spontaneously moral' and 'live truthfully'. At the present, or the egoistic stage of his development, man cannot avoid conflicts and suicidal wars. It is a futile search to try and find the moral base of man either in the animal life or in the material constituents of man. Nor can reason, which is just a tool of the egoistic psyche, like any other limb of the individual, devise and give man a helpful ethics. God or the Basic Reality, which is Love, can alone be the source of the moral life of man. Ultimately, it is only God or Naam-consciousness, involving a link with the Basic Fount of Love, that can lead to truthful living. That is why the Guru says, "Naam-consciousness and ego-consciousness cannot go together." The



two are contradictory to each other. It is a hymn of fundamental significance. For, ego-consciousness means man's alienation from the basic Force of Love. And, greater the alienation or isolation of man from his spiritual and moral source, the greater would be his drive towards destruction. Secularism as an institution represents that egoistic isolation. This trend, the Guru says, is inconsistent with the paths towards link with the Universal Consciousness, the spring of moral life. The Gurus have given a lead to man in the field. Ten Gurus or ten gurmukhs, lived the life of God-consciousness. In one sense, it is the life of one gurmukh completing a demonstration and furthering the progress of life and its spiritual evolution and ascent. Guru Nanak's thesis involved the integration of the spiritual life of man with his empirical life. This integration has to enrich life and society. Because of the earlier cultural and religious tradition, it took ten lives for Guru Nanak, the gurmukh or Sant-Sipahi, to demonstrate his thesis and role, and discharge his social responsibilities.

These socio-spiritual responsibilities involved not only the creation of a society motivated with new ideas, but also the completion of the five tasks Guru Nanak had indicated as targets before himself and his society. With every succeeding Guru, the ideal of gurmukh or Sant-Sipahi, as laid down and lived by Guru Nanak, unfolded itself progressively. It is a path of love, humility, service, sacrifice, martyrdom and total responsibility as the instrument of God, the basic Universal Consciousness moving the world.

A question may be asked as to why there have been ten incarnations of Guru Nanak in Sikhism, while in other religions there have generally been only one prophet. To us, four reasons appear quite obvious. First, in a society in which dichotomous religions stand deeply embedded and established for over three thousand years and which claims to have contributed asceticism and monasticism to the cultures of the rest of the world, it was not easy for a whole life religion with its *miri-piri* concept to be acceptable and take firm roots in one generation. Second, the Sikh ideology did not involve individual salvation, or a gurmukh just living truthfully, but it also involved compulsively the creation of a society motivated with new aspirations and ideals. And this new orientation and conditioning could be done only by the process of creating a new ideology, embodying it in a new scripture, organising new institutions, socio-religious practices and centres of the new faith, and inspiring people, by the method of martyrdoms, into accepting a new ethical standard of morality and values. For as Ambedkar and Max Weber have stated, the Hindu society cannot be reformed from inside, and rid itself from the unjust system of caste and untouchability, because the Varn Ashram Dharma has the sanction of *Shashtras* and scriptures; and a Hindu while making caste distinctions and exhibiting caste prejudices never feels any moral guilt or abhorrence. Instead, he feels a real sense of religious and moral satisfaction that he is observing his Dharma and Shastric injunctions. Hence, the inevitable necessity of creating a new ideology and Scripture with a new religious and socia-moral code of conduct. Third, even if the ideology and institutions had been there, the Sikh society would, like some reformed societies, soon have reverted to the parent society, if it had not successfully achieved the social targets discussed above, including those of creating a fraternal society of householders, of dislodging the political misrule, and sealing the North-Western gate of India against the invaders.

The fourth reason appears to be very important. Our survey of the major religions of the world shows that revealed systems which start with a combination of the spiritual life with the empirical life and even with clear social objectives, over a period of time, either shed their social ideals and become pacifist, otherworldly, or a salvation religion, or become dichotomous, bifurcating, on the one hand, into monasticism, and, on the other hand, into either political misrule and tyranny or sheer secularism. Sikhism does not stand any such danger of ideological decline or bifurcation, because of its gradual and firm ascent and unfolding. It shows the prophetic vision of Guru Nanak that he not only profusely and clearly defined all aspects of his life affirming and integrated ideology, but also detailed the targets his society had to achieve. He laid the firm foundations of the institutions and the socio-religious structure his successors had to develop and complete. Guru Nanak defined his God not only as the Ocean of Virtues, but also as a Sant Sipahi or the Destroyer of the evil-doers; and the ideal he laid down for the seeker was to be the instrument of the Will of such a God. Guru Arjun gave instructions to his son to militarise the movement and thereafter, as was explained by Guru Hargobind to Sant Ramdas, his sword was for the protection of the weak and the destruction of the tyrant. While Guru Arjun, the first martyr of the faith, had confrontation with the empire and gave orders for militarisation, the subsequent five Gurus manifestly proclaimed and practised the spiritual ideal of Sant-Sipahi. So, whatever some votaries of pacifist or dichotomous ideologies or other outsiders may say, to students of Sikhism or a seeker of the Sikh ideal, there can never be any doubt as to the integrated miri-piri or Sant-Sipahi ideal in Sikhism. Because in the eyes of a Sikh, any reversion to ideas of pacifism, personal salvation or monasticism would be a manifest fall from the spiritual ideology laid down by Guru Nanak, enshrined in Guru Granth Sahib, and openly, single-mindedly and demonstrably lived by the ten Gurus, culminating in the creation of the Khalsa, with kirpan as the essential symbol for resisting injustice and oppression. The *kirpan* essentially signifies two fundamental tenets of Sikhism, namely, that it is the basic responsibility of a Sikh to confront and resist injustice, and that asceticism, monasticism, or escapism, of any kind is wrong. Thus, the *kirpan*, on the one hand, is a constant reminder to the Sikh of his duty, and, on the other hand, is a standing guard against reversion to pacifism and otherworldliness. The extreme sagacity and vision of the Sikh Gurus is evident from the thoughtfully planned and measured manner in which they built the structure of their ideology and the Sikh society, epitomised in the order of the Khalsa. That is also the reason that so far as the ideology and ideals of the Sikh society are concerned, there cannot be any ambiguity in that regard. Hence, considering the manner in which the lives of the ten Gurus have demonstrated the Sikh way of life, the question of its bifurcation or accepting pacifism or otherworldliness does not arise. And this forms, we believe, the fourth important reason for there being ten Gurus and the closure of succession after the Khalsa was created.

### “May God Bless all Mankind”

The summary of the Sikh ideology, in the background of the religious history of some higher religions, makes the viewpoint of the Sikh Gurus and the Sikh position very clear. The Gurus emphasise that at the manmukh stage of man's development, man is constitutionally incapable of avoiding injustice, wars

and conflicts. Because, man is basically egocentric and stands alienated from the Fundamental Force (God) which is Love. So long as he does not link himself with the Flow of Love and fails to work in unison with it, his problems of clash, disharmony and tensions will continue. The diagnosis of the authors of Limits of Growth is also the same, namely, that unless man is able to shed his egocentrism, there appears little hope for peace and happiness in the world.

The state is an instrument devised by man to curb the basic egocentrism or wickedness of individuals and power groups. But, politics divorced from the Fundamental Spiritual Force, or moral brakes creates the situation that 'the State or Establishment is seized by individuals and groups, who openly use and employ all the enormous means of the modern state for the satisfaction of their egocentrism, working to the detriment of the masses and the poor. And the more backward or poor a country, the greater the oppression uninhibited secularism can do with the power machine of the state. The result, logically and unavoidably, is that the gap between the downtrodden masses and the oppressive elites goes on widening. This happens both within a state, and among the various national states. We wonder if anyone who is acquainted with recent history, can contradict this observation.

Rationally speaking, secularism is incapable of reversing the present trend, or finding a solution of the existing malady. The causes for this failure have been stressed by the Gurus. Reason being a tool or limb of the egocentric man (*manmukh*) and being unconnected with the Universal consciousness or spirituo-moral base of man, it can never make the individual spontaneously altruistic. Hence, any search for a humanitarian ethics through empiricism, communism or secularism is doomed to failure. The hopes which science in the first decades of the century had raised, stand tragically shattered.

To us, materialism and morality seem a contradiction in terms. Similarly, dichotomous or life-negating religions are equally amoral in their social impact. It is because of the Indian religions being dichotomous that the unjust secular institution of Varn Ashram Dharma and caste could continue in the Indian society, and also have the approval of its scriptures. The study of the three Western religions of Judaism, Christianity and Islam also furnishes the same lesson. The moment any of these societies became otherworldly, or showed dichotomous tendencies, the moral strength of the society to face the challenges of life became minimal. Or vice versa, the society became dichotomous, when it failed to face effectively the challenges of life. And, ultimately it is the moral stamina of a people or culture that by and large determines its survival. This is evident from the known history, both of Judaism and Islam. But for the subordination of religious institutions to the national state, following the Reformation, the triumph of secularism and scientism to erode the Christian ethical base from the Western life would never have been possible. The ethical field today is in complete disarray. Since religion is the only source which could furnish the moral sap to maintain social cohesion, and Christian elan being at its lowest ebb, the twentieth century has witnessed the worst slaughter and butchery of tens of millions, both at the international and the national levels. Hitler, Stalin and Hiroshima are phenomena of the twentieth century secularism. The nations of the world are spending on arms a thousand billion dollars each year. It is this dismal spectacle that had, on the one hand, forced the Soviets to talk of the 'priority of universal values over the class or group values', and, on the other hand, led the North

American Churches to suggest co-operation with other religions in order to fight the common danger of secularism. For the present, either out of their ignorance, or for other reasons, the European Churches have overruled the American view. But, the problem remains and stands highlighted by thinking persons. Decades back, Collingwood wrote: "The discovery of a relation is at once the discovery of my thought as reaching God and of God's thought as reaching me: and indistinguishable from this, the performance of an act of mine by which I establish a relation with God and an act of God's by which He establishes a relation with me. To fancy that religion lives either below or above the limits of reflective thought is fatally to misconceive either the nature of religion or the nature of reflective thought. It would be nearer the truth to say that in religion, the life of reflection is concentrated in its intensest form, and that the special problems of the theoretical and practical life all take their special forms by segregation out of the body of religious consciousness and retain their vitality only so far as they preserve their connexion with it and with each other in it". This statement presents the view that unless reason and religion are combined, or the spiritual life is combined with the empirical life of man, his problems will remain insolvable. Reason is incapable of devising or creating a moral force. Hence, the inherent incapacity of secularism to create any worthwhile values, much less universal values. The fall of the Russian Empire has made this clear.

Five hundred years ago, Guru Nanak emphasised that unless the spiritual component enriches the empirical life, man's problems of conflict, war and disharmony will remain. The solution lies in working in consonance with God's Will or the Basic Force of Love and Altruism. The brotherhood of man cannot be a reality without accepting the Fatherhood of God. For the Gurus, the Fatherhood of God or Force of Love or Universal Consciousness is not an assumption, but a reality. For them, it is a true and most indubitable experience, spontaneously leading to activity. It is an experience far more real than the sensory perception of external phenomena or the construction of a pragmatic or utilitarian ethics, or the assumption of a dialectical movement raised by human reason. The Gurus exhort man to follow the path of altruistic deeds to reach the next evolutionary stage of gurmukh or God-man. It is a worldview of combining the spiritual life with the empirical life of man, thereby breaking the alienation from which man suffers. It is a worldview of total responsibility towards every sphere of life, the God-man's sphere of responsibility being co-terminus with the sphere of God. At a time when most of the higher religions have either become dichotomous, or are withdrawing from the main fields of social responsibility, and human reason feels frustrated, the Sikh Gurus express a comprehensive worldview of hope and eternal relevance. At the same time, it is important to state that, far from being exclusive, Sikhism is universal in its approach, always anxious and willing to serve and co-operate with those who aim at harmony among beings and welfare of man. For, the Gurus prayer to God is that the world may be saved by any way. He may be Gracious enough to do. And, Guru Nanak proclaimed that his mission was, with the help of other God-men, to steer man across the turbulent sea of life. This fundamental ideal stands enshrined in the final words of the daily Sikh prayer,

"May God bless all Mankind".

**Daljeet Singh**

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# THE MASTER'S GRACE

Extracts from "Thoughts of Bhayee Ardaman Singh"



*Guru Nanak Devji with Bahlol, a Muslim seer in Baghdad, where a Gurdwara exists today.*

**A** thoughtless, imitative historiography appears to have done incalculable damage to the pristine Sikh image, and for this sad state of affairs, Sikh historians in concert with unscholarly theologians are as much responsible as the ideological enemies of the faith. Sikhism was, therefore, naturally projected through tainted and blurred glasses. Happily, the writers and scholars now in labour have begun to dissipate the fog thus engendered and helped restore a certain kind of discipline in their work. The *sarkari* media and the ruling classes have in a way pressurised the Sikh imagination to establish afresh the Sikh identity. And the Sikh identity is largely the Sikh way of life.

Now this expression is comprehensive enough to subsume many a basic Sikh thought and the Sikh code of conduct and the Sikh world-view. It is not based on any set of mantras, rules and laws, edicts or commandments as such. There is no place in the Sikh way of life for any physical austerities, rituals, formalism, acrobatic postures, fasts or ablutions, trances or talismans, pilgrimages, penances or *karam kand*. Nor is there any room for mechanical practices and observances, for empty ritualism, masochistic yogic or other life-denying exercises. Furthermore, it steers clear of esoteric introversions, cobwebs of castes, incarnations and the like.

The nuclear energies of such a life are calculated to mould the human mind so that it acquires complete harmony with the will of the Creator. This can be achieved by submitting ourselves to His will in thought and perception as the daily business and traffic of life.

It means, ipso facto, the extinction of our ego or '*haumai*'. And this, in sum, is the dialectic of growth, and the creation of harmony and action in tandem.

This 'Way of Life' took two hundred years to evolve.

Guru Nanak Dev sowed the seed towards the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> and the dawn of the 16<sup>th</sup> Century. His eight successors nurtured, cultivated and fortified it. After 200 years of meticulous planning and preparation, the 10th Nanak, Guru Gobind Singh, brought this to blossom and fruition in 1699 when the Guruship was entrusted to the Khalsa under sovereign direction of the Gurbani adumbrated and preserved in the Guru Granth Sahib. The spirit and the light (*jot*) were to be received from the Gurbani, and its implementation (*jugat*) in actual life was left to the Khalsa as the community or the new Commonwealth progressed from generation to generation, in tune with the essentials 'of the creed. Thus, a certain kind of resilience to deal with contingencies and crises formed an integral part of the process of "being and becoming". Thus harmony was to be created between our mind, soul and body, and between our functioning organs and intellect.

Equally, harmony is the hallmark of Sikh family life.

Since a Sikh is to exult in the life of a house holder and partake of its riches, bounties and beauties, he is required to train his sensibility, and condition his mind accordingly.

In the context of our life today, this order of harmony acquires a greater urgency. In fact, its orbit comprehends friends and relations, acquaintances and contacts where they live or work.

Ultimately, this harmony leads us to those spiritual heights where alone we can get peace of mind and stability. It is there that we get into perfect harmony and rhythm with Nature where the Creator is seen in action and where we experience eternal bliss. And that is the stage where the achieved equilibrium lifts us above fears and vain hopes. The *Shabad*, finally, vanquishes all falsenesses and all masks.

At this point we realise our insignificance and helplessness when compared to the Omnipotent Universality of the *Akal Purkh*. The human soul is just a drop in the ocean of the Unfathomable and the Incomprehensible Universal Soul. As a consequence, we arrive at cross-roads and one begins to slide towards utter helplessness, frustration, pessimistic inaction, renunciation, fatalism, and other tribulations of the spirit. This course propelled us into slavery, and all the suffering that India underwent by succumbing to this specious way.

The 'other way' is of action, service, optimism, and taking pleasure in doing good to others. Sikhism affirms this way of positive action. We formulate our own Karma. That is our responsibility. *Karma* cannot be created by inaction. It results from our actions only. Action, therefore, is an essential part of life. If our actions are approved, the Master's Grace will liberate us from the labyrinth of defeated thought. Action, then, becomes an imperative.

Guru Nanak Dev's paeans to peace, to fortitude in suffering have, generally, been taken as the Master's message.

It needs to be emphasised that there is an element of radical, revolutionary thought in his bani also, and that the true *dharma* implies and even demands action in full wakefulness of one's spirit. His poetry of pity in *Babar Vani* alone is enough to affirm his views.

In Var Majh Guru Nanak says

**ਗਲੀ ਡਿਮਤਿ ਠ ਜਾਈਐ, ਛੁਟੈ ਮਚੁ ਕਮਾਇ ।**

*By talking and discussing you cannot reach heaven.*

*Deliverance can only be had by living an active truthful life.*

The Tenth Master has himself prayed:

**ਜਥ ਆਵ ਕੀ ਅਰੁਦਿ ਨਿਦਾਨ ਥਣੈ ਅਰਿ ਹੀ ਰਨਮੈ ਤਬ ਜੂਝ ਮਰੇ ।**

*When the end comes,  
May I die fighting in the thick of the battle.*

Our next duty is towards the Satguru. The place of the Guru in Sikhism is next to God. To get Light and Guidance, the need of the Guru is essential. All the gems and jewels lie inherent and dormant in us. They are only waiting for the touch of the Guru to be energised and used.

**(ਮਰਿ ਵਿਚ ਰਨਨ ਜਵਾਹਰ ਮਾਣਿਕ ਜੇ ਇਕ ਗੁਰ ਕੀ ਸਿਖ ਸੁਣੀ)**

We have only to grasp and cling on to the Satguru's "Lotus Feet" with faith and devotion. If we persist with a singleness of purpose, in spite of the tests the Guru puts on us, the loving Guru will embrace and come to function in us. Along with the Guru come his forces, strength and powers. For us, God and the Guru are inseparable. Entrusting our body, mind, passions, and everything to the Guru, and abiding by His Will, we get the true realisation.

**ਰਨੁ ਮਨੁ ਧਨੁ ਸਭੁ ਸਰੁਪਿ ਗੁਰ ਕਰਿ, ਹੁਕਮ ਮੰਨਿਐ ਪਾਈਐ ।**

Next comes our duty towards the Sikh community known as the *Panth*. Being entrusted with the Guruship, the Khalsa is the image of the Guru himself. To preserve its image and identity, and keep its colours high and aloft is a Sikh's foremost, sacred duty.

*Keshas* (unshorn hair) are a spiritual link with the Guruship. It is *keshas* that have saved the Sikhs from extinction.

Otherwise, they would have been assimilated by intolerant Hindu majority long ago. This responsibility has to be faced with courage and conviction.

To perform our duties and fulfil our responsibilities, we must have requisite capability and capacity. For this purpose, besides the will and understanding, ways and means, intellect and knowledge, physical fitness and health are a necessity.

The Satguru's mission, and so the ideal of a Sikh, is to uphold and advance righteousness, and to emancipate the good, "the saint in us" (ਧਰਮ ਚਲਾਣ ਸੰਤ ਉਧਾਰਨ). And to extirpate evil and evil-doers, root and branch (ਦੁਸਟ ਸਠਨ ਕੇ ਮੂਲ ਉਪਾਰਨ).

To fulfil this mission for self-preservation, and preservation of our way of life, of our *dharam*, traditions and our established institutions and organisations, the community as a corporate, integrated body has to create the necessary energies. The essentials were incorporated in this way of life from the very beginning. Guru Nanak Dev had himself established missionary centres even in distant places including Ceylon, the Deccan, Multan and Baghdad. The selection and nomination of his successors proved a significant step in this direction. This established a precedent which has continued and formed a lasting order. Our aims, therefore, are to be achieved in *Sangat*, and not by any way of renunciation. This is why *Sangat* (community gatherings) and *Pangat* (community dining) constitute the two strong pillars supporting the superstructure evolved over the tempestuous period of time.

As we have argued in this brief exposition,

The Sikh way of life is unique, rooted in faith and deed, and catholic in its sweep of thought and understanding.

And all this deified in Nature itself. "Nature is the Lord's spirit in grace and glory". Everything perceptible is the manifestation of the One Supreme Master. He can be perceived in His myriad, uncountable forms. It is in His manifest nature that His will, (*Hukam* and *Razaa*) can be observed.

In *Asa-di-Var*, the Satguru says

**ਕੁਦਰਤਿ ਦਿਸੈ ਕੁਦਰਤਿ ਸੁਣੀਐ ਕੁਦਰਤਿ ਭਰਿ ਸੁਖ ਮਾਰੁ ।**

*It is your will functioning in Nature, by which we see  
And hear, and are conscious of fear and comfort.*

**ਕੁਦਰਤਿ ਪਤਾਲੀ ਆਕਾਸੀ ਕੁਦਰਤਿ ਸਰਬ ਆਕਾਰੁ ।**

*The nether regions, the heavens, and all the forms and  
Bodies in Creation came under the course of Thy Nature;*

**ਕੁਦਰਤਿ ਵੇਦ ਪੁਰਾਣ ਕਰੇਯਾ ਕੁਦਰਤਿ ਸਰਬ ਵੀਚਾਰੁ ।**

*So did the Vedas, the Puranas, the Semetic Scriptures  
And all the Schools of Thought.*

**ਕੁਦਰਤਿ ਖਾਣਾ ਪੀਣਾ ਪੈਨਣੁ ਕੁਦਰਤਿ ਸਰਬ ਪਿਆਰੁ ।**

*Under your will come the ways of eating, drinking,  
Dressing and all the ways of love and affection.*

**ਕੁਦਰਤਿ ਜਾਤੀ ਜਿਨਮੀ ਰੰਗੀ ਕੁਦਰਤਿ ਜੀਅ ਜਗਠ।**

*Thy Nature prevails in all the species, genera,  
The animal kingdom and colours.*

**ਕੁਦਰਤਿ ਠੇਕੀਆ ਕੁਦਰਤਿ ਬਦੀਆ ਕੁਦਰਤਿ ਮਨੁ ਅਭਿਮਾਨੁ ।**

*Thy Nature works in the virtues and evils of men  
And in their feelings of honour and dishonour.*

**ਕੁਦਰਤਿ ਪਉਣ ਪਾਣੀ ਬੈਸੰਤਰ ਕੁਦਰਤਿ ਧਰਤੀ ਖਰੁ ।**

*It is your Nature which works in the wind, water, and  
Fire as well as in the particles of the earth.*

**ਨਲਕ ਹੁਕਮੈ ਅੰਦਰਿ ਵੇਖੈ ਵਰਤੈ ਤਕੇ ਤਰੁ ।**

*It is all Your Will and Nature that work every where.  
You are the Creator and Master of Nature.  
Your Name is the holiest of the holy.*

**ਸਭ ਤੇਰੀ ਕੁਦਰਤਿ ਤੂ ਕਾਦਿਰੁ ਕਰਤਾ ਪਕੀ ਨਈ ਪਕੁ ।**

*Says Nanak, Thou beholdest and pervadest all things  
under Thy Command and workest most intelligently.*

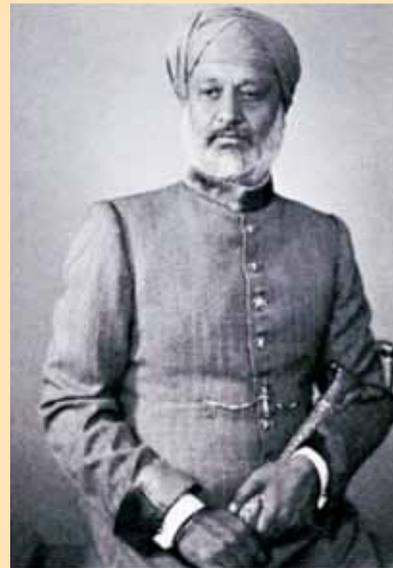
In this Cosmos of His Presence, the insignificant human plays out his life and the Lord observes his conduct – the good (ਦੀਰਿਆਈਆਂ) and the bad (ਬੁਰਿਆਈਆਂ)

By man's own conduct is determined by his nearness or otherwise to the Lord. He who contemplates on His Name receives acceptance in Him. (Slok Japji Sahib)

## Bhai Sahib Bhayee Ardaman Singh 1899-1976

The eldest son of Bhai Sahib Bhai Arjan Singh was Bhayee Ardaman Singh, who received rich religious and liberal contemporary education. Graduating from the Khalsa College Amritsar, he grew up in an environment of Sikh scholarship with personalities like Bhai Kahn Singh of Nabha, Principal Teja Singh and Baba Prem Singh of Hoti Mardan, besides his own father who was also a great scholar of Sikhism. His was an enlightened soul, deeply immersed in Sikh religious philosophy and its practice. His scholarly bent of mind and deep understanding of Sikh ethos reflected the depth of his views, rooted as it was in his illustrious heritage. His saintly disposition evoked reverence and gave him a place of eminence amongst the Sikhs. As an upright exponent and practitioner of the Sikh dharma, or way of life, he was known for his uncompromising and forthright views. He provided direction to the Sikh thought during some of the most difficult days of the Panth in Independent India and provided an apolitical leadership to the community, in the most exalted tradition of over three hundred years of his family.

Bhayee Ardaman Singh passed away in 1976 leaving behind three sons, Bhai Haridhan Singh, Bhai Ashok Singh and Bhayee Sikandar Singh. The family institutions are now headed by Bhai Jujhar Singh, son of Bhai Haridhan Singh, who expired in 1994.



[This first appeared in Nishaan III/2000.]

# Takht Sri Harmandir Sahib, Patna



## Takhts of the Faith

**P**atna, ancient Patlipitra, now capital of Bihar, is reverently called Patna Sahib by the Sikhs because of its consecration by Guru Nanak Dev, Guru Tegh Bahadur and Guru Gobind Singh. The latter was born here during Guru Tegh Bahadur's tour of eastern Bihar, Bengal and Assam from 1666 to 1670. Patna Sahib is situated on the right bank of the River Ganges.

*Gurdwara Pahila Bara* (lit. the first and larger), commonly known as Gurdwara Gae Ghat, is dedicated to Guru Nanak Dev, who during his visit to Patna stayed here with Bhai Jaita, a pious man, confectioner by trade, who became the Guru's follower and later converted his house into a *dharmsal*. The congregation that gathered here came to be called Bari Sangat or Gae Ghat Sangat. Later, Salas

Rai, a wealthy jeweller, became a convert and took the Guru to his own place where, too, a small community of Sikh believers was formed into what was known as Chhoti Sangat. A new building comprising a spacious square hall with the sanctum in the middle was constructed during the 1980s. Two relics are preserved here – a rebeck claimed to be once Bhai Mardana's and a stone called Mata Gujari's grindstone.

*Takht Sri Harimandir Sahib*, the principal shrine at Patna Sahib and one of the five Takhts or the highest seats of religious authority for the Sikhs, marks the site of the *Chhoti Sangat*. Guru Tegh Bahadur had first alighted at Bari Sangat at Gae Ghat from where he was brought in procession to this place which had once been the commodious mansion of Salas Rai, the jeweller, and where Raja Fateh Chand Maini now built a new house to accommodate the holy family. Guru Tegh Bahadur himself, leaving his family here in the care of his brother-in-law Kirpal Chand and the local *sangat*, proceeded on further to the east. Guru Gobind Singh was born here on the seventh day of the light half of the lunar month of *Poh* in 1723 *Bikrami* corresponding to 22nd December 1666.

Young Gobind spent his early childhood here until his departure for the Punjab in 1670. The house continued to be maintained as a holy place of worship. Its building was replaced by Maharaja Ranjit Singh during 1837-39 with a square flat-roofed hall surrounded by a covered passage for circumambulation. Rulers of Patiala, Jind and Faridkot jointly added several rooms and a gateway to the compound in 1887. An earthquake in 1934 seriously damaged the older building of the Takht Sahib. The present five-storey building was constructed during 1954-57 through *kar seva* under the supervision of Sant Nischal Singh and Sant Kartar Singh. The sanctum sanctorum representing the room where Guru Gobind Singh was born has a circumambulatory passage around it. Adjacent is the spacious

high-ceilinged congregation hall. The arch of the door of the inner sanctum opening on the congregation hall is covered with gilded copper plates embossed with floral design, matching the marble sculpture on the interior walls. Of the three canopied seats facing the hall, the central one has Guru Granth Sahib seated on it with a large-sized portrait of Guru Gobind Singh behind it in place of an officiant. Guru Granth Sahib is placed on the seat on its right and the Dasam Granth on the one on the left, both attended by granthis holding whisks over them. The compound of the Takht Sahib also has several blocks or rooms for staff and visitors as well as for *Guru ka Langar*.

*Gurdwara Bal Lila Maini Sangat*, located in a narrow lane close to Takht Sahib, marks the house where Raja Fateh Chand Maini lived. His childless Rani had developed special fondness for the young Gobind Das, who, too, often came here to sit in the Rani's lap giving her immense delight and spiritual solace. She fed the Sahibzada and his playmates at his demand, with boiled and salted gram. Even now boiled and salted gram is served as *prasad* (consecrated food) in this gurdwara, which, unlike the other shrines in Patna Sahib, is served by Nirmala Sikhs. A wood carving on the old front door is dated Assusudi 1, 1725 *Bikrami* corresponding to 28th August 1668, but the hall housing the sanctum and other blocks of rooms in the inner compound have been reconstructed during recent decades.

*Gurdwara Sri Guru Gobind Singh Ghat* is where the child Gobind Das used to play with his playmates on the bank of the Ganges. *Ghat*

means a place on the bank, usually paved, for bathing, drawing water or for landing or harbouring boats. This *ghat*, about one furlong from Takht Harimandir Sahib is marked by a gateway over which this Gurdwara is situated in a single room. The river has, however, receded since, away to the north.

*Gurdwara Guru ka Bagh* is about three kilometres east of Takht Harimandir Sahib where Guru Tegh Bahadur first alighted in a garden (*bagh*) belonging to Nawabs Rahim Bakhsh and Karim Bakhsh, nobles of Patna, and where the *sangat* of Patna came to receive him back from his four-year long odyssey. Its present building was constructed during the 1970s and 1980s. An old well still in use and a dried stump of the imli tree under which the *sangat* met Guru Tegh Bahadur, still exists.

Precious relics of the Tenth Guru are kept at the Takhat:

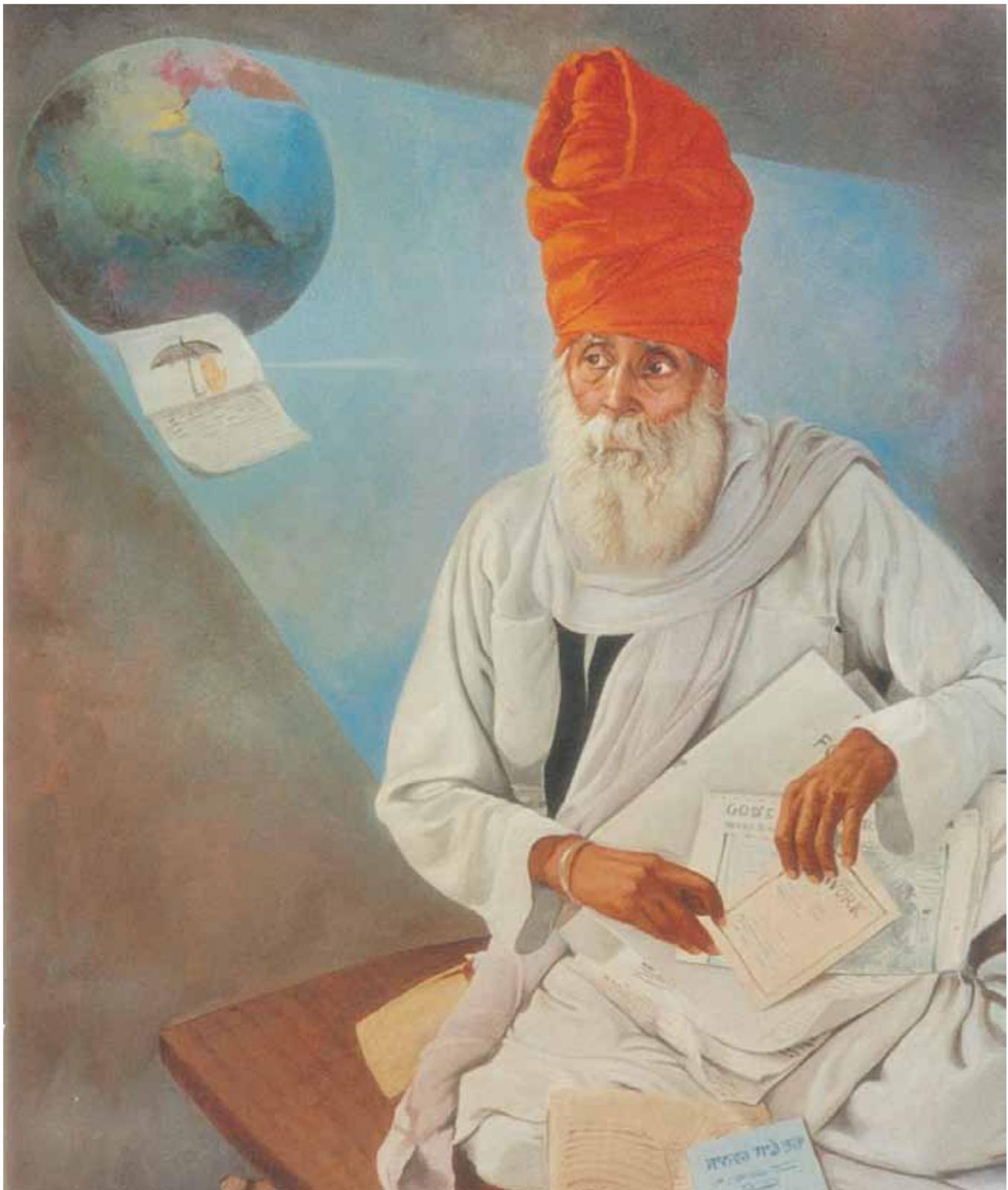
- Cot used by the child Gobind Rai
- Four arrows
- Small sword
- Small khanda
- Small kataar
- Kanga made of sandalwood
- Karanwaan (sandals) made of ivory
- Parchment inscribed with alphabets of Panjabi by the young Gobind Rai

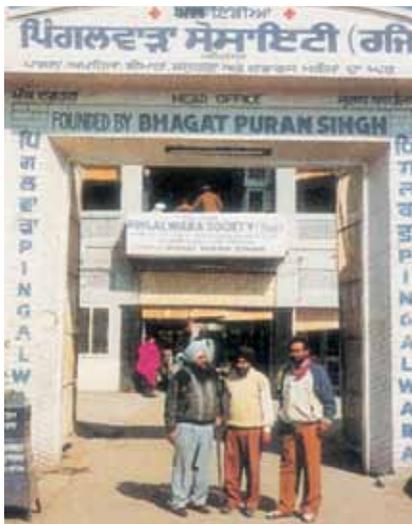
Also kept are

- Kharanwaan – sandalwood sandals of the 9th Guru.

[This first appeared in Nishaan I/20001.]

# The Saint of Pingalwara : Bhagat Puran Singh





Entrance to Pingalwara (above) and the way it began (below).



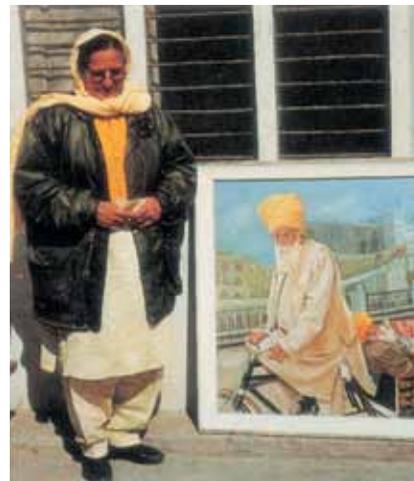
*Dr. Bibi Inderjit Kaur took over as Life President of the All India Pingalwara Society in 1992. Getting her MBBS Degree in 1967 from Patiala Medical School, she first worked as a gazetted doctor and then joined her father's clinic at Sangrur. The first spiritual interaction with Bhagat Puran Singh was in 1975 and was a turning point in her life. Like a devoted daughter, she looked after Bhagatji in his failing health and their common concern for the poor, the handicapped, disabled and mentally retarded strengthened the filial bond between the spiritual father and the devoted daughter.*

**A**t Pingalwara, in Amritsar and elsewhere around, the wondrous legacy of Bhagat Puran Singh lives on. This is to share some first-person accounts of the multi-dimensional personality, one of the true saints of our times.

As Prof. Pritam Singh of Patiala wrote, "Throughout his life Bhagat Puran Singh remained a living legend in the Punjab, the modern version of Bhai Kanahayya the founder of Sewa Panthi, our precursor of the Red Cross."

Bhai Kanahayya was a Sikh of Guru Tegh Bahadur, who outlived his Guru and joined the entourage of Guru Gobind Singh. The Bhai took upon himself the duty of providing drinking water to the Guru's camp. In one of the Sikh-Mughal skirmishes, he was also seen offering water to the injured enemy. Sikh soldiers were furious and dragged him to the Guru for suitable action. To their amazement, the Guru not only blessed him for his true perception of the Sikh faith but also gave him healing ointment for the benefit of those who needed it the most. Since then, the Seiva Panthi Sikhs have been known for their humanitarian services, which transcend all barriers of colour, caste, creed and country.

Bhagat Puran Singh represented, in practice, the same spiritual and moral values that Bhai Kanahayya imbibed under the guidance of Guru Tegh Bahadur and Guru Gobind Singh. A visit to his Pingalwara (the refuge of the handicapped) which was conceived and founded by him in Amritsar, shows how the compassionate soul of this saintly person had spread its protective wings over the many thousands of unfortunate persons suffering from incurable diseases and with no one to look after them. Pingalwara provides an asylum to the physically handicapped, the mentally retarded, the completely deranged, the derelict, forsaken women and abandoned children. For such people, Bhagatji's unique institution remains a charitable hospital, rather a nursing home, with free medicines, boarding, lodging and clothing. Any person, coming from any part of the country, whom society had thrown out of its pale, was sure to find a welcoming godfather. For Bhagatji, all persons suffering from physical or mental ailments were human beings in distress needing immediate succour.

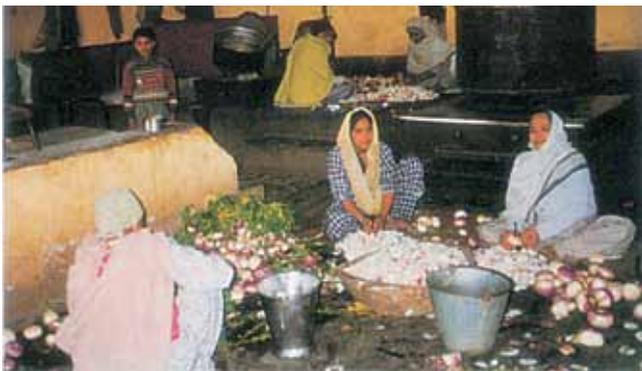




*Pingalwara serves one and all, without thought of creed, community or race. There are some 650 inmates at the various wards, with over ninety per cent of them from outside the Punjab, largely from central and eastern India and even Bangladesh, Where does the help come from ? In the words of one Pingalwara volunteer, "We just keep doing our work .... and as long as the Sangat is there, we will never lack for anything".*



*The main ward at Pingalwara, housing the epileptic and mentally ill, a rehabilitation centre for abandoned women, where they are given vocational training such as candle making, embroidery, stitching and sewing. On the upper floor is a school for mentally retarded children of 2-12 years age. In keeping with Bhagat Puran Singh's sensitivity against wastage of natural resources, there are solar arrays for heating purposes and power generation while horse-drawn tongas bring children to school.*



*"The hands that serve are holier than the lips that pray" was Bhagatji's maxim. Volunteers at the langar kitchen : over one thousand are fed four times a day:- daliya at 0600, milk at 0900, lunch at 1130 and dinner at 1800 hours.*

He was once asked whether he had any religion-wise record of inmates of his Pingalwara : his reply was

that he had never cared to know, but could tell with certainty that non-Sikh inmates far outnumbered their Sikh brethren.

"And what about the religion-wise ratio of the contributors"? "Perhaps 90 per cent or more among the contributors are Sikhs, but everyone is God's child".

Time was when Bhagatji used to go about seeking those who were shelterless so he could provide some succour. In fact, that is how he started his life of service at Lahore. He had adopted a forsaken, spastic child and for the next 14 years, a tall, lanky, poorly dressed person with unkempt beard moving about in streets, with a growing boy clinging to his neck, became a familiar scene for the people of Lahore. Since then, the situation has changed tremendously. The inmates of Pingalwara in Amritsar are now provided with better perches than human backs : the wards of the spacious, double-storeyed building overflow with patients. Bhagat Puran Singh would share the same food as was provided to all inmates and more often than not, sleep on the floor using the same blankets.

The Bhagat never married: his decision to remain single was deliberate because the avocation that he had chosen required total dedication. No marriage could have survived the stresses and strains that he had to undergo during his life.

"Who was responsible for driving you to this life of a roving mendicant", we asked in wonderment?

"God himself", he said and continued thus: "Born as Ramji Das, in a rich money-lending Hindu family of Village Rajewal, near Samrala in District Ludhiana, I was to receive a revelation early in life. Once, going to my village on foot, I was forced to spend a night in a Hindu temple, which I voluntarily swept-clean and washed, but when it was time for a meal, the priests ate in my presence without bothering to share even their left-overs, even though they knew that I would sleep with an empty stomach. As luck would have it, I had to spend another night in similar circumstances at a way side Sikh Gurdwara. I was a total stranger there, did not belong to their faith, but was served, without discrimination, a wholesome meal which was rounded off with a glass of milk. This contrast in the attitude of the two sets of people living in their respective places of worship, planted in my young mind the seeds of the Sikh faith, from which I learnt the lessons of social service, self-sacrifice and dignity of human life. My contact with the Head Granthi of Guru Arjun's Dera Sahib Gurdwara at Lahore, Bhai Teja Singh

convinced me for dedicating my entire life to that most satisfying avocation in the world—alleviation of human contribution. I have swept the excreta of patients with my own hands and do so, even now; I have picked up waste paper and fruit-skins from the roads and do so even now; I have carried mud and bricks on my head for the buildings of Pingalwara. I have begged food for the inmates from door to door and do so even now; I sit outside the Golden Temple and other Gurdwaras in sun and rain and collect money for my Ashram. I do not feel ashamed for all this. In fact, I get in return affection and respect. I have no personal demands but my demands for Pingalwara are unending and enormous. Much of my time is taken by other activities relating to the inculcation of social and ecological awareness among our people and that requires money, which I collect from the public. My demands, howsoever heavy, have always been met generously by the public because people are confident that behind my craze for collection is an unselfish and noble cause. Mine has been a full



*Old-style printing presses work continuously at Pingalwara : there are 19 such machines, deliberately kept thus to maximise employment.*

and meaningful life — a Guru directed journey, through the service of humanity”.

Meeting Bhagatji was always an instructive experience. Full of energy and upto date with ideas culled from books and newspapers, he had socially relevant advice for everyone. “Plant trees, do not cut them” and then would follow an informed lecture on the economic and ecological vantages of trees. “Always travel by train; avoid bus travel”, and then he went on to tell you how dangerous carbon monoxide exhausts are and painted an alarming picture of the steeply mounting toll of human lives in road accidents; “Beware of the impending doom of our world by nuclear and chemical arms”, and you heard from him a horrifying description of the devastatingness of the malignant fission of the atomic nucleus.

“Produce less children”; “Do not throw fruit skins on the road” — the list of such Do’s and Don’ts went on and on. Bhagat Puran Singh was a voracious reader. He employed three readers to provide him with cuttings of socially useful and informative writings from national newspapers and journals and reproduced them on any sort of paper in his own press in the form of handbills, booklets, pamphlets, for free distribution. Books published by him, such as the biographies of Guru Nanak and Guru Gobind Singh and English translation of the Japu of Guru Nanak, some of them as many as 500 pages, were distributed free, in spite of the fact that the amount spent on them ran into lakhs of rupees. “Money comes to me in small amounts from so many people. I give it back to them in the form of character-building and nation-building literature”, explained Bhagat Puran Singh in justification of such expenditure.

It is not easily possible to sum up a multi-dimensional institution that Bhagat Puran Singh surely was. Had the Bhagat been a little more exposed to the clinical



*Women and girls, abandoned and hopeless, brutally thrown into trains that terminate at Amritsar or brought by trucks from all parts of India, find asylum at Pingalwara: seen here, Suman from Madhya Pradesh, Molina from Bangladesh and others. “It is a sacred task to raise their morale, infuse new spirit and confidence, to live as self-respecting people”.*

standards of cleanliness and business management and had the information media of our country been a little more observant of the constructive and inspiring voluntary servants of society, instead of over-indulgence in the game of inflating and deflating by turns, there is every reason that Bhagat Puran Singh’s name should have been the common property of the whole world, such became that of Mother Teresa.

As written elsewhere, “The sage of Amritsar was to the unattended here which Mother Teresa was to the poor orphans of Calcutta. The difference was, of course, resources – and media exposure”.



Ambulance “donated by the Sikh Community of Hong Kong”, alongside horse-drawn tonga at Pingalwara: Bhagat Puran Singh urged people to walk, bicycle or take animal-drawn carts instead of driving in motor vehicles whose ever-increasing output of hydrocarbons would have severe health and economic effects on mankind.



Dr. Inderjit Kaur, with inmates of the female ward at Pingalwara.



The Pingalwara Trust also runs a number of Primary Schools in and around Amritsar for the children of slum dwellers and the very poor. One such is some 4 kilometres away from Pingalwara near the village of Masoolpura and the slums close to the Punjab Mandi Board where over 100 children of 5 to 8 years are given free schooling and two meals a day.

## On Ecology Bhagat Puran Singh’s Vital Concern

Bhagat Puran Singh’s dedication to service of the sick, the disabled and destitute is universally acknowledged, but lesser known is his pioneering concern on ecology, for survival not just of homo-sapiens but of all creation on this planet. Bhagat Puran Singh was a pathfinder who raised an impassioned cry about jeopardy looming over the earth, while most carry on in the euphoria of ignorance. He had foreseen the dangers emanating from indiscriminate industrialisation, the so called “boons” of modern life.

In one of his pamphlets (in Gurumkhi) *The Knell* which he distributed free and would insist that people read between its lines, he wrote that the reckless pursuit of technology for its own sake would devastate all the treasures of this earth and ruin it completely within a lifetime. The pamphlet gravely warned against inordinate use of modern transport run on hydro-carbons and exhorted people to travel on foot or by bicycle. Bhagatji would advise his followers to cultivate a habit of walking regularly for 8½ miles a day so as to keep healthy and physically fit.

Bhagatji regarded the earth as a holy shrine of the Lord, after Guru Nanak’s concept .... “Within the Universe, Earth was created to be a Shrine”, and that polluting its atmosphere was an act of sacrilege. He perceived the presence of God pulsating through every insignificant factor of this planet. His passion for the protection and safety of the earth had evolved into a sort of new religion that verily cherished the well-being of all. His spirit of care was so extensive that it encompassed everything—sensible or insensible — on earth. Besides his fellow beings, he would feel equal kinship for the birds, the beasts, the trees, the flowers, the hills, the blue sky, the dancing rivulets and all that the human eye could see. He would be anguished at the sight of a wood-cutter chopping branches of a tree. He once gave a large sum to a cutter who threatened to axe down the trees grown by his mother.

His major apprehension was the gradual extinction of present civilisation through indiscriminate felling of trees. Written on a wall of the Pingalwara Complex, he warned that the green forest cover in India was being reduced at the rate of ten lakh and fifty thousand hectares every year. If such process of hewing the jungles continued, India would turn into a vast desert by the year 2010. Such realisations created horrifying imagination. Bhagatji explained through his numerous pamphlets and posters, that the toxic waste produced by industry and poisonous fumes of fuel and chemicals was taking earth to the brink of extinction.

V.N. Narayanan, then Editor-in-Chief of The Tribune and later of *The Hindustan Times* wrote about Bhagat Puran Singh with great reverence:

He looks like the rishies of old and the Khalsa of Guru Gobind Singh — a veritable combination of courage and compassion, a total embodiment of unselfishness and service. Bhagat Puran Singh is what India's distilled wisdom and rich heritage are all about.

There he sits, at the entrance of the Golden Temple at Amritsar, with loads and loads of paper around him. In front of him is a brass vessel as nondescript as the man's physical appearance. Visiting devotees to the shrine stop, pay silent obeisance, put some cash into the tray and move on. Bhagat Puran Singh neither seeks nor acknowledges their greetings.

The money piles up, but the sage notes it not, but along comes a seeker and the sage welcomes with open arms.

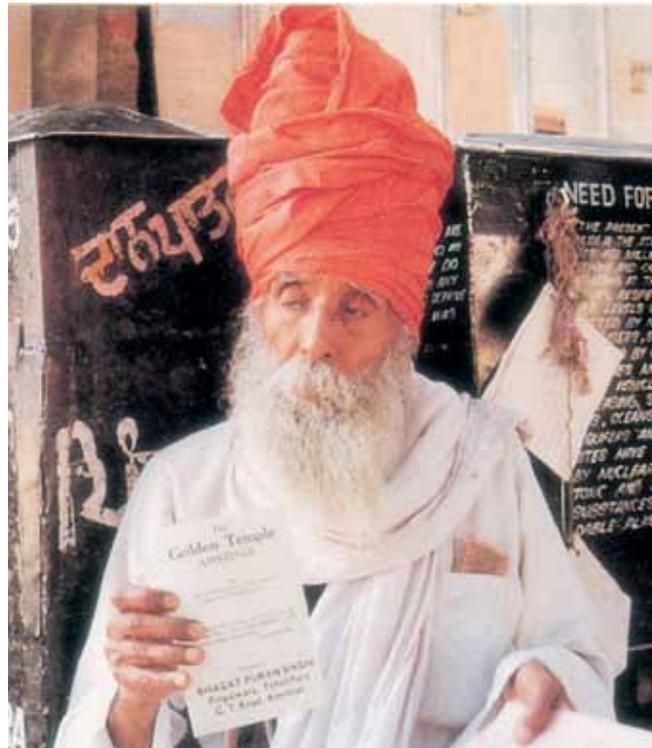
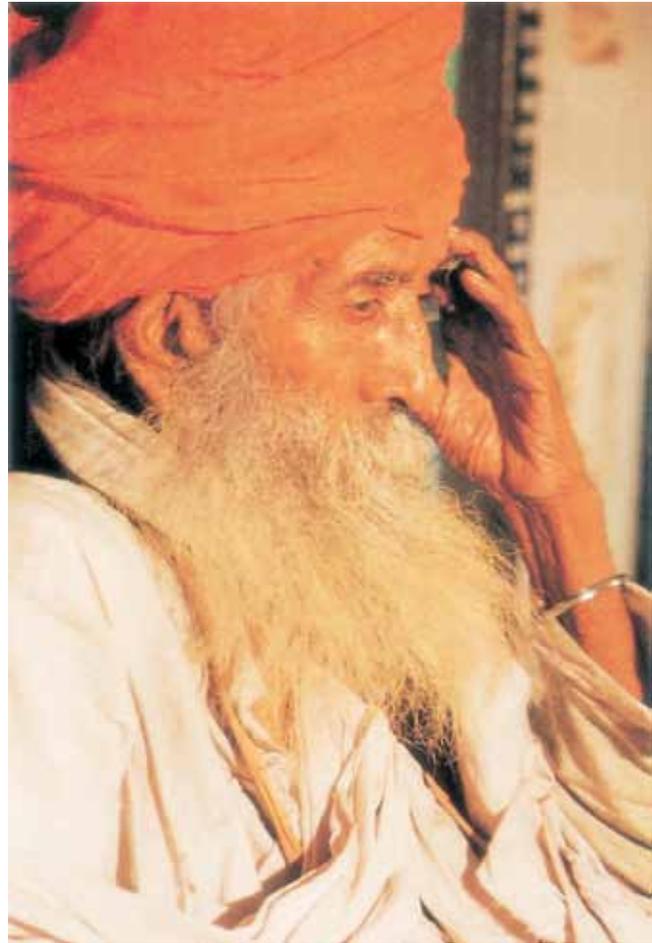
There is spontaneous rapport and the generation gap is closed. You wonder what this wizened old man has — if anything at all — to say and minutes later there is another kind of wonder : how is it that this frail man of near ninety is so well versed in ecology environment problems, the Tehri dam, Narmada and deficit financing. The words of Guru Nanak in *Var Asa* flash through the mind:

“He who attains humility through love and devotion to God, Such a one may attain emancipation”.

He is gentle, soft and sublimely uncritical of anything around him. To him, all of God's creations are sacred, be they animal, vegetable or mineral or whatever. He collects, as he walks along the streets of Amritsar, pebbles, horse-shoes, peculiarly shaped stones, and a lot else

The picking of pebbles on the street is very symbolic. After all, for close to seven decades Bhagatji had been picking up human pebbles cast away by a cruel destiny or an uncaring society. God helps those who help themselves; Bhagat Puran Singh has vowed to help those who cannot help themselves.

He is the saint of our times. Contemporary history has few names (I have Mother Teresa on my mind when I write this) which can boast of such relentless service to humanity as that of Bhagat Puran Singh. “*Binu seva phal kabhu na pawasi seva karni sari*”. Talking to him is enlightening. He has very simple remedies for almost all the nation's ills. All perfectly practical and easily enforceable — but in a nation of Bhagat Puran Singhs.





At the Ram Talai ward, now renamed after Mata Mehtab Kaur

A few public-spirited Indians in the USA started a movement to recommend the Nobel Peace Prize for Bhagatji. He would be the last person to be enthusiastic about it. He knows the difference between the emancipated soul and the Good Samaritan, the difference that would explain why Martin Luther King's non-violence struggle was worthy of the Nobel Award, and why it was unworthy of Mahatma Gandhi's Satyagraha and Ahimsa.

Meanwhile, the saint went on unworried by the mess caused by our leaders to the country.

Bhagat Puran Singh would echo Guru Nanak Dev ...

*"I have learnt by the light shed by the Master, perfectly endowed;*

*Recluse, hero, celibate or sanyasi*

*No one may expect to earn merit .*

*Without dedicated service Service which is the essence of purity".*

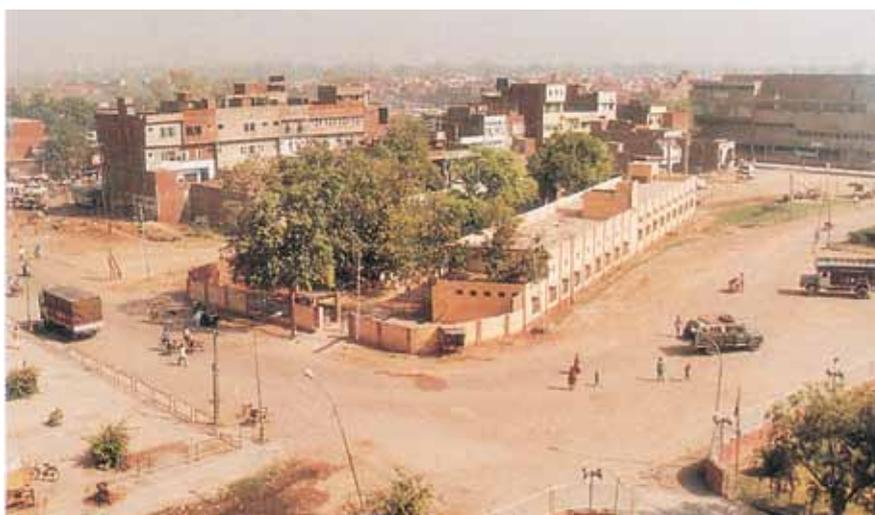
This was written in 1991. When V.N.Narayanan last met Bhagatji, at Chandigarh's PGI, he was in deep coma .... "I was admitted to his bedside .... as in a trance I moved my hand towards him and thought his own hands moved up to touch mine. It was the touch of the Lord himself".

## Cosmic Bond

Some associations are dictated by cosmic design and these then channelise future ideologies and perceptions in a definite manner. My association with Bhagat Puran Singh was one such. I cannot assign any tag or title to it, but this was a strong bond.

He was Bhagatji for rest of the world, but for me, he was Babaji, a name which I had affectionately coined for him at an early age.

I was into my teens when first taken to meet Bhagatji by my grandfather, while visiting Ferozepore. Being so young, I interpreted religion in my own terms then and had scant respect for any other interpretation. So grandfather redefined the personality .... "he is an



View of the Mahan Singh Gate, now called the Piara Singh Ward

unusual social worker". This was different, and now I was interested. After school, I was taken to meet the gentleman. Both Bauji and this unusually dressed Sikh person were sunning themselves in the verandah and were engrossed in deep discussion. He was tall and thin, wearing a freshly washed and ironed white khadi kurta and loose pyjamas. A kirpan slung from a black strap contrasted starkly with the whiteness, as did the saffron parna loosely wrapped around his head. It was lesser in length than a pagri, but being coarse in material, gave the appearance of a mountain-sized pagri on top of his frail head, with a flowing white beard beneath it.

I was still not impressed until he pinned me to my seat with his sharp grey eyes and started conversing with me in English.

"So, what do you aim to do in life?"

"Become a surgeon," I said shortly.

"But I hear that you write well".

I simply shrugged my shoulders.

"This world needs more writers, who can make other people aware of what is happening around us and what all needs to be done".

I heard him quietly and respectfully.  
“What about marriage”, he questioned.

“You tell me Babaji, why haven’t you married”? was my retort. I was very anti-marriage then.

“Of course I am married — but to my work”.

“What kind of work”? I asked, for till then I had no inkling of what ever he was doing.

Babaji then suggested that I walk with him to the Gurdwara, where people were waiting to donate something for his institution ‘Pingalwara’ (literally, a house of pingalas, or the handicapped).

Along the way, whenever he saw a stone or a piece of broken glass on the road, he would pick it and leave it at one side, ... “this might hurt someone’s foot or puncture a vehicle’s tyre”.



*Bhagat Puran Singh and his Piara*

And if he saw paper left on the road, he would pick that up too, saying that it could be recycled.

He abhorred the use of plastics and environment polluting vehicles. He said this without hesitation, to whosoever him, whether it was the Chief Minister of Punjab, Khushwant Singh or whosoever.

There were heaps of clothing of all shapes and sizes, which he was collecting for the inmates of Pingalwara. “There are women who have been abandoned, raped or are widows, even unmarried mothers. They come and stay in Pingalwara till I can find a substitute home for them”, Babaji stated. Each one in the crowd was eager to have a word with him, or give him donations for the Pingalwara, and he personally wrote out the receipts. I watched the scenario quietly. It was slowly seeping into my conscious mind. this man’s stature belied his appearance.

When the crowd around him receded, he continued with his advice

“You must take up writing seriously. Secondly, you must marry, but marry a puran Gursikh”. I nodded my head slowly. This first meeting with him affected me greatly and left an indelible impression of what true service towards humanity and society really meant. The magnitude of his endeavour, undertaken single-handedly, was to strike me with much greater force, but many years later.



*Babaji reading one of his sermons on a wall near the Darbar Sahib*

I learnt that Bhagat Puran Singh was born a Hindu and was named Ramji Das in his childhood before his mission changed him and remodelled his personality. Growing up in village Rajewal in Ludhiana district, he belonged to a well-to-do family. He was deeply influenced by his mother’s ideology at a very tender age, and imbibed her generosity, warmth and high principles, which multiplied with age and lifted his stature so as to place him somewhere between the soul and the over-soul. Ramji Das was preparing for his entrance examination to college, when by a single stroke of fate, his father Chhibu Mal died and the mother and son were left virtually penniless. They left for Lahore and took shelter in Gurdwara Dera Sahib. Ramji Das got employed as a helper in the Gurdwara langar. Sikhism was not new for him as he had leanings towards this faith from a very early age. He soon became a Sikh and was named Puran Singh, a name he hugged and whatever it represented metaphorically, all his life.

Bhagat Puran Singh’s mother, Mehtab Kaur continued in frail health for sometime but soon passed away. Puran Singh was left alone. He was passing through a void, when he saw an abandoned child left on the steps leading to Gurdwara Dera Sahib. The child of four was mentally and physically handicapped and suffering from diarrhoea. Puran Singh felt an overpowering surge of

love and pity for the child, picked him up, washed him, fed him and then named him Piara ("loved one"). Thus started a long journey of service rendered to humanity, self-sacrifice, the establishment of Pingalwara (home for the handicapped) and a continuous effort to instill social and religious values in humans at large without alienating them as different sects. He practised his ideas zealously, even as he satiated his hunger for all-encompassing knowledge by reading books on all sorts of subjects at different libraries. This pattern continued until India's partition left him homeless again and he left Lahore for Amritsar in 1947.



*Bhagat Puram Singh's writing material : a Kalam and ink in a tin pot...*

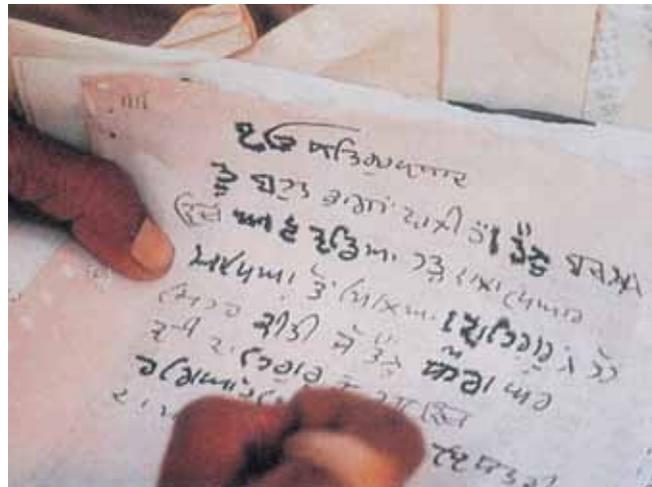
As a refugee, carrying Piara on his back, he camped at the Khalsa College, where he helped other refugees suffering from a cholera epidemic. After the camp was wound up, Bhagatji found that Piara had brothers and sisters, old or disabled like him, who too had become dependent on him. So the foundation of Pingalwara was unconsciously laid, with some help from others but continued to be nomadic in nature for sometime.

The land where the present Pingalwara stands (near the main bus stop in Amritsar) was purchased in the early 1950s with some help from the Ministry of Rehabilitation. Bhagatji's dream started unfolding here. The main wards were built here, while with aid from various institutions and individuals, other wards came to be added over the next years.

At all times, Bhagatji would be serving the helpless, the sick, the mental wrecks, the lepers, welcoming them into the fold of Pingalwara. As a result the number of wards or Pingalwara's sub-branches, increased : the Ram Talai ward, Mahan Singh Gate ward, Pandori Waraich branch and the one at Goindwal Sahib came into being.

Throughout my schooling, and later in college, Bhagatji and I kept in touch with each other. Invariably there would be the local Pingalwara representative standing at our gate, bearing a note from Babaji along with some books just published by the Pingalwara press, which he wanted me to read and then react on.

I would go through the books dutifully and then write to him. He would never, or hardly ever, write himself but instead would select passages relevant to the theme he had in mind from different sources and then bring them together in the form of an article, and publish it at his press.



*..... Babaji writing for Reema.*

Some years on, when I was writing for Chandigarh newspapers, my contemporaries would refer to Bhagatji as an "eccentric genius", but factually, eccentrics like him make the world a better place.

In the years that followed, we met just three or four times again, but kept in touch and met again many years later, after I had got married and settled in Delhi.

Television had by now entered our lives in a big way. Subconsciously, I had nurtured the idea of making documentary films for quite sometime and there was also a fixation in the mind that if I switched from the print media to T.V. journalism, I would embark on this career by first making a documentary on Bhagat Puran Singh.

In the summer of 1992, I called Babaji and told him that I wanted to meet with him. By this time, the idea of making a documentary film on Bhagat Puran Singh was taking clear shape and I was engaged in working out plans with my director and rest of the team. We would have to work day and night to finish the work as per schedule, as it was within a very tight budget.

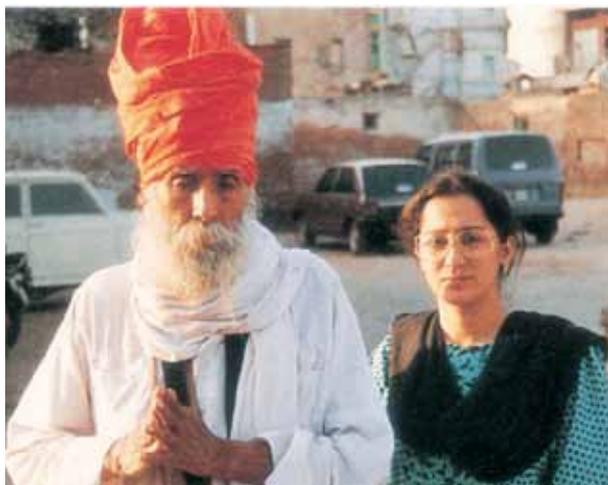
For my groundwork, I reached Amritsar to meet Babaji, to take his formal permission and to have a general idea of what I wanted to capture on camera.

As was my habit, I touched his feet in deep reverence. This time I found he had aged considerably and took some time to place me.

“It’s Reema, Babaji .... From Ferozepore.”

He blessed me fondly and introduced me to those around him “meri beti hai...”

But then everyone he introduced was his son, his daughter, sister or brother. But the place that



*Babaji and Reema in Amritsar, 1992*

Piara Singh occupied in his heart, no one else could. This crippled, deaf and dumb person was his most precious being and it is because of him that Pingaiwara owes its identity “If I go anywhere, Piara becomes very sad and refuses to eat anything”, Babaji confided laughingly.

Babaji took me on a tour of Pingalwara, called out to each inmate with great affection and told me about each person’s background, their problems, and as to how he was trying to deal with them. He then asked a veteran worker in Pingalwara to show me the rest of the place.

“I am not young any more, and grow tired very fast”, he said in a breathless voice.

“I have made you tired”, I said apologetically.

“No, no, I have to go to the Gurdwara Sahib and sit there till the evening”. He then gathered Piara in a hand-cart which is now being pushed by sevaks, and went to the Harmandir Sahib, where he sat surrounded by large black trunks which carried his messages scrawled in white paint.

A steel *bata*, a hollow utensil, was placed next to him for donations which the Sangat would willingly make for the Pingalwara.

In return, Babaji would distribute books, pamphlets, or broad sheets which were printed on recycled paper, covering a wide range of subjects ranging from religion, the environment, to pollution, politics, family roles, the society and so on.

He would invariably be at the Golden Temple till late evenings and only return to the main Pingalwara building at night. Babaji never slept more than four to five hours a day. The zest for goodness and service to humanity was pursued with single-minded determination, which was incredible for his (or any) age. I then told him the purpose of my visit and he laughed.

“A film on me ....why? I am doing no great work, just a duty, fulfilling a vow which my mother had taken from me.

His humbleness, his modesty made his stature even more daunting. It was incredible that he gave himself no credit for the herculean task which he was undertaking.

Soon, I brought my team and carried out the filming for three days and nights, all the while trying not to tire Bhagatji. We managed to cover all the wards that he had opened, and met all manner of inmates who were living there.

We also traced Babaji’s personal history after his arrival in Amritsar in 1947, along with his very personal thoughts about his childhood, his mother, his self-education. I do not know whether we were able to do justice to this great man’s life. How I wish he was alive so that he could see what had been made on him, and tell me how I could improve upon this. One can only pray that the institution which he literally carved out of his body and soul, will progress from strength to strength and so keep this superhuman’s spirit and memory alive.

**Reema Anand**

*Reema Chadha (nee Anand) was born on 4 June 1964 and went to school at St. Joseph’s Convent, Ferozepore. After college in Jullundur, where she got her Masters degree in English Literature, she taught at the Institute there and started regular contributions to newspapers from the early 80s. Her selected poems were published in three volumes in 1980, ‘82 and ‘87. In 1989 she married Amit Singh Chadha, a Constitutional & International Lawyer from Harvard. They have three children and live in New Delhi.*

*Reema first met Bhagat Puran Singh when she was 13 and was overwhelmed by his devotion to humanity. In 1988 she started to plan a documentary film on Bhagatji which was completed in 1992, just a few weeks before he passed away.*

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