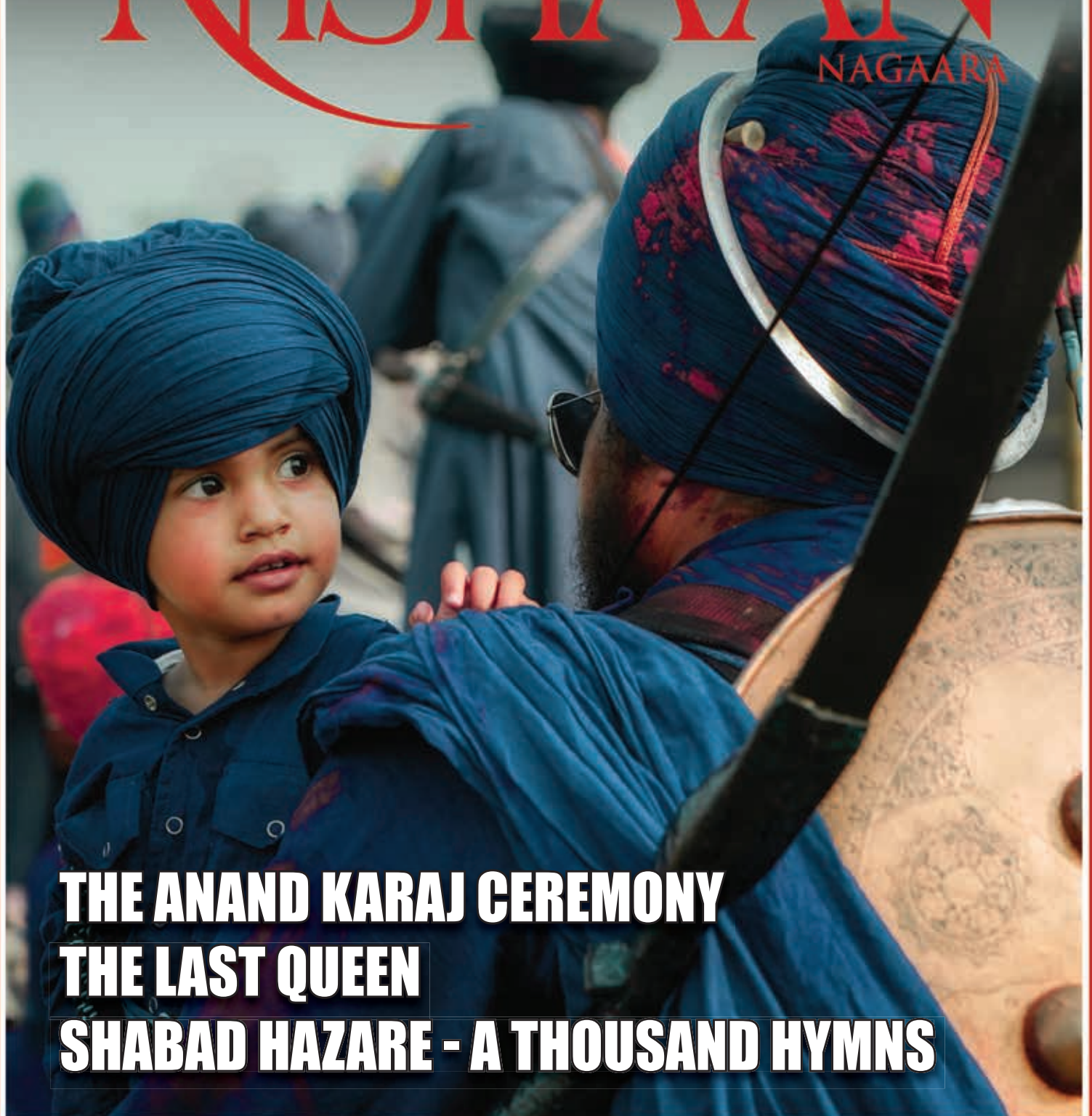


ISSUE 1 / 2022

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EDITORIAL

KEEP OPEN THE DEBATE

What's the world like these days? To my mind it seems that more people are entering and joining the public discourse. Obviously, theoretically, with more public exposure to a topic, more open becomes the issue and greater becomes the possibility that truth would become unhidden.

To my simple mind, this should be a matter of unadulterated joy. When deeply buried facts get unearthed, particularly after a certain period of private secrecy, some greater or lesser embarrassment results, and truth might be difficult to deal with openly. But to my simple mind the only cure seems equally open-faced treatment.

For digging about issues, like many authors, I lean on a core base of readers while the information base keeps multiplying and expanding magically. Surely a simply managed system but not devoid of my confused mind that continues to pave the path with road-blocs.

And then a simple system laid me low by its simplicity.

A significant announcement of the whole endeavor was planned, but such are the plans of mice and men. A new, latest road bloc, greeted us just as I was penning a brief note at the passing away of Pushpindar Singh, the man behind the whole endeavor.

I see it as heavy weight advice to keep things simple. Life and death are partners for life. Keep them together. Remember them both; respect them both. Without one the story remains incomplete.

Yet it is true that Pushpindar Singh had many ambitions and projects in mind that now remain incomplete. And yes, his progeny will pick and polish some of his ideas But this is how life and death merge to make the story of life complete.

So, this narrative of his story winds and completes as it passes on. A chapter in life is completed and the next chapter begins on a clean slate. How their words weave and remain connected will make another endless story to behold.

Shakespeare reminds us: "With words, countenance and manners I shall make an excellent suit of armor".

It is for the younger ones to note the legacy. Do so but don't hold on to it too tightly. Others will surely note how it is further shaped by its journey and what footprints will it leave in the sands of time.

I.J. Singh

MIRROR MIRROR ON THE WALL

I.J. Singh

This is not to pose afresh the proverbial question: Who is the fairest of them all?

As a Sikh I have more than one question in mind: *Who are we? What are we? Why are the way we are?* If you find these easy *we* pickings, then I suggest more: *Where are we? How did we get here? Where do we want to go? How do we hope to get there?*

I am not smart enough to mine the complexities of each, nor foolish enough to try to roll them all into one short essay. They demand a lifetime of exploration. *So, today we titillate our genes of curiosity.* Let's map the territory of each by bold brush strokes, and probe a little history for my biases.

What better way to start off a new year?

While growing up in India, this bug about the self never bit me quite so hard. It claimed a bigger bite when I came here because there were barely a handful of recognizable Sikhs in New York. And I spent years where Sikhs and others from India were even fewer.

I got invitations aplenty to local churches. They were hoping that I would convert to their cause, so they shrewdly asked me to explain my belief. I hardly ever turned down an invitation, but with a knot in the pit of my stomach because I knew little or nothing about what I professed to be – a Sikh. Now six decades later it's time to inventory this life; hence the many questions

that seem simple, but are not so simply understood or explained.

How we became what we are?

First some sound bites about modern Sikhi: One of the youngest religions of mankind, it is the fifth or sixth largest faith tradition of mankind, ranking behind Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam. Its position vis a vis Judaism is open to debate. Arising in Punjab, in the Indian subcontinent, a little over 500 years ago, its final form dates from 1699, over 300 years ago. Over 3 million Sikhs live outside India, close to a million are in North America. Around 20-23 million remain in India, less than 2 percent of India's population of a billion plus.

Briefly, much as cultured Europeans look at the rough and ready North Americans as loud, boisterous, larger than life, since they lack intimacy with Europe's cultural and historical grandeur; also, much as East Coast Yanks may see Texans as grade larger than life, louder and more boisterous; similarly, the cultured Indian mind steeped in India's gloried past looks at the average Punjabi. The non-Sikh Punjabi speaks of the Punjabi Sikh as several shades grander and larger than life. Just visit a Bollywood movie to experience my cartoonish projections.

Sikhi is a tradition that is unique, universal, timeless, a thinking person's belief system, and symbolically most powerfully expressed through its five articles

of faith. Each of these items deserve an essay if not a book – perhaps another time.

Since its roots lie in India's hoary culture and mythological past, both find a place in the Sikh narrative, yet there is a clear divide between the Sikh context and larger Indian realities.

How did these stark differences materialize? How did Punjabis and Sikhs evolve so differently from the rest of India, even though, they largely share the same DNA. The answer lies in the socio-cultural and geopolitical realities of the Indian subcontinent when Sikhi arose in the fifteenth century and beyond.

Until the Europeans (mostly British) reached India in large enough numbers by sea to colonize it, for much of recorded history, the easiest inlet into India was the Khyber Pass that connects Afghanistan with Pakistan. This is the likely route for mass migrations from Asia Minor and the Caucasian mountains into the fertile plains of Punjab. Greeks under Alexander the Great, traders, and soldiers of fortune took the same path into Punjab to stay, perish or pillage and return. These petty warlords prevailed because the Indian chieftains rarely mounted a credible united defense; too many sold out or were easily corrupted.

Undeniably, Punjab, along with the Balkans, has been the busiest laboratory of genetic hybridization in human history. Hybridization undoubtedly results in greater vigor and vitality.

When Guru Nanak, the founder of Sikhi, trod this Earth, Muslims, though a minority, were the politically dominant. Islam was turning rabidly fanatical, forcing conversions to Islam, even at the point of a gun. Hindus, the majority community, were sharply divided where low castes were little better than slaves. Hindu widows committed self-immolation (*suttee*), and female infanticide was common.

What do a people need? Economic hope, relief from recurrent invasions, freedom of thought and belief, economic and social justice, accountability, and participatory self-governance.

A revolutionary shift in thinking was necessary but would span more than one generation. Sikhi, a product of that time, was the means towards such ends.

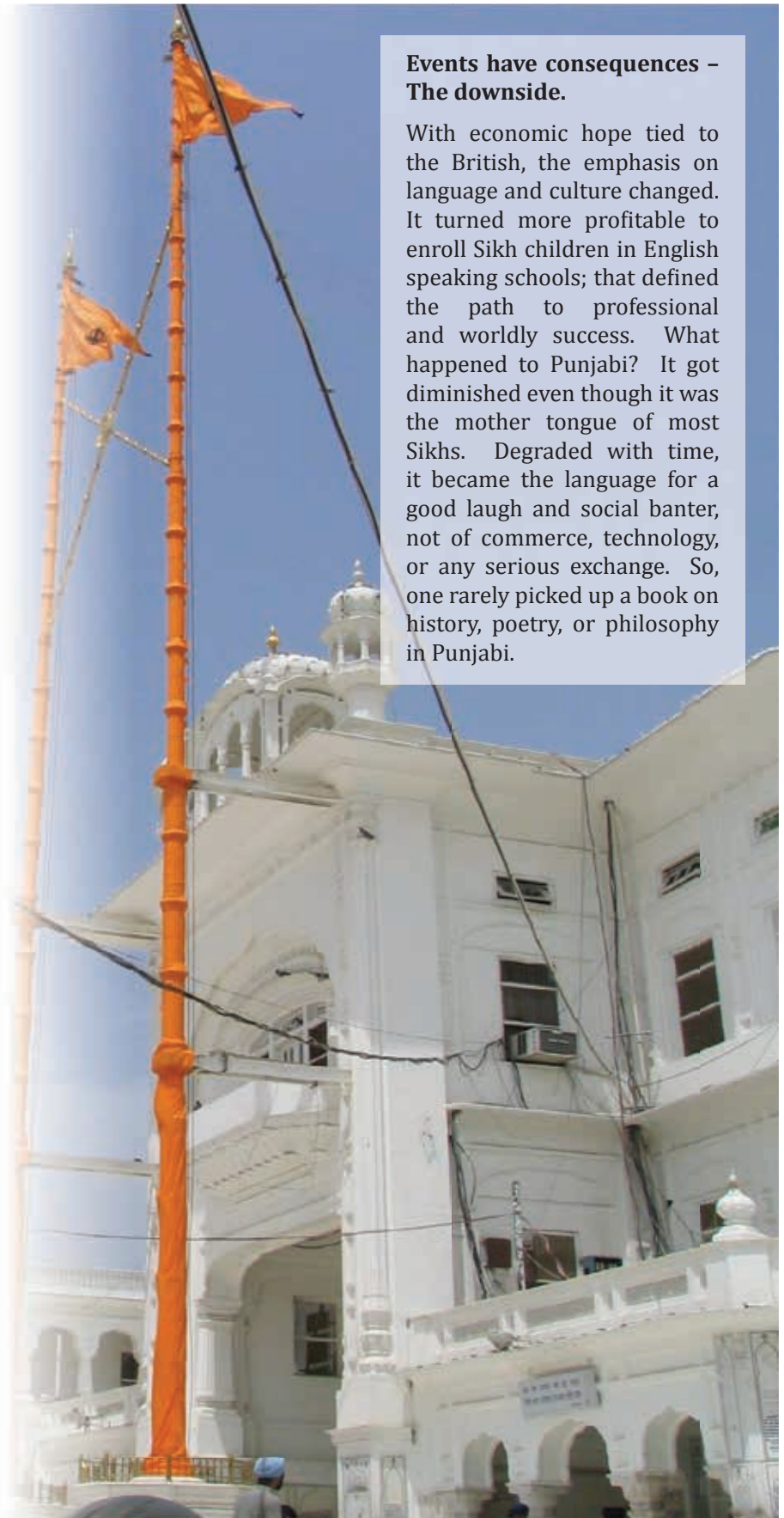
By the early 1800s, Sikhs were progressing well towards these goals. Ranjit Singh, a Sikh, reigned wisely for almost half a century.

The fall of his empire coincided with the meteoric rise of British power. Fortune favored the British.

Having battled with them over Punjab, the British valued the martial spirit and character of Sikhs, a notably pragmatic practical people. A mutually useful bond developed. Sikhs were encouraged to join the British army, and the British were respectful of Sikh lifestyle.

Sikhs from the villages of Punjab rushed to fill the police and British army ranks. The two World Wars burnished their reputation brilliantly.

They earned the trappings of Westernization without compromising the Sikh message or practices.



Events have consequences – The downside.

With economic hope tied to the British, the emphasis on language and culture changed. It turned more profitable to enroll Sikh children in English speaking schools; that defined the path to professional and worldly success. What happened to Punjabi? It got diminished even though it was the mother tongue of most Sikhs. Degraded with time, it became the language for a good laugh and social banter, not of commerce, technology, or any serious exchange. So, one rarely picked up a book on history, poetry, or philosophy in Punjabi.

The other side of the coin is no better. We learned to use English effectively in our professions and at our jobs. But in this, too, we do not easily pick up a book on history, poetry, or philosophy.

Our relationship with both Punjabi and English became largely transactional. This largely closed the door to a life of the mind -- which remains the goal of the Guru Granth Sahib.

In pre-British days, the *granthi* (the officiant at the Gurdwara) was the most world-wise, educated person in the village. He rapidly lost his place in the community, as the British consolidated their reign. With increasing Anglicization of Sikhs, their gurdwaras emptied. Visit any Gurdwara these days. Most people show up for *parshaad* and *langar*. The *katha* often fails to connect to current realities. *Kirtan* is tolerated because music grabs the soul without impediment, but the hold is transient. I repeat, history has shaped Sikhs as superbly pragmatic.

Some historical factoids

During the 18th century, immediately following the Guru period, a popular ditty in Punjabi was "*Khaada peeta laahay da;*

baaki Ahmed Shaahay da." Roughly, it says that whatever we consume or enjoy is ours, the rest belongs to Ahmed Shah Durrani (aka Abdali). He invaded Punjab nine times between 1747 and 1767. Every time, his hoards plundered the country and returned to Afghanistan with treasures and tons of women slaves. Indians were powerless, until Sikhs mobilized brigades to harass his army him. The doggerel mimics the desperation of India then.

It also points to the determined optimism of Sikhs who surely lived in the present, in fact in the moment. Today, 300 years later, it still produces triumphant smiles. The expression today might be: "Eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die."

Guru Amardas, the Third Founder-Master of Sikhi, established the tradition for Sikhs from across the country to visit the Guru twice a year. At these national conventions, Sikhs jointly resolved issues facing the community. But in 1805, the ruler of greater Punjab, Ranjit Singh, suspended these instruments of self-governance that were the conventions of *Sarbat Khalsa*. Why? Perhaps he was uncomfortable with a possible competing center of power within his domain.



When the British entered Punjab, perhaps for a similar reason, they continued the ban on the Sarbat Khalsa. Only in 1925, after a titanic struggle that shook the British Empire to its core, Sikhs won the right to convene the Sarbat Khalsa and manage their own gurdwaras. But then realities were different; we were a British colony. India became an independent, nominally secular nation in 1947-50, but the Indian government, through its parliamentary processes continues to control Sikh institutions. Ergo, a mostly non-Sikh body regulates Sikh religious institutions and their people. *Note that no other government in the world dictates a people's religious practices through non-believers of their faith.*

This systemic structural weakness continues to undermine Sikh participatory self-governance. By acquiescing to such political ploys, have we willingly diminished our history, vision, and purpose? *We need to undo the existing practice and redevelop a model of self-governance.*

From my early teens, a recurring refrain in Punjab was the alarmist alert that the **"Panth is in danger."** It was always a call to action. Passions ran high for months, followed by a brief respite, and then came another call to action because "Panth was still in danger." *More than a slogan it became a lifestyle.* In retrospect, a never-ending reality show à la Donald Trump and his campaigning style.

Intolerant Islam was the danger to Sikh identity in the 15th to early 18th centuries. In the twentieth century, it is resurgent Hinduism flexing its somewhat atrophied muscle. Sikhs still raise the periodic clarion call of danger ahead. Hindutva is the mantra of the day. Now India's elite promote Bollywood as the gateway to India's timeless culture rooted in

Hindu lore. The minority status of Sikhs is not likely to change, either in India or elsewhere. Some non-Sikh neighbors will always find the Sikh lifestyle provocative. And we are a pragmatic people as minorities from troublesome lands naturally become.

Sikhi asks that we remain thoughtful and bold on the great globe that is the theater; our survival depends on it. Sikhi promises an integrated life of *interiority and exteriority*. The connection of the two, the internal and the external manifestations, ideologically inseparable, seems to be fraying, contrary to the *Meeri-Peeri* doctrine. I need not dwell further on the centrality of this doctrine in Sikhi, given the Five Kakkas and their significance. The externals of Sikhi must be matched by a corresponding interiority, or else we are in a schizoid existence. Our enemies, minimally, want us to not be a flaunting presence on the global stage. They want us to tone down our presence, dilute and opacify our message to appear less challenging. Our neighbors want us to act like a regional religion, not an international presence. We are so few.

Looking ahead

Thinking thus, many Sikhs flirt with one of two traps. A faction wants to limit Sikhi to Punjabis only. They want no Sikhs that are racially different, people of African, European or East Asian descent; none that speak another lingo than Punjabi especially in gurdwaras; that eat any food other than Punjabi, or sway to anything else but pure Bhangra.

Another faction wants to banish any Punjabi connection; integration is good but their goal seems total assimilation -- an unrecognizable entity. In both cases, the elemental pull of the Sikh message no longer

remains the defining criterion. *To me, both alternatives are undesirable and speak of frantically running away from the seminal idea of a sense of self.* Circling the wagons is a defensive posture. It is not the panacea, nor is it a way to the good life.

I understand the fear that tempts a minority to isolate and fence itself, but it is not the solution. Sikhs are a minority and will always be so, anywhere and everywhere. We need not so much a hermetically sealed wall around us, but tentacles that interlink us with those outside our ambit. How can we forget the words of Guru Gobind Singh: *"Manas ki jaat sabhae ekae pehchano"*--words that clearly emphasize an inclusive community.

Fences are important to minorities, much as they are to a baby in a cradle. Fences save lives. But they must not become walls, lest the cradle becomes a prison. Self-created cocoons are suicidal traps. Critical for each of us is a continuous inner journey, to understand why we are the way we are; to become comfortable in our own skins. When we accept ourselves, others will too. What have we become? How have we evolved? Despairing of where we are, many Sikhs blame the British for our ills. Scapegoating I say. Let's not blame others for our own cultural myopia.

To paraphrase Susan Faludi: *"Is identity what we create or what we can't escape?"*

The mirror on the wall prods us towards the process of self-awareness. Insane is he who knows not himself. When he understands the self, he knows the Creator (*"So baura jo aap na pechhanea, aap paehchhanea ta eko jaanae"* Guru Granth p. 855).

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SHABAD HAZARE - A THOUSAND HYMNS

Sarabjeet Dhody Natesan

In 2005, I lost my mother. One minute I was leaning over her in the ambulance rushing her to the hospital, and the next, she became still. Four days later, she left us. By this time, my father was also very sick, suffering end-stage cancer, and the only place I could turn to for solace and guidance was the *Guru Granth*, the keeper of all secrets and the dispenser of all knowledge.

Not that I knew much, nobody does. Before I left for the USA for my graduate studies in 1988, my father had taught me a few *Shabads* (*Hymns*). I learned those well, and while I was overseas, we spoke often enough for him to also share with me small pieces of Sikh history and deeper meaning in the words of Nanak. He once said to me that the *Granth*, the *Baani*, had to be felt before it could be understood. *Dhur ki Baani Aiye, Tey Sagli Chint Mitai*, words of the Fifth Nanak, Guru Arjan Dev, signify that the *Baani* is from another realm; it relieves the listener of all worries. The words of the *Gurus* impart on the listener a deep knowledge of spirituality, philosophy, and morality. The *Baani* belongs to all; it cannot be appropriated by any person, community, or section of society. And it cannot be read, heard, or spoken with irreverence.

It was then, trying to understand the larger context of meeting and separation in the loss of my mother and an imminent separation from my father hiding in the shadows, that I rediscovered a *Shabad* by Guru Arjan: *Mera Mann Loche* (*My Heart Yearns*). I felt as if it was written for me, waiting for me to find it. It gave me the ability to connect to my parents at a deeper spiritual level and also to take solace in the fact that hundreds of years ago, people lost their loved ones and continued to live, love, and be.

Within a year and a half of losing my mother, I lost my father. The fear of loss became a reality of grief. My father was my first and only best friend. My childhood was spent under his tutelage and I looked up to him for everything. He was my Ustaad (Guru) and I was his Shagird (disciple). At that time, this same *Shabad* kept me together. Even as it filled me with a deep longing for

him, it also made me realize that partings are the natural order of things.

Though *Mera Mann Loche* is eventually about a reunion between a young man and his father, it spoke most powerfully about the pangs of separation. And though I had read it first for comfort when I lost my mother, it prepared me for my father's separation too. I imagined eventually meeting him in another sphere and drew a lot of courage and solace from that. The words of the hymn calmed me and I realized that my pain is felt by many others and perhaps sharing the deeper meaning of the words would provide solace and succour to others too.

As a disclaimer, and without a doubt, the subtle meaning, intent, and context of the *Shabads* are best captured in the language of the Gurus, the *Gurbani*. No one can ever hope to completely demystify the words of the Gurus; every reading yields a different perspective and deeper understanding. This is but an attempt. And I also add that any errors here are purely unintentional and beg your pardon for the said errors or omissions.

Guru Arjan Dev

Guru Arjan Devji (1563-1606), the fifth Guru of the Sikhs, invokes love, affection, respect, and awe. He compiled the writings of the first four Gurus into the *Adi Granth* which was later expanded to become the *Guru Granth Sahib*. The devotion that he inspires is enshrined in the following words, *Japayo Jin Arjan Dev Guru, Phir Sankat Jaun Garbh Nahin Ayo* (*Whoever meditates on Guru Arjan attains deliverance from the cycle of life and death*). He is the author of one of the most revered *Baanis* of the *Granth*, the *Sukhmani Sahib* (1602) (*The Provider of Peace and Joy*). And *Mera Mann Loche*, which he wrote in 1583 to showcase his love for his father and Guru, Guru Ramdas, is referred to as *Shabad Hazare*, one *Shabad* equivalent to *A Thousand Hymns*.

The devotion of the young man, Arjan to his father is also rooted in the sublime. His father, Guru Ramdas, was also his first teacher, The *Adi Granth*, the first version of the *Guru Granth Sahib* that Arjan compiled and to which

he contributed 2000 verses, can be attributed to the spiritual and meditative teachings of his father and guru, Guru Ramdas.

The following is my interpretation of Arjan's words. My explanation highlights both bonds, that reverence between the Guru and his follower and also the affection between the father and the son.

Background

In 1581, Guru Ramdas was asked to come to Lahore to arrange and attend the wedding of his cousin Sahari Mal's son. The Guru had laid the foundations of the city of Ramdaspur, later renamed as Amritsar, and was busy with the construction of the *sarovar* (pool), which he had had excavated in 1577. Today, the Harmandir Sahib, the Golden Temple, stands inside this pool.

Expressing his sincere inability to attend the wedding rituals, Guru Ramdev asked his eldest son, Prithi Chand, to represent him in Lahore. Prithi Chand, fearing that in his absence the second son, Mahan Dev, would be declared the next guru of the Sikh Panth, also cited work at home and conveyed his inability to travel to Lahore. But like his elder brother, Mahan Dev also worried that his absence away from Ramdaspur could lead to him being denied the opportunity to be the next guru, and he too refused to travel to Lahore, citing his lack of interest in all things worldly. (Mahan Dev later became an ascetic).

When his elder two sons did not accede to his request, Guru Ramdas turned to his youngest son, Arjan Dev, and asked him if he would travel to Lahore and help in the preparations required for the wedding. He also requested Arjan to spread the tenets of Sikhism and help set up Guru's *langar* in Lahore. Arjan was just a young lad of 16 years, but he immediately agreed to his father's request and set out for Lahore. Guru Ramdas also asked him to remain in Lahore in order to bring stability to the donations to the *langar* by the ever-increasing Sikh-*sangat*. Since Arjan was Guru Ramdas's son, people placed their trust in him and knew that any donations he received would be passed on to the free kitchen to feed the poor.

Arjan attended the wedding and also started the *Langar Sewa*, and then he waited patiently for his father's letter asking him to return to Ramdaspur.



He followed his father's instructions, and two years went by. Arjan was much loved by the Sikh Sangat in Lahore with whom he worked but with no news from Ramdaspur asking him to return, he missed his father's presence and company and became very despondent. He wrote the first of three letters reminding his father of his state. These three letters are the first three stanzas of this beautiful and evocative poetry. The last stanza was recited by him in Ramdaspur, which then led to him being chosen as his heir by Guru Ramdas and anointed to the Gur-Gaddi as the Fifth Guru of the Sikhs.

Shabad Hazare, Mera Maan Loche (My heart yearns)

Sri Guru Granth Sahib Ji, Guru Arjan, Ang 96

ਮੇਰਾ ਮਨੁ ਲੋਚੈ ਗੁਰ ਦਰਸਨ ਤਾਈ

Merā man lochāigurdarsantāī
My heart yearn for the blessed vision of the Guru.

ਬਿਲਪ ਕਰੇ ਚਾਤਿਕਕੀ ਨਿਆਈ॥

Bilap kare chātrik kīniāī.
It cries out like the thirsty song-bird.

ਤਿਰਖਾ ਨ ਉਤਰੈ ਸਾਤਿ ਨ ਆਵੈ ਬਿਨੁ ਦਰਸਨ ਸੰਤ ਪਿਆਰੇ ਜੀਉ॥੧॥

Tarikhā na utrai sānt na āvai bin darsan sant piāre jīo. (1)

My thirst is not quenched, and I can find no peace, without the Blessed Vision of the Beloved

ਹਉ ਘੋਲੀ ਜੀਉ ਘੋਲਿ ਘੁਮਾਈ ਗੁਰ ਦਰਸਨ ਸੰਤ ਪਿਆਰੇ ਜੀਉ॥੧॥ਰਹਾਉ॥

Ha°o ghōlī jīo ghōl ghumāī gur darsan sant piāre jīo. (1) rahāo.

I am a sacrifice, my soul is a sacrifice, to the Blessed Vision of the Beloved Saint Guru. (1) (Pause)

ਤੇਰਾ ਮੁਖੁ ਸੁਹਾਵਾ ਜੀਉ ਸਹਜ ਧੁਨਿ ਬਾਣੀ॥

Terā mukh suhāvā jīo sahj dhun baṇī.

Your Face is so beautiful, and the sound of Your Words imparts intuitive wisdom.

ਚਿਰੁ ਹੋਆ ਦੇਖੇ ਸਾਰਿੰਗ ਪਾਣੀ॥

Chir hoā dekhe sāring pāṇī.

It is so long since this rain-bird has had even a glimpse of water.

ਧੰਨੁ ਸੁ ਦੇਸੁ ਜਹਾ ਤੂੰ ਵਸਿਆ ਮੇਰੇ ਸਜਣ ਮੀਤ ਮੁਰਾਰੇ ਜੀਉ॥੨॥

Dhan so des jahā tūn vasiā mere sajan mīt murārejīo. ||2||

Blessed is that land where you dwell, O my friend and intimate divine Guru. ||2||

ਹਉ ਘੋਲੀ ਹਉ ਘੋਲਿ ਘੁਮਾਈ ਗੁਰਸਜਣ ਮੀਤ ਮੁਰਾਰੇ ਜੀਉ॥੧॥ਰਹਾਉ॥

Ha°o ghōlī ha°o ghōl ghumāī gur sajan mīt murāre jīo. ||1|| rahāo.

I am a sacrifice, I am forever a sacrifice, to my friend and intimate divine Guru. ||1||Pause||

ਇਕ ਘੜੀ ਨ ਮਿਲਤੇ ਤਾ ਕਲਿਜੁਗੁ ਹੋਤਾ॥

Ik gharī na milte tā kalijug hotā.

When I could not be with you for just one moment, the dark age of Kali Yuga dawned for me.

Huṅ kaḍ milī᳚ai pari᳚a tuḍḥ bhāgvantā.

When will I meet you, O my beloved Lord?

ਮੇਰਾ ਰੈਰਾ ਨ ਹਰਿਨੀਦ ਨ ਆਹਿਨੁਦੇਖੇਗੁਰ ਦਰਾਰੇਜੀਉ ॥੩॥

Mohi rain᳚ na vihvāvai nīḍ᳚ na āvai bin dekḥe gur᳚darbāre jī᳚o. ||3||

I cannot endure the night, and sleep does not come,
without the sight of the Beloved Guru's

Court. ||3||

ਉ ਘੋਲੀ ਜੀਉ ਘੋਹਲ ਘੁਮਾਈ ਹਸੁਸਚੇਗੁਰ ਦਰਾਰੇਜੀਉ ॥੧॥ਰਾਉ ॥

Ha᳚o gḥolī jī᳚o gḥol gḥumā᳚ī ḥis sachḥe gur᳚darbāre jī᳚o. ||1|| rahā᳚o.

I am a sacrifice, my soul is a sacrifice, to that
True Court of the Beloved Guru. ||1||Pause||

Sri Guru Granth Sahib Ji, Guru Arjan, Ang 97

ਭਾਗੁਆ ਗੁਰ ਸੰਹਿਮਲਾਇਆ ॥

Bhāg ho᳚ā gursant᳚ milā᳚i᳚ā.

By good fortune, I have met the Saint Guru.

ਪ੍ਰਭੁਅਹਨਾਸੀਘਰਮਹਪਾਇਆ ॥

Parabh᳚ abḥināsī gḥar mēḥ pā᳚i᳚ā.

I have found the Immortal Lord in my own home.

ਸੇਕਿਰੀਪੁਲੁਚਸਾਨਹਛਿੜਾਜਨਨਾਨਕਦਾਸੁਮਿਾਰੇਜੀਉ ॥੪॥

Sevkarī pal ḥasānavichḥurājānNānak᳚dāstumārejī᳚o. ||4||

I will now serve you forever, and I shall never be separated
from you, even for an instant.

Servant Nanak is your slave, O Beloved Master. ||4||

ਉ ਘੋਲੀ ਜੀਉ ਘੋਹਲ ਘੁਮਾਈ ਜਨ ਨਾਨਕ ਦਾਸੁਮਿਾਰੇਜੀਉ ॥ ਰਾਉ ॥੧॥੮॥

Ha᳚o gḥolī jī᳚o gḥol gḥumā᳚ī jan Nānak ḍās tumāre jī᳚o. Rahā᳚o. (1)(8)

I am a sacrifice, my soul is a sacrifice; servant Nanak is Your slave, Lord.
(Pause)(1)(8)

1st Letter — Quatrain 1

The rain-bird is thirsting for rain.

In the first letter that Arjan sends to his father with the messenger, he compares his plight to that of a rain-bird thirsting for water and informs his father of his longing to meet him.

ਮੇਰਾ ਮਨੁ ਲੋਚੈ ਗੁਰ ਦਰਸਨ ਤਾਈ ॥

Merā man loḥai gur᳚darsan ṭā᳚ī-

My heart yearn for the blessed vision of the Guru.

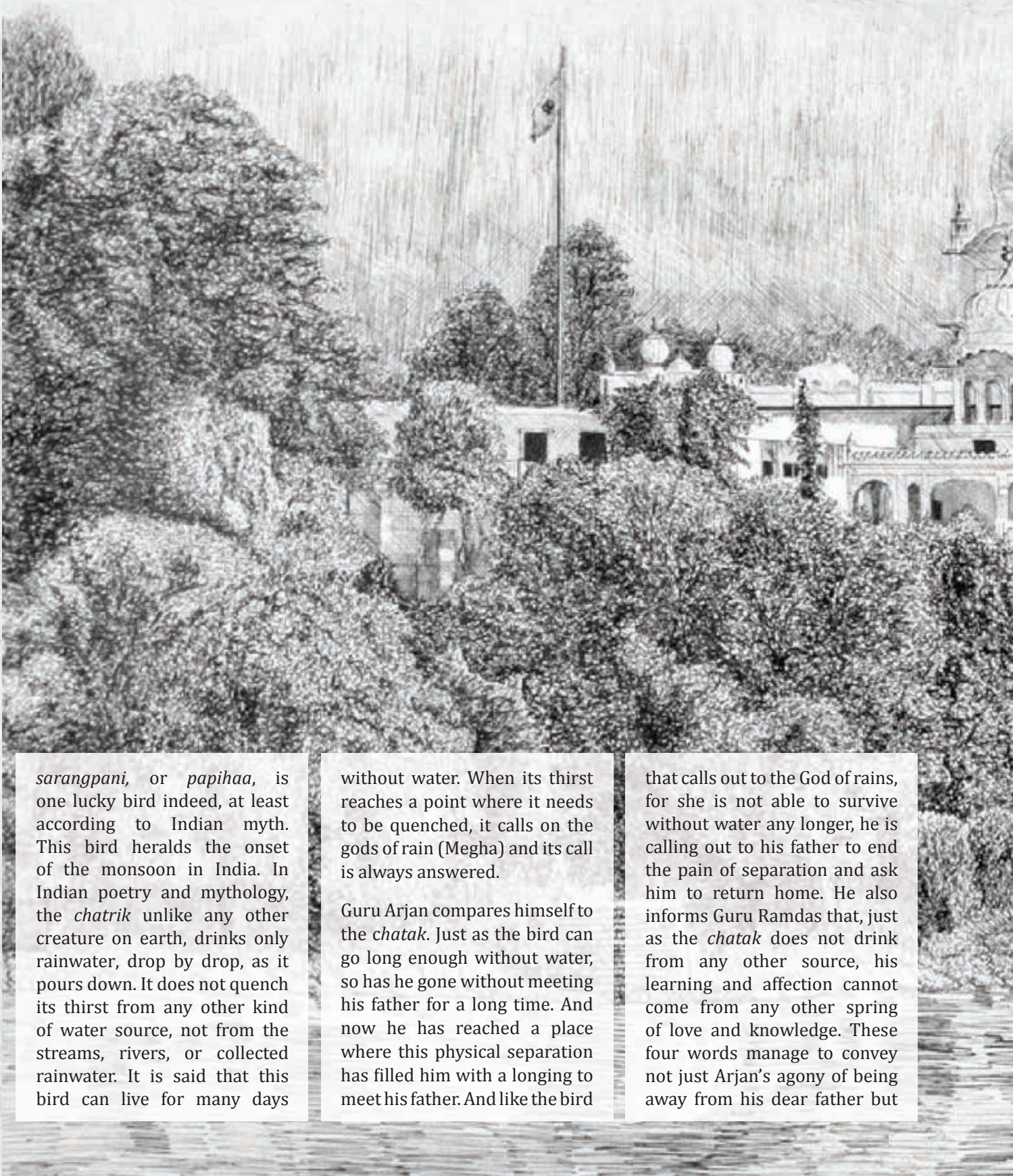
Young Arjan longs for his Guru, saying, my heart and mind are in turmoil and remembering you and yearning to be in your physical presence is leaving me bereft of any peace.

ਬਿਲਪ ਕਰੇ ਚਾਤ੍ਰਕ ਕੀ ਨਿਆਈ ॥

Bilap kare ḥā ṭrikkī ni᳚ā᳚ī-

It cries out like the thirsty song-bird.

The *chatrik/chatak*, also known as the pied crested cuckoo, Jacobin cuckoo,



sarangpani, or *papihaa*, is one lucky bird indeed, at least according to Indian myth. This bird heralds the onset of the monsoon in India. In Indian poetry and mythology, the *chatrik* unlike any other creature on earth, drinks only rainwater, drop by drop, as it pours down. It does not quench its thirst from any other kind of water source, not from the streams, rivers, or collected rainwater. It is said that this bird can live for many days

without water. When its thirst reaches a point where it needs to be quenched, it calls on the gods of rain (Megha) and its call is always answered.

Guru Arjan compares himself to the *chatak*. Just as the bird can go long enough without water, so has he gone without meeting his father for a long time. And now he has reached a place where this physical separation has filled him with a longing to meet his father. And like the bird

that calls out to the God of rains, for she is not able to survive without water any longer, he is calling out to his father to end the pain of separation and ask him to return home. He also informs Guru Ramdas that, just as the *chatak* does not drink from any other source, his learning and affection cannot come from any other spring of love and knowledge. These four words manage to convey not just Arjan's agony of being away from his dear father but



also paints a beautiful picture, comparing his distress to that of a bird thirsting for water but unable to drink anything else except that which flows directly from the god of rains.

**ਤਿਰਖਾ ਨ ਉਤਰੈ ਸਾਂਤਿ ਨ ਆਵੈ ਬਿਨੁ
ਦਰਸਨ ਸੰਤ ਪਿਆਰੇ ਜੀਉ॥੧॥**

Ṭarikhā na utrai sānti na āvai
bin ḍarsan sanṭ piāre jīo. ||1||

My thirst is not quenched, and I can find no peace, without the Blessed Vision of the Beloved Saint Arjan goes on to add that

the only way his thirst for love and affection can be sated is to be in the benign and saint-like presence of his father, whom he has been calling out to.

**ਹਉ ਘੋਲੀ ਜੀਉ ਘੋਲਿ ਘੁਮਾਈ
ਗੁਰ ਦਰਸਨ ਸੰਤ ਪਿਆਰੇ
ਜੀਉ ॥ ੧ ॥ ਰਹਾਉ ॥**

Ha'o gholī jīo gholi ghumāī
gurḍarsan sanṭ piāre jīo. (1)
rahāo.

Arjan finishes the quatrain with an elegiac reflection of how his life has dissolved into

meaninglessness without the presence of his Guru and father. He is willing to surrender himself for the opportunity to see the Guru's visage. In Sikhism, the concept of submission of the self and one's ego supersedes all. Faith, trust, and devotion to the Guru are considered the supreme surrender.

The messenger carrying this letter to Guru Ramdas is intercepted by Arjan's eldest

brother, Prithi Chand. Prithi takes the letter from the messenger and upon reading it is filled with instant jealousy. Incapable of writing such deep verse, he becomes more insecure of his position. He asks the messenger to return to Lahore and inform Arjan that the Guru wishes him to stay there for a while longer. Prithi Chand then withholds his brother's letter to their father.

2nd Letter — Quatrain 2

Blessed is the land where it rains, yet it eludes the rain-bird who has been banished from there.

When Arjan does not hear from his father, he understands that something is amiss and after waiting for two months, sends another letter to his father, instructing the messenger to hand it to no one else but the Guru himself.

In the second letter, the second quatrain of *Shabad Hazare*, Arjan extends the metaphor of the rain-bird and laments that it has not seen the rain nor heard the sounds of the falling raindrops. He adds to the soul of the verse by saying that he too is thirsting to see the beautiful visage of the Guru and listen to his wise and soulful words. He says Ramdaspur is blessed by the presence of his father, whom he also calls his friend, lamenting that he is exiled from the Guru's presence. The presence of Guru Ramdas is likened to rain that has blessed the fields and rivers of Panjab.

ਤੇਰਾ ਮੁਖੁ ਸੁਹਾਵਾ ਜੀਉ ਸਹਜ ਧੁਨਿ ਬਾਣੀ॥

Terā mukh̄ suhāvā jīo sahj dhun̄ banī.

Your face is beautiful and calm; your visage radiates harmony, and your spiritual words and voice fill the listener with peace. This is a metaphorical comparison to the plentiful rain that soaks everything in its path and rejuvenates whomsoever it meets: the earth, the fields,

the plants, and the people. It brings water to the wells; tanks overflow, and life is restored.

ਚਿਰੁ ਹੋਆ ਦੇਖੇ ਸਾਰਿੰਗ ਪਾਣੀ॥

Chir ho-ā dekhe saringpānī

It is so long since this rain-bird has had even a glimpse of water Arjan again compares himself to the rain-bird, who has not seen the rain for an eternity (*chir*). He likens his life to that of a land hit by drought. His mind is unfulfilled and his heart barren, due to not receiving the life-sustaining and faith-affirming company of his Guru.

ਧੰਨੁ ਸੁ ਦੇਸੁ ਜਹਾ ਤੂੰ ਵਸਿਆ ਮੇਰੇ ਸਜਣ ਮੀਤ ਮੁਰਾਰੇ ਜੀਉ॥੨॥

Dhan̄ so des jahā tū'n vasi-ā mere sajan̄ mīt murāre jīo ||2||

Blessed is that land where you dwell, O my friend and intimate divine Guru. ||2||

The verse progresses with Arjan expressing his gratitude for the blessing of the land of his birth, where Guru Ramdas resides. He then writes wishing that his friend and Guru may live long and continue to bless the lands with his presence and benevolence.

Arjan's words, thus far, are hopeful, reminding his father of his son's plight. Remembering his father's instructions to him to not return to Ramdaspur till he is summoned, he does not ask him the reason but dutifully follows his instructions. Arjan assumes that his pain at being away will carry through his words to his father who will then call him back. He does not think that he has been forgotten, though that could have been a fair assumption, given the power struggles in ascension to the Gur Gaddi, the temporal power of the Sikh faith.

His mind is neither on the power nor on becoming the fifth guru of the Sikhs. Obeying his father's wishes without a murmur, he is concerned at being away from



him. And yet, as the refrain suggests, he doesn't rebel against his father's wishes and surrenders himself to a longer wait, if his father's summons don't arrive. Like the rain-bird who would rather die of thirst than drink water from a source other than the monsoons. Though Arjan's yearning for his father is conveyed in a rather earthy manner, his words display a deep filial admiration.

Unfortunately, Arjan's messenger is once again stopped by Prithi Chand, and the letter is intercepted by him. Prithi has been lying in wait, knowing that Arjan would be sending another message soon. The second letter has angered Prithi more than the first, and once again he (writing as his father) sends a message to Arjan, instructing him to stay in Lahore until further instructions are shared and that he (Guru Ramdas) will personally come to fetch him home. Then, fearing that knowledge of a messenger arriving from Lahore might reach Guru Ramdas, Prithi Chand asks the messenger to return to Lahore post haste.

The failure of the second letter also to reach his beloved father upsets Arjan grievously, and he dispatches the third letter, the third quatrain of the *Shabad Hazare*, to Ramdaspur, this time embossing the number 3 on the letter and asking the messenger to be careful of Prithi Chand and to avoid him at all costs.

3rd Letter- Quatrain 3

The wait for rain is interminable—will the drought ever end?

The lengthening separation grows increasingly intense in young Arjan's words. He now wonders if he will ever again meet with the land of his birth and with his father. His mind perceives the time and distance as growing and perhaps his meditative stance eroding, as he feels the dark powers of Kali Yuga overtaking his being. Like the rain-bird thirsting for water, Arjun is disoriented and worried that he will never satiate his thirst. Unable to fly, he fears, he won't be able to return to the land that he left behind.

ਇਕ ਘੜੀ ਨ ਮਿਲਤੇ ਤਾ ਕਲਿਜੁਗੁ ਹੋਤਾ॥

Ik gharī na milte t̄a kalijug hotā.

When I could not be with you for just one moment, the dark age of Kali Yuga dawned for me.

Arjan now tells the Guru that even a moment's separation longer now feels like a lifetime. Rain-birds are harbingers of the monsoons, he tells his father, but I have been exiled from the blessed land of my birth for an eternity.

ਹੁਣਿ ਕਦਿ ਮਿਲੀਐ ਪਿਰਾ ਤੁਧੁ ਭਗਵੰਤਾ॥

Huṇ kaḍ milī'ai pari'a tuḍh bhagvantā.

When will I meet you, O my beloved Lord?

Having obediently followed his father's request to go to Lahore, Arjan now finally hesitatingly asks him, when will we meet, my dear lord? His worry at sounding disrespectful overrides his lingering sadness and the increasing distance of time and space in his mind.

ਮੋਹਿ ਰੈਣਿ ਨ ਵਿਹਾਵੈ ਨੀਦ ਨ ਆਵੈ ਬਿਨੁ ਦੇਖੇ ਗੁਰ ਦਰਬਾਰੇ ਜੀਉ॥੩॥

Mohi rain na vihāvai nīḍ na āvai bin dekhe gurḍarbāre jīo. ||3||

I cannot endure the night, and sleep does not come, without the sight of the Beloved Guru's Court. ||3||

Having laid bare the turmoil of his mind and heart, Arjan closes this verse by telling the Guru that he has lost interest in life. Time has come to a standstill and sleep eludes him. The rain-bird is not able to carry on anymore and is wasting away.

In the third letter, Arjan compares the duration of their separation to the span of a *yuga*, a period so long that he feels a weight descend on his heart. To Arjun the separation seems to have announced the start of the dark ages. He speaks of the immense heartbreak he has experienced at such a long absence from his father and spiritual Guru and reminds his father that a moment's parting has seemed like the passing of an eon. How is he, Arjan, to understand it? He conveys to his father his fears that this pain will not end anytime soon. The troubled young mind then finally asks his father to tell him when they will be united again. He unburdens his heart, saying that thoughts of the Guru, his beloved father, and the separation he now endures make him restless at night, that sleep eludes him. Arjan finishes by acknowledging the regard he has for Guru Ramdas and how this separation has filled him with a longing to be in the Guru's abode.

The messenger suitably cautioned by Arjan, finds Prithi Chand lurking in the shadows waiting for his arrival. He waits till Prithi Chand is called away and takes the missive directly to the Guru. As Guru Ramdas read his youngest son's third letter, his eyes well up and his tears fall on the paper already strained by Arjan's tears.

His father, the Guru sees the number 3 written on the envelope and asks the messenger for the first two letters. As the messenger recounts the fate of the earlier two trips with Arjan's letters, Guru Ramdas understands immediately what has happened and asks his eldest son

to meet him. Prithi Chand feigns ignorance and, calling the messenger a liar, denies any knowledge of the existence of the earlier two letters. Upon his eldest son's denial, Guru Ramdas instructs the messenger to go to Prithi Chand's house and look for the two undelivered letters in the pocket of the garment hanging on the rack. The two letters are brought to the Guru. As soon as Guru Ramdas finishes reading the letters, he calls for Baba Budha and requests him to leave immediately for Lahore and accompany Arjan back to Amritsar. Baba Budha, is one of the earliest Sikhs of Nanak and performed the formal coronation ceremonies of the five gurus after Nanak. He was named Budha (an old man) at a very young age by Nanak, for being wise beyond his years. He died at the age of 124 years.

4th Verse-Quatrain 4

(This one was not written but recited in front of his father)

The drought ends—the rain-bird is satiated

Upon Arjan's arrival at Amritsar, the reunion of the father and son is poignant. The young man falls at his father's feet. The father holds him close to his heart, resting his son's head on his flowing white beard. Guru Ramdas, then turns to Prithi Chand and asks him to recite the fourth quatrain of the poem and claim the *Gur-Gaddi*. He does not want to be accused of being led by his emotions at the reunion with his youngest son. Prithi Chand is at a loss for words. His mind goes blank and not a single word of the spiritual realm comes to his being. Guru Ramdas then turns to Arjan again and asks him to finish the poem by reciting the fourth verse, the last quatrain to claim his rightful place in Nanak's legacy.

ਭਾਗੁ ਹੋਆ ਗੁਰਿ ਸੰਤ ਮਿਲਾਇਆ॥

Bhāg hoā gur sant milāiā.

ਪ੍ਰਭੁ ਅਬਨਿਸੀ ਘਰ ਮਹਿ ਪਾਇਆ

Parabh abhināsī ghar meh pāiā.

Arjan goes on to say that the immortal Lord was all he sought, and the Lord had always been at home. He now understands that whatever guidance we seek outside is found at home.

ਸੇਵ ਕਰੀ ਪਲੁ ਚਸਾਨ ਵਿਛੁੜਾ ਜਨ ਨਾਨਕ ਦਾਸ ਤੁਮਾਰੇ ਜੀਉ॥੪॥

Sev karī pal chāsā na vichhūrā jan Nānak dās tumāre jīo. ||4||

I will now serve you forever, and I shall never be separated from you, even for an instant. Servant Nanak is your slave, O Beloved Master. ||4||

Arjan now says that he will not be parted from his Guru for even a moment. Arjun promises to take care of his father as a disciple. Arjan, in his refrain in the last quatrain, echoes his yearning to never be separated from Guru Ramdas, for this bond to never be severed.

The young Arjan spontaneously recites the 4 lines, pouring from his heart his joy at meeting his father. In them, he recognizes that his final letter got delivered

to Guru Ramdas due to the loyalty and ingenuity of his messenger, who evaded Prithi Chand. He acknowledges this with humility and appreciates his good fortune, calling the messenger a saint in disguise, who finally unites him with his Guru. Arjun realizes that in the presence of Guru Ramdas, much like the rain-bird, drenched in the first showers of the monsoons, his prayer of longing has been answered.

Arjan goes on to add that from now on, he will never be parted from his Guru and friend and will serve him forever. Declaring himself as a follower of Nanak, he promises to uphold the glorious traditions of the Gurus with

humility and sincere service. Having sung paeans to the God of rains to arrive, having waited for the monsoons, the rainbird is finally sated.

As soon as Arjan finishes reciting the fourth verse and completes the *Shabad*, Guru Ramdas holds him close and tells him that on this day, *he* wants to fall at his son's feet. "The Gur Gaddi is a reward of merit and there is no one more meritorious than you and your humility and simplicity," he says. "And today I grant you the seat of Nanak's spiritual power." He then turns to Baba Budha and asks him to put a *tilak* on Arjan's forehead, and to make preparations to anoint him the fifth guru to declare his spiritual sovereignty to the *Sikh Sangat*. Baba Budha Singh gets a coconut and 5 paise and gifts it to the surprised young man, and Arjan Dev becomes Guru Arjan Devji. Immediately thereafter, Guru Ramdas,

In Sikhism, the concept of submission of the self and one's ego supersedes all. Faith, trust, and devotion to the Guru are considered the supreme surrender.

the fourth Guru of the Sikhs, bows his head before his son. This one *Shabad* is indeed equivalent to a thousand, and thus its name, *Shabad Hazare- A Thousand Hymns*.

**

Losing my mother was a difficult moment in my life and my father could see that I was unable to handle it well. When his cancer resurged, he kept the news and the pain to himself, worried about inflicting another trauma so close to my mother's passing. He tried to hide it, but he could not. It left footprints in his eyes. It was in his untouched plates of food. I felt it just around the corner, whenever he asked me to switch off his favorite music. I wanted to be there and yet I wanted to be away, unable to see him suffer. After he left us, I amplified my loss to sorrow and regret; somewhere I felt that I had let him down. I could not put the feelings down, yet they tired me so much, that neither could I carry them with me. A kind of self-pity took hold of me. It was at that time that I reread *Shabad Hazare*. The words of Arjan held me in their emotional cocoon, they told me to embrace my emotions and to take them forward with me. And to replace my sorrow with love, for every parting foretells a reunion.

Guru Arjun's words helped me channel my grief and loss. They helped me bridge the distance between sadness and yearning. I yearn for my father, yet I also celebrate his life. I find an emotional connect with Arjun's words in that, even though my father is no more, I too am blessed to be born in the lands that he lived in.

Guru Arjan's tender evocation of loss helped me deal with mine. In writing these words, I hope to bring succor to others dealing with theirs.

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Documentation:

Sri Guru Granth Sahib Ji, Guru Arjan, Ang 96

ਮਾਝ ਮਹਲਾ ੫ ਚਉਪਦੇ ਘਰੁ ੧॥

Mājhmēhlā 5 chāupdeghar 1.

Maajh, Fifth Mehl, Chau-Padas, First House:

This *Shabad* is on page 96 and 97 of the *Guru Granth Sahib*. Composed in Raag Maajh, Mehlā 5, for the fifth Guru. *Chaupade* means a hymn of four lines or a quatrain. *Ghar 1* is a number annotation and its significance is still under debate.

The ending of the verses with *Rahao* is akin to a refrain and it must be repeated before the beginning of the next



set of couplets or quatrains. It requires one to pause and reflect on the words of the *Shabad*. Sentences in the *Granth* are called *tuks*. In this *Shabad* the three *tuks* and the fourth *rahao* make the *Chaupadi*. The four *Rahao*'s of this *shabad* reinforce and emphasise the theme of a disciple's willingness to surrender himself to a higher calling.

The messenger of this letter is later referred to as a *sant*, a saint, on whom Guru Arjan Dev places the gratitude of reuniting him with the Guru.

The Punjabi script and its translation and transliteration are taken from srigranth.org (pages 96 and 97), accessed on 17th January 2021. The names of the Gurus are not mentioned in the *Granth*. The guiding light is that of Nanak, and the next eight gurus are referred to as Mehlā 1-9. The number identifies them, yet the words belong to the spiritual power, the *Dhur*. The *Baani* of Guru Gobind Singh, the tenth Guru of the Sikhs, is contained in the *Dasham Granth*.

Sarabjeet is an Associate Professor of Economics at Krea University. Born and raised in New Delhi, she grew up listening to stories of her parents' journey from Pakistan in 1947 and the Granth Sahib. Her research interests are in the intersection of Economics, Public Policy, 1947 Partition, Sikhism, and Memory Studies. She currently lives in Chennai by the seashore, with the family.

BHAGAT BANI IN SRI GURU GRANTH SAHIB (PART - I)

Prithipal Singh

Bhagats (true devotees) have been recognized for their unflinchingly firm faith to The Almighty. They have believed in the Universality of The Almighty irrespective of the traditions they followed. They belonged to different strata of society as well as to different regions and periods of history.

The “Universal scripture – The Guru Granth Sahib” has the compositions of fifteen “Bhagats”. It is also interesting to know that various observations of the life of the “Bhagats” have been mentioned in the Guru Granth Sahib.

For example, in the Asa-di-Vaar (Ang 468), Guru Nanak Dev Ji refers to the devotees as follows:

ਭਗਤ ਤੇਰੈ ਮਨਿ ਭਾਵਦੇ ਦਰਿ ਸੇਹਨਿ ਕੀਰਤਿ ਗਾਵਦੇ ॥

ਨਾਨਕ ਕਰਮਾ ਬਾਹਰੇ ਦਰਿ ਫੈਅ ਨ ਲਹਨੁਹੀ ਯਾਵਦੇ ॥

Your devotees are pleasing to Your Mind, Lord. They look beautiful at Your door, singing Your Praises.

O Nanak, those who are denied Your Grace, find no shelter at Your Door; they continue wandering.

In the well-known composition of Guru Amardas (Ramkali M.3 Anand), the “Bhagats” (or true devotees) have been referred to in “pauri 14” (Ang 918) as follows:

ਭਗਤਾ ਕੀ ਚਾਲ ਨਿਰਾਲੀ ॥

ਚਾਲਾ ਨਿਰਾਲੀ ਭਗਤਾਹ ਕੇਰੀ ਬਿਖਮ ਮਾਰਗਿ ਚਲਣਾ ॥

ਲਬੁ ਲੇਭੁ ਅਰੰਕਾਰੁ ਤਜਿ ਤ੍ਰਿਸਨਾ ਬਹੁਤੁ ਨਾਹੀ ਬੋਲਣਾ ॥

ਖੰਨਿਅਹੁ ਤਿਖੀ ਵਾਲਹੁ ਨਿਕੀ ਏਤੁ ਮਾਰਗਿ ਜਾਣਾ ॥

The lifestyle of the devotees is unique and distinct. The devotees lifestyle is unique and distinct; they follow the most difficult path. They renounce greed, avarice, egotism and desire; they do not talk too much. The path they take is sharper than a two-edged sword, and finer than a hair.

This suggests that the Bhagats have faced severe challenges and remained steadfast in their devotion to The Almighty.

Similarly, in the “Sukhmani Sahib” (The Psalm of Peace),

Guru Arjan Dev Ji describes the devotion of the Bhagats in the very first Asthapadi (Ang 262) as follows:

ਸੁਖਮਨੀ ਸੁਖ ਅੰਮ੍ਰਿਤ ਪ੍ਰਭ ਨਾਮੁ ॥
ਭਗਤ ਜਨਾ ਕੈ ਮਨਿ ਬਿਸ੍ਰਾਮ ॥ ਰਹਾਉ ॥

Sukhmani: Peace of Mind, the Nectar of the Name of God.

The minds of the devotees abide in a joyful peace. IIPauseII

Recognizing the importance of the above quotations, the contributions of the Bhagats need to be analysed. These contributions are commonly referred to as “Bhagat Bani”. Some aspects of these contributions shall be explored in the following paragraphs.

Of the 15 Bhagats, two stand out for the large number of their compositions incorporated in the Guru Granth Sahib. They are Bhagat Kabir Ji (with 532 compositions in 16 Raagas) and Baba Sheikh Farid Ji (with 4 Shabads in 2 Raagas — Asa and Suhi, and 130 Saloks). These are followed by (1) Bhagat Namdev Ji (61 Shabads in 18 Raagas) and (2) Bhagat Ravi Das Ji (40 Shabads in 16 Raagas). The number of Shabads of the remaining 11 Bhagats vary from just a single “tuk’ (=statement/ line incorporated into a Shabad by Guru Arjan Dev Ji in Raag Sarang) by Bhagat Surdas Ji; or a single composition by (1) Bhagat Pipa Ji in Raag Dhanasari, (2) Bhagat Parmanand Ji in Raag Sarang, (3) Bhagat Sain Ji in Raag

Dhanasari, (4) Bhagat Bhikhan Ji in Raag Dhanasri, (5) Bhagat Ramanand Ji in Raag Basant, and (6) Bhagat Sadhna Ji in Raag Bilaval. Further, Bhagat Jai Dev Ji contributed 2 Shabads, one each in Raag Gajri and Raag Maru; and Bhagat Dhanna Ji has 3 Shabads (2 in Asa and 1 in Dhanasari). In addition to Bhagat Dhanna Ji, Bhagat Beni Ji also contributed 3 Shabads (Srirag, Ramkali and Prabhati), while Bhagat Trilochan Ji has 4 Shabads.

Sri Guru Arjan Dev Ji describes the qualities of Bhagats and quotes Bhagat Surdas Ji in the following Shabad.

ਤਨੁ ਮਨੁ ਅਰਪਿ ਸਰਬਸੁ ਸਭੁ ਅਰਪਿਓ ਅਨਦ ਸਰਜ ਯੁਨਿ ਝੋਕ
॥੧॥ ਰਹਾਉ ॥

The people of the Lord dwell with the Lord.

They dedicate their minds and bodies to Him; they dedicate everything to Him. They are intoxicated with the celestial melody of intuitive ecstasy. ॥1॥Pause॥

Gazing upon the Blessed Vision of the Lord's Darshan, they are cleansed of corruption. They obtain absolutely everything.

ਦਰਸਨੁ ਪੇਖਿ ਭਏ ਨਿਰਬਿਖਈ ਪਾਏ ਹੈ ਸਗਲੇ ਥੋਕ ॥

But one who forsakes the elegantly beautiful Lord, and harbors desire for anything else, is like a leech on the body of a leper.

ਸਿਆਮ ਸੁੰਦਰ ਤਜਿ ਆਨ ਜੁ ਚਾਹਤ ਜਿਉ ਕੁਸਟੀ ਤਨਿ ਜੋਕ ॥

Says Sur Daas, God has taken my mind in His Hands. He has blessed me with the world beyond. ॥2॥1॥8॥

1. Bhagat Surdas Ji : Hindu, 15th century, Vrindavan/Mathura, Uttar Pradesh.

Bhagat Surdas Ji was a poet, sant and musician was blind from birth. A devotee of The Almighty, he practiced "Gurmat" philosophy. He belonged to the Bhakti movement. The very fact that only one "tuk" of his compositions was included in a Shabad by Guru Arjan Dev Ji emphasizes the importance of "The True Essence" of understanding "Gurmat" philosophy. This implies that no Shabad is greater than the other. Every composition in The Guru Granth Sahib brings an understanding of "The Eternal".

The "tuk" ਸੂਰਦਾਸ ਮਨੁ ਪ੍ਰਭਿ ਹਥਿ ਲੀਨੇ ਦੀਨੇ ਇਹੁ ਪਰਲੋਕ
॥੨॥੧॥੮॥ - Soordaas Man Prabh Hath Leeno Deeno Eihu Parlok ॥2॥1॥8॥ from Guru Arjan Dev Ji's Shabad (above) is the only contribution of Bhagat Surdas Ji in The Guru Granth Sahib. He is revered along with all the Guru Sahibans, the Bhagats, the Bhats and the Gursikhs whose "Bani" is enshrined in the Scripture.

2. Bhagat Pipa Ji - A Rajput King, 15th century, Rajasthan.

Bagat Pipa was a Rajput King who abdicated the throne to become a Hindu mystic poet. Hailing from the Malwa region, he was a Shiva and Durga follower in his early life. Later he became a disciple of Ramanand and became an influential proponent of the Bhakti movement in 15th century northern India.

Only one of his compositions has been included in the Guru Granth Sahib, in Raag Dhanasari (Ang 695).

ਕਾਯਉ ਦੇਵਾ ਕਾਇਅਉ ਦੇਵਲ ਕਾਇਅਉ ਜੰਗਮ ਜਾਤੀ ॥
ਕਾਇਅਉ ਧੂਪ ਦੀਪ ਨਈਬੇਦਾ ਕਾਇਅਉ ਪੂਜਉ ਪਾਤੀ ॥੧॥
ਕਾਇਆ ਬਹੁ ਖੰਡ ਖੋਜਤੇ ਨਵ ਨਿਯਿ ਪਾਈ ॥
ਨਾ ਕਛੁ ਆਇਬੇ ਨਾ ਕਛੁ ਜਾਇਬੇ ਰਾਮ ਕੀ ਦੁਹਾਈ ॥੧॥ ਰਹਾਉ ॥

ਜੇ ਬ੍ਰਹਮੰਡੇ ਸੇਈ ਪਿੰਡੇ ਜੇ ਖੋਜੇ ਸੇ ਪਾਵੈ ॥

ਪੀਪਾ ਪ੍ਰਣਵੈ ਪਰਮ ਤਤੁ ਹੈ ਸਤਿਗੁਰੁ ਹੋਇ ਲਖਾਵੈ ॥੨॥੩॥

Within the body, the Divine Lord is embodied. The body is the temple, the place of pilgrimage, and the pilgrim. Within the body are incense, lamps and offerings.

Within the body are the flower offerings. ॥1॥

I searched throughout many realms, but I found the nine treasures within the body.

Nothing comes, and nothing goes; I pray to the Lord for Mercy. ॥1॥Pause॥

The One who pervades the Universe also dwells in the body;

whoever seeks Him, finds Him there.

Peepaa prays, the Lord is the supreme essence;

He reveals Himself through the True Guru. ॥2॥3॥

3. Bhagat Sain Ji - A Nai (barber) in a Royal Court, 15th century, Punjab.

Bhagat Sain Ji was a (Nai) barber off the Royal Court of Raja Ram, King of Rewa. Born in Amritsar (village Sohal, now in Tarn Taran district of Punjab), Bhagat Ji was a follower of the Bhakti movement of Ramanand. Having leisure time at his disposal due to light duties at the Royal Court, Bhagat Ji became devoted to spiritual compositions.

There is also a suggestion that on one occasion, the Raja realized the spirituality of Bhagat Ji and fell at his feet.

Thus, like Bhagat Pipa Ji and other Bhagats, Sain Ji was also influenced by the Bhakti movement.

His only composition in the Guru Granth Sahib is part of the daily "Arti" in Raag Dhanasari. (Ang 695)

ਧੂਪ ਦੀਪ ਘ੍ਰਿਤ ਸਾਜਿ ਆਰਤੀ ॥
 ਵਾਰਨੇ ਜਾਉ ਕਮਲਾ ਪਤੀ ॥੧॥ ਮੰਗਲਾ ਹਰਿ ਮੰਗਲਾ ॥
 ਨਿਤ ਮੰਗਲੁ ਰਾਜਾ ਰਾਮ ਰਾਇ ਕੇ ॥੧॥ ਰਹਾਉ ॥
 ਉਤਮੁ ਦੀਅਰਾ ਨਿਰਮਲ ਬਾਤੀ ॥
 ਤੁਹੀ ਨਿਰੰਜਨੁ ਕਮਲਾ ਪਾਤੀ ॥੨॥
 ਰਾਮਾ ਭਗਤਿ ਰਾਮਾਨੰਦੁ ਜਾਨੈ ॥
 ਪੂਰਨ ਪਰਮਾਨੰਦੁ ਬਖਾਨੈ ॥੩॥
 ਮਦਨ ਮੂਰਤਿ ਤੈ ਤਾਰਿ ਗੋਬਿੰਦੇ ॥
 ਸੈਨੁ ਭਣੈ ਭਜੁ ਪਰਮਾਨੰਦੇ ॥੪॥੨॥

With incense, lamps and ghee, I offer this lamp-lit worship service.

I am a sacrifice to the Lord of Lakshmi.

Hail to You, Lord, Hail to You!

Again and again, Hail to You, Lord King, Ruler of all!
 ||Pause||

Sublime is the lamp, and pure is the wick.

You are immaculate and pure, O Brilliant Lord of Wealth!
 ||2||

Raamaanand knows the devotional worship of the Lord.

He says that the Lord is all-pervading, the embodiment of supreme joy! ||3||

The Lord of the world, wondrous form, has carried me across the terrifying world ocean.

Says Sain, remember the Lord, the embodiment of supreme joy! ||4||2||

4. Bhagat Sadhana Ji – Muslim butcher, 12th century Sindh Province.

Bhagat Sadhana was a butcher by profession, but true to his religious belief. He would be taunted by the Mullahs for his profession and was often told that he shall not get a place in The Kingdom of The Almighty.

ਨ੍ਰਿਪ ਕੰਨਿਆ ਕੇ ਕਾਰਨੇ ਇਕੁ ਭਇਆ ਭੇਖਧਾਰੀ ॥
 ਕਾਮਾਰਥੀ ਸੁਆਰਥੀ ਵਾ ਕੀ ਪੈਜ ਸਵਾਰੀ ॥੧॥ ...
 ਮੈ ਨਾਹੀ ਕਛੁ ਹਉ ਨਹੀ ਕਿਛੁ ਆਹਿ ਨ ਮੇਰਾ ॥
 ਅਉਸਰ ਲਜਾ ਰਾਖਿ ਲੇਹੁ ਸਧਨਾ ਜਨੁ ਤੋਰਾ ॥੪॥੧॥

This is the only Shabad by Bhagat Sadhana in The Guru Granth Sahib.

I am nothing, I have nothing, and nothing belongs to me.

Now, protect my honor; Sadhana is

Your humble servant. ||4||1|| (Ang 858)

In this Shabad, Bhagat Ji describes instances where The Almighty has showered Blessings on different individuals for their devotion. He completes the Shabad with an appeal to The Almighty for Blessings by total submission.

5. Bhagat Parmanand Ji – Maharashtra, 15th century.

Bhagat Parmanand Ji was a Maharashtra poet and a devotee of Vishnu. He worshiped the Vaisnavite manifestation of Krishna. He believed that God could only be worshipped as an image for a very long time. However, when he realized that God is “Nirgun” and Supreme, he changed his thought process. Only one Shabad of Bhagat Parmanand Ji (in Raag Sarang) is enshrined in the Guru Granth Sahib.

ਤੈ ਨਰ ਕਿਆ ਪੁਰਾਨੁ ਸੁਨਿ ਕੀਨਾ ॥

ਅਨਪਾਵਨੀ ਭਗਤਿ ਨਹੀ ਉਪਜੀ ਭੂਖੇ ਦਾਨੁ ਨ ਦੀਨਾ ॥੧॥
 ਰਹਾਉ ॥

ਕਾਮੁ ਨ ਬਿਸਰਿਓ ਕ੍ਰੋਧੁ ਨ ਬਿਸਰਿਓ ਲੇਭੁ ਨ ਛੂਟਿਓ ਦੇਵਾ ॥
 ਪਰ ਨਿੰਦਾ ਮੁਖ ਤੇ ਨਹੀ ਛੂਟੀ ਨਿਫਲ ਭਈ ਸਭ ਸੇਵਾ ॥੧॥

ਬਾਟ ਪਾਰਿ ਘਰੁ ਮੂਸਿ ਬਿਰਾਨੇ ਪੇਟੁ ਭਰੈ ਅਪ੍ਰਾਧੀ ॥
 ਜਿਹਿ ਪਰਲੋਕ ਜਾਇ ਅਪਕੀਰਤਿ ਸੇਈ ਅਬਿਦਿਆ ਸਾਧੀ ॥੨॥
 ਹਿੰਸਾ ਤਉ ਮਨ ਤੇ ਨਹੀ ਛੂਟੀ ਜੀਅ ਦਇਆ ਨਹੀ ਪਾਲੀ ॥
 ਪਰਮਾਨੰਦ ਸਾਧਸੰਗਤਿ ਮਿਲਿ ਕਥਾ ਪੁਨੀਤ ਨ ਚਾਲੀ ॥੩॥੧॥
 ॥੬॥

[Saarang (SGGS: 1253)]

So what have you accomplished by listening to the Puraanas?

Faithful devotion has not welled up within you, and you have not been inspired to give to the hungry. ||1||Pause||

You have not forgotten sexual desire, and you have not forgotten anger; greed has not left you either.

Your mouth has not stopped slandering and gossiping about others. Your service is useless and fruitless. ||1||

By breaking into the houses of others and robbing them, you fill your belly, you sinner.

But when you go to the world beyond, your guilt will be well known, by the acts of ignorance which you committed. ||2||

Cruelty has not left your mind; you have not cherished kindness for other living beings.

Parmaanand has joined the Saadh Sangat, the Company

of the Holy. Why have you not followed the sacred teachings? ||3||1||6||

6. Bhagat Bhikhan Ji – Uttar Pradesh, 16th century.

Bhagat Bhikhan Ji belonged to Uttar Pradesh during the rule of the Mughal King Akbar.

Only one Shabad (in Raag Sorath) is included in the Guru Granth Sahib (Ang 659).

ਨੈਨਹੁ ਨੀਰੁ ਬਰੈ ਤਨੁ ਖੀਨਾ ਭਏ ਕੇਸ ਦੁਧ ਵਾਨੀ ॥
ਰੂਧਾ ਕੰਠੁ ਸਬਦੁ ਨਹੀ ਉਚਰੈ ਅਬ ਕਿਆ ਕਰਹਿ ਪਰਾਨੀ ॥੧॥
ਰਾਮ ਰਾਇ ਹੋਹਿ ਬੈਦ ਬਨਵਾਰੀ ॥
ਅਪਨੇ ਸੰਤਹ ਲੇਹੁ ਉਬਾਰੀ ॥੧॥ ਰਹਾਉ ॥
ਮਾਥੇ ਪੀਰ ਸਰੀਰਿ ਜਲਨਿ ਹੈ ਕਰਕ ਕਰੇਜੇ ਮਾਹੀ ॥
ਐਸੀ ਬੇਦਨ ਉਪਜਿ ਖਰੀ ਭਈ ਵਾ ਕਾ ਅਉਖਧੁ ਨਾਹੀ ॥੨॥
ਹਰਿ ਕਾ ਨਾਮੁ ਅੰਮ੍ਰਿਤੁ ਜਲੁ ਨਿਰਮਲੁ ਇਹੁ ਅਉਖਧੁ ਜਗਿ ਸਾਰਾ ॥
ਗੁਰ ਪਰਸਾਦਿ ਕਰੈ ਜਨੁ ਭੀਖਨੁ ਪਾਵਉ ਮੋਖ ਦੁਆਰਾ ॥੩॥੧॥

[Raag Sorath Bani Bhagat Bhikhan Kee. (SGGS: 659)]

Tears well up in my eyes, my body has become weak, and my hair has become milky-white.

My throat is tight, and I cannot utter even one word; what can I do now? I am a mere mortal. ||1||

O Lord, my King, Gardener of the world-garden, be my Physician,

And save me, Your Saint. ||1||Pause||

My head aches, my body is burning, and my heart is filled with anguish.

Such is the disease that has struck me; there is no medicine to cure it. ||2||

The Name of the Lord, the ambrosial, immaculate water, is the best medicine in the world.

By Guru's Grace, says servant Bheekhan, I have found the Door of Salvation||3||

7. Bhagat Ramanand Ji – Brahmin (Vaishnav), Uttar Pradesh, late 14th century.

Bhagat Ramanand Ji was born in an upper-caste Brahmin family in Allahabad. He preached that "Hari" (God) was available to people of all castes. He was a well known proponent of the "Bhakti Movement", and several other Bhagats have followed this concept. Ramanand's

profound philosophy has been presented in a single Shabad in Raag Basant.



ਕਤ ਜਾਈਐ ਰੇ ਘਰ ਲਾਗੋ ਰੰਗੁ ॥
ਮੇਰਾ ਚਿਤੁ ਨ ਚਲੈ ਮਨੁ ਭਇਓ ਪੰਗੁ ॥੧॥ ਰਹਾਉ ॥
ਏਕ ਦਿਵਸ ਮਨ ਭਈ ਉਮੰਗੁ ॥
ਘਸਿ ਚੰਦਨ ਚੋਆ ਬਹੁ ਸੁਗੰਧੁ ॥
ਪੂਜਨ ਚਾਲੀ ਬ੍ਰਹਮ ਠਾਇ ॥
ਸੇ ਬ੍ਰਹਮੁ ਬਤਾਇਓ ਗੁਰ ਮਨ ਹੀ ਮਾਹਿ ॥੧॥
ਜਹਾ ਜਾਈਐ ਤਹ ਜਲ ਪਖਾਨੁ ॥
ਤੂ ਪੂਰਿ ਰਹਿਓ ਹੈ ਸਭ ਸਮਾਨੁ ॥
ਬੈਦ ਪੁਰਾਨ ਸਭ ਦੇਖੇ ਜੋਇ ॥
ਊਹਾ ਤਉ ਜਾਈਐ ਜਉ ਈਹਾ ਨ ਹੋਇ ॥੨॥
ਸਤਿਗੁਰ ਮੈ ਬਲਿਹਾਰੀ ਤੋਰ ॥
ਜਿਨਿ ਸਕਲ ਬਿਕਲ ਭ੍ਰਮ ਕਾਟੇ ਮੋਰ ॥
ਰਾਮਾਨੰਦ ਸੁਆਮੀ ਰਮਤ ਬ੍ਰਹਮੁ ॥
ਗੁਰ ਕਾ ਸਬਦੁ ਕਾਟੈ ਕੋਟਿ ਕਰਮੁ ॥੩॥੧॥

[Ramanand Jee Ghar 1 (SGGS: 1195)]

Where should I go? My home is filled with bliss.

My consciousness does not go out wandering. My mind has become crippled. ||1||Pause||

One day, a desire welled up in my mind.

I ground up sandalwood, along with several fragrant oils.

I went to God's place, and worshipped Him there.

That God showed me the Guru, within my own mind. ||1||

Wherever I go, I find water and stones.

You are totally pervading and permeating in all.

I have searched through all the Vedas and the Puraanas.

I would go there, only if the Lord were not here. ||2||

I am a sacrifice to You, O my True Guru.

You have cut through all my confusion and doubt.

Raamaanand's Lord and Master is the All-pervading Lord God.

The Word of the Guru's Shabad eradicates the karma of millions of past actions. ||3||1||

8. Bhagat Jai Dev Ji – Brahman, Bengal, 12th century.

Bhagat Jai Dev Ji belonged to a Brahman family of Bengal. He was a celebrated Sanskrit poet – author of “Gitgovind”. He led the life of an ascetic and developed rare poetic talent. There are 2 Shabads (one each in Raag Gujri and Maru) of Jai Dev Ji in the Guru Granth Sahib.

ਪਰਮਾਦਿ ਪੁਰਖਮਨੇਪਿਮੰ ਸਤਿ ਆਦਿ ਭਾਵ ਰਤੰ ॥
ਪਰਮਦਭੂਤੰ ਪਰਕ੍ਰਿਤਿ ਪਰੰ ਜਦਿਚਿੰਤਿ ਸਰਬ ਗਤੰ ॥
ਕੇਵਲ ਰਾਮ ਨਾਮ ਮਨੋਰਮੰ ॥
ਬਦਿ ਅੰਮ੍ਰਿਤ ਤਤ ਮਇਅੰ ॥
ਨ ਦਨੇਤਿ ਜਸਮਰਣੇਨ ਜਨਮ ਜਰਾਧਿ ਮਰਣ ਭਇਅੰ ॥੧॥
ਰਹਾਉ ॥
ਇਛਸਿ ਜਮਾਦਿ ਪਰਾਭਯੰ ਜਸੁ ਸ੍ਰਸਤਿ ਸੁਕ੍ਰਿਤ ਕ੍ਰਿਤੰ ॥
ਭਵ ਭੂਤ ਭਾਵ ਸਮਬਥਿ ਪਰਮੰ ਪ੍ਰਸੰਨਮਿਦੰ ॥੨॥
ਲੋਭਾਦਿ ਦ੍ਰਿਸਟਿ ਪਰ ਗ੍ਰਿਹੰ ਜਦਿਬਿਧਿ ਆਚਰਣੰ ॥
ਤਜਿ ਸਕਲ ਦੁਹਕ੍ਰਿਤ ਦੁਰਮਤੀ ਭਜੁ ਚਕ੍ਰਯਰ ਸਰਣੰ ॥੩॥
ਹਰਿ ਭਗਤ ਨਿਜ ਨਿਹਕੇਵਲਾ ਰਿਦ ਕਰਮਣਾ ਬਚਸਾ ॥
ਜੋਗੇਨ ਕਿੰ ਜਗੇਨ ਕਿੰ ਦਾਨੇਨ ਕਿੰ ਤਪਸਾ ॥੪॥
ਗੋਬਿੰਦ ਗੋਬਿੰਦੇਤਿ ਜਪਿ ਨਰ ਸਕਲ ਸਿਧਿ ਪਦੰ ॥
ਜੈਦੇਵ ਆਇਉ ਤਸ ਸਫੁਟੰ ਭਵ ਭੂਤ ਸਰਬ ਗਤੰ ॥੫॥੧॥

[Gujri Sri Jaidev Jeeo Ka Padaa Ghar 4 (SGGS: 526)]

In the very beginning, was the Primal Lord, unrivalled, the Lover of Truth and other virtues.

He is absolutely wonderful, transcending creation; remembering Him, all are emancipated. ||1||

Dwell only upon the beautiful Name of the Lord,

The embodiment of ambrosial nectar and reality.

Remembering Him in meditation, the fear of birth, old age and death will not trouble you. ||1||Pause||

.....

Remembering Him in meditation, the fear of birth, old age and death will not trouble you. || 1 || Pause ||

If you desire to escape the fear of the Messenger of Death, then praise the Lord joyfully, and do good deeds. In the past, present and future, He is always the same; He is the embodiment of supreme bliss. || 2 ||

If you seek the path of good conduct, forsake greed, and do not look upon other men's property and women. Renounce all evil actions and evil inclinations, and hurry to the Sanctuary of the Lord. || 3 ||

Worship the immaculate Lord, in thought, word and deed. What is the good of practicing Yoga, giving feasts and charity, and practicing penance? || 4 ||

Meditate on the Lord of the Universe, the Lord of the Universe, O man; He is the source of all the spiritual powers of the Siddhas.

Jai Dev has openly come to Him; He is the salvation of all, in the past, present and future. ||5||1||

ਚੰਦ ਸਤ ਭੇਦਿਆ ਨਾਦ ਸਤ ਪੂਰਿਆ ਸੂਰ ਸਤ ਖੇੜਸਾ ਦਤੁ
ਕੀਆ ॥

ਅਬਲ ਬਲੁ ਤੋੜਿਆ ਅਚਲ ਚਲੁ ਥਪਿਆ ਅਘੜੁ ਘੜਿਆ
ਤਹਾ ਅਪਿਉ ਪੀਆ ॥੧॥

ਮਨ ਆਦਿ ਗੁਣ ਆਦਿ ਵਖਾਣਿਆ ॥

ਤੇਰੀ ਦੁਬਿਧਾ ਦ੍ਰਿਸਟਿ ਸੰਮਾਨਿਆ ॥੧॥ ਰਹਾਉ ॥

ਅਰਧਿ ਕਉ ਅਰਧਿਆ ਸਰਧਿ ਕਉ ਸਰਧਿਆ ਸਲਲ ਕਉ
ਸਲਲਿ ਸੰਮਾਨਿ ਆਇਆ ॥

ਬਦਤਿ ਜੈਦੇਉ ਜੈਦੇਵ ਕਉ ਰੰਮਿਆ ਬ੍ਰਹਮੁ ਨਿਰਬਾਣੁ ਲਿਵ
ਲੀਣੁ ਪਾਇਆ ॥੨॥੧॥

[Raag Maru Bani Jaideo Jeeo Kee (SGGS: 1106)]

The breath is drawn in through the left nostril; it is held in the central channel of the Sushmanaa and exhaled through the right nostril repeating the Lord's Name sixteen times.

I am powerless; my power has been broken. My unstable mind has been stabilized, and my unadorned soul has been adorned. I drink in the Ambrosial Nectar. ||1||

Within my mind, I chant the Name of the Primal Lord God, the Source of virtue.

My vision, that You are I are separate, has melted away. ||1||Pause||

I worship the One who is worthy of being worshipped. I trust the One who is worthy of being trusted. Like water merging in water, I merge in the Lord.

Says Jai Dayv, I meditate and contemplate the Luminous, Triumphant Lord. I am lovingly absorbed in the Nirvaanaa of God. ||2||1||

9. Bhagat Dhanna Ji – Hindu, Rajasthan, 15th century.

Bhagat Dhanna was from a Hindu Dhaliwal family of Tonk in Rajasthan.

He was a mystic poet and there are 3 Shabads in The Guru Granth Sahib. Two Shabads are in Asa Raag. One of these is mentioned here:

ਇਹ ਬਿਧਿ ਸੁਨਿ ਕੈ ਜਾਟਰੇ ਉਠਿ ਭਗਤੀ ਲਾਗਾ ॥ ਮਿਲੇ
ਪ੍ਰਤਖਿ ਗੁਸਾਈਆ ਧੰਨਾ ਵਡਭਾਗਾ ॥੪॥੨॥

Hearing this, Dhanna the Jaat applied himself to devotional worship.

The Lord of the Universe met him personally; Dhanna was so very blessed. ॥4॥2॥

The third Shabad in Dhanashree Raag is part of the daily Arti - "Gopal Tera Aarta ॥ Ang 695."

ਗੋਪਾਲ ਤੇਰਾ ਆਰਤਾ ॥

ਜੇ ਜਨ ਤੁਮਰੀ ਭਗਤਿ ਕਰੰਤੇ ਤਿਨ ਕੇ ਕਾਜ ਸਵਾਰਤਾ ॥੧॥
ਰਹਾਉ ॥

ਦਾਲਿ ਸੀਧਾ ਮਗਉ ਘੀਉ ॥
ਹਮਰਾ ਖੁਸੀ ਕਰੈ ਨਿਤ ਜੀਉ ॥
ਪਨੁਹੀਆ ਛਾਦਨੁ ਨੀਕਾ ॥
ਅਨਾਜੁ ਮਗਉ ਸਤ ਸੀ ਕਾ ॥੧॥
ਗਉ ਭੈਸ ਮਗਉ ਲਾਵੇਰੀ ॥
ਇਕ ਤਾਜਨਿ ਤੁਰੀ ਚੰਗੇਰੀ ॥
ਘਰ ਕੀ ਗੀਹਨਿ ਚੰਗੀ ॥
ਜਨੁ ਧੰਨਾ ਲੇਵੈ ਮੰਗੀ ॥੨॥੪॥

O Lord of the world, this is your lamp-lit worship service.

You are the Arranger of the affairs of those humble beings who perform your devotional worship service. ॥1॥Pause॥

Lentils, ghee and flour – these things, I beg of You.

My mind shall ever be pleased.

Shoes, fine clothes, and grains of seven kinds – I beg of You. ॥1॥

A milk-cow and a water buffalo, I beg of You,

And a fine Turkestan horse.

A good wife to care for my home –

Your humble servant Dhana begs for these things, Lord. ॥4॥2॥

Prithipal Singh had the honour of teaching for 40 years in the University of Delhi and constituent colleges. He has been published in many Sikh journals and magazines on various topics in Sikh Religion and History.



THE SIKH FESTIVAL OF HOLA MOHALLA

Text by: Jotsimran Singh Dua
Photographs by: Tanny Kaler

Hola Mohalla is a Sikh festival that takes place on the first of the lunar month of Chet, which usually falls in March. This, by a tradition established by Guru Gobind Singh, follows the Hindu festival of Holi by one day; Holi is the masculine form of the feminine sounding Holi. The word “Mohalla” is derived from the Arabic root ‘hal’ (alighting, descending) and is a Punjabi word that implies an organized procession in the form of an army column.

But unlike Holi, when people playfully sprinkle color, dry or mixed in water, on each other, the Guru made Holi Mohalla an occasion for the Sikhs to demonstrate their martial skills in simulated battles.

Together the words “Holi Mohalla” stand for “mock fight.” During this festival, processions are organized in the form of army type columns accompanied by war-drums and standard-bearers, proceeding to a given spot or moving in state from one Gurdwara to another.

The custom originated in the time of Guru Gobind Singh, who held the first such mock fight event at Anandpur Sahib in February 1701. The foothills of the Shivaliks in Ropar district of Punjab’s north-eastern region, especially around the historic townships of Anandpur Sahib and Kiratpur Sahib have, since 1701, been playing host to Holi Mohalla.

The military exercise, which was personally supervised by the Guru, was carried out on the bed of the River Charan Ganga with the famous Hindu temple of Mata Naina Devi in the Shivaliks as the backdrop.

This annual festival held at Anandpur Sahib in Punjab and now replicated at other Gurdwaras







(Above) Nihangs play with Holi colors during the ongoing Holla Mohalla celebrations at Anandpur Sahib.



(left) Nihang with his horse and Nagara (the Drum) during the celebration of Holla Mohalla at Anandpur Sahib.

(Right) Nihang Sikh carrying spear and performing stunts riding on horse during the celebration of Holla Mohalla at Anandpur Sahib.

worldwide was started by the tenth Sikh Guru, Guru Gobind Singh, as a gathering of Sikhs for military exercises and mock battles on the day following the festival of Holi at Anandpur Sahib. It reminds the people of valor and defense preparedness, concepts dear to the Tenth Guru who was at that time battling the Mughal empire and the hill kings.

On this three-day grand festival, mock battles, exhibitions, displays of weapons, etc. are held, followed by Kirtan, music and poetry competitions. The participants perform daring feats, such as Gatka (mock encounters with real weapons), tent pegging, bareback horse-riding, standing erect on two speeding horses and various other feats of bravery.

There are also a number of Darbars where the Sri Guru Granth Sahib is present, and Kirtan and religious lectures take place. On the last day a long procession, led by Panj Pyaras, starts from Takhat Keshgarh Sahib, one of the five Sikh religious seats, and passes through various important Gurdwaras like Qila Anandgarh, Lohgarh Sahib, Mata Jitoji and terminates at the starting place (Keshgarh Sahib).

For people visiting Anandpur Sahib, *langars* (voluntary community kitchens) are organized by the local people as a part of *seva* (community service). Raw materials like wheat flour, rice, vegetables, milk and sugar are provided by





(Above) Waiting for his turn: Nihang displaying with his horse and Nagara (the Drum) during the celebration of Hola Mohalla at Anandpur Sahib.

(Below) A young Sikh 'nihang' beating the Nagara (the Drum) during the celebration of Hola Mohalla at Anandpur Sahib.



Horses are the lifeline of an ever-mobile Nihang culture. Boys grow up knowing and caring for their horses. The horses are thoroughly trained to act as mounts during displays of the Nihangs' fighting skills or to play an equal part in their riding shows. They eventually become a physical extension of their masters. Here a nihang Sikh gestures in a moment of love with his horse during Hola Moholla 2022 at Anandpur Sahib.





(Left) Nihang with colour and riding on horse with a young Nihang during Hola Mohalla celebrations 2022 at Anandpur Sahib.

(Right) Nihang Sikh carrying spear during the celebration of Hola Mohalla at Anandpur Sahib.



the villagers living nearby. Men and women volunteer to cook and others take part in cleaning utensils and other manual tasks that need to be carried out. Traditional cuisine is served to the pilgrims who eat while sitting in rows on the ground (*Pangat*).

Sikhs in large numbers still assemble at Anandpur Sahib on this day and an impressive and colorful procession is taken out in which the Nihangs, in their traditional panoply, form the vanguard while parading their skill in the use of arms, horsemanship, tent-pegging, and other war-like sports.

Originally known as Akalis, the Nihang Singhs are endearingly designated as Guru's Knights or the Guru's beloved. They still carry the military ambience and heroic style that was cultivated during the lifetime of Guru Gobind Singh. Nihangs constitute a distinctive order among the Sikhs and are readily recognized by their dark blue Bana and their ample Dumallas.

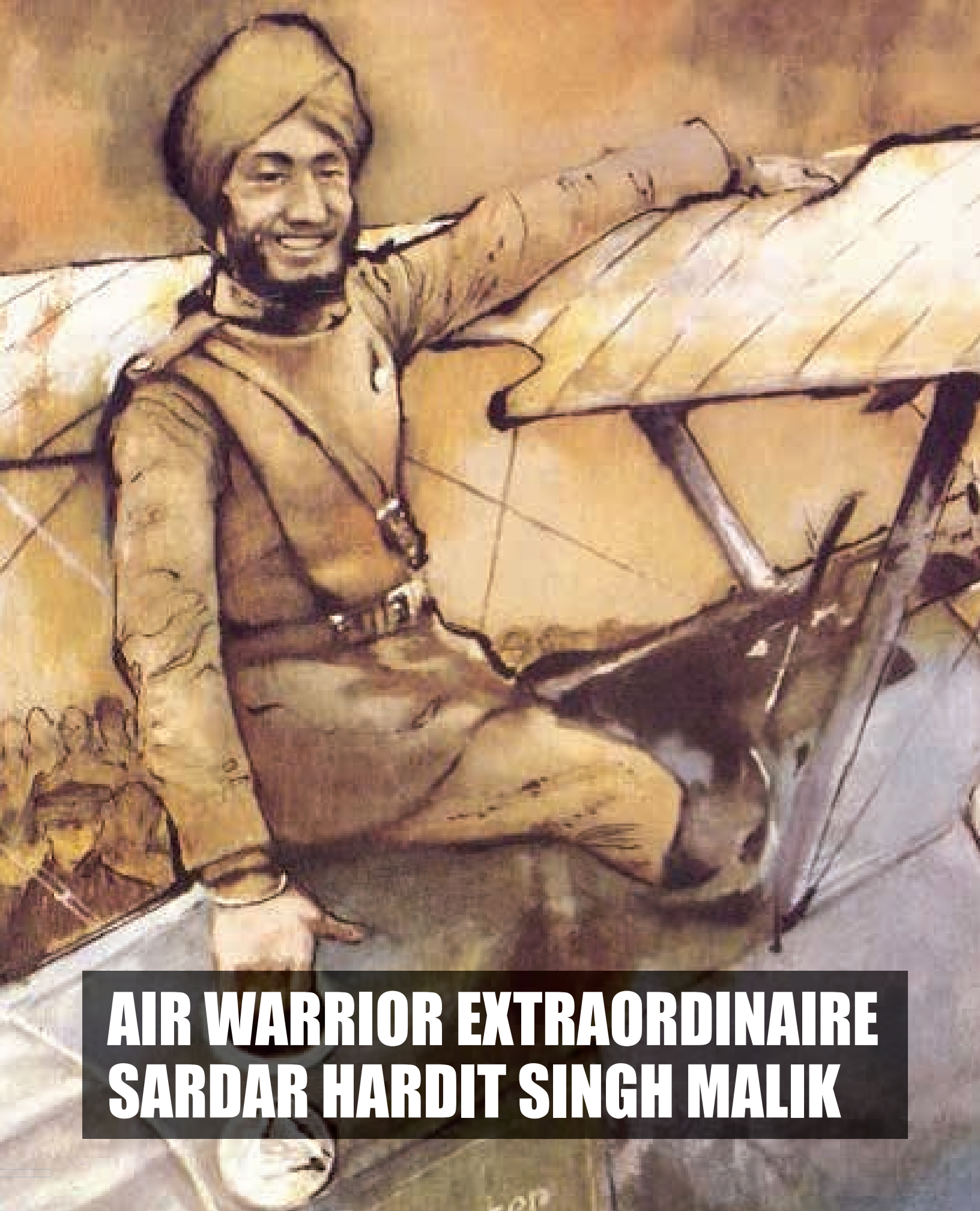
The most spectacular event at Hola Mahalla is the magnificent procession of Nihangs on horses and elephants and on foot carrying a variety of traditional and modern weapons and demonstrating their skill in using them.

The Hola Mahalla festival is unique and distinguishable from other festivals in that the Nihangs have tried to preserve the traditional form and content as established during its inception, and strictly observed by the Akalis, for more than three centuries.





Hola Mohalla 2022: Photographs by Tanny Kaler. He is an amateur photographer who developed his skills over the past year while taking part in the farmers protest at Tikri Border.



**AIR WARRIOR EXTRAORDINAIRE
SARDAR HARDIT SINGH MALIK**



There are people who from their early childhood are interested in flying, making model planes etc. I can claim no such early interest unless a passion for flying kites alongwith the kites battles that went on, one kite diving on another, attempting to cut off the cord with the glass coated cord of one's kite, can ever be called an interest in flying. This passion I shared as a youngster with a number of my contemporaries during the kite flying season.

When the First World War came in 1914 I was in my second year at Oxford. Practically all of my British colleagues who were physically fit volunteered to join the fighting services and it was not long before I also caught the fever. I had a strong feeling that this was going to be a unique adventure in which every young man should participate.

There was one problem which as an Indian I was immediately conscious of. This was said to be a war for freedom. How could I, a native of a country that was itself not free, engage in a struggle in which I might well lose my life when its outcome, one way or the other, would have no effect on my freedom since my country would continue to be under foreign rule? However, my wish to join my friends and fight alongside them got me over this hurdle.

For an Indian student, however, getting into the war was not easy in those days. My attempts to get a commission in the fighting services as most of my British friends had done were not successful and all I was offered was a job an orderly in one of the hospitals in England where the wounded soldiers of the Indian Army who had joined the British Expeditionary Force were being looked after. This was not my idea of active service.

Eventually, with the help of my tutor at Balliol, 'Sligger' Urquhart who was also a good friend I succeeded in getting out to France as an ambulance driver with the rank of an officer in the French Red Cross.

It was during this period of service on the Western Front that I made up my mind that I would be a fighting pilot. As luck would have it I was able, by pestering some of my French friends whom I got to know at that time, to arrange for admission to the French Air Force as a Volunteer. In the meantime I had kept up regular correspondence with 'Sligger' who had got me into the French Red Cross and when he heard of the possibility of my being taken into the French Air Force he called on General Sir David Henderson, who was commanding the Royal Flying Corps at that time and who was a friend of his, and expressed his indignation at the possibility of my being taken into the French Air Force when I, as a British subject should by all rights be in the Royal Flying Corps (RFC).

General Henderson was over and before long I was called to London for a personal interview with him. To my great delight and excitement the General, after a brief interview offered me a cadetship in the RFC as soon as I could secure my release from the French Red Cross. This did not take long and early in 1917, I joined the RFC, as a cadet. It seemed almost like a dream and I shall never forget the thrill of putting on the prestigious uniform — the famous old 'maternity jacket' — for the first time!

I have often been asked if as a Sikh - with my *keshas* and turban - I did not have problems in the RFC. Well, on my very first parade the Sergeant Major in charge of the parade pulled me out of the ranks and said "Why are you not wearing a hat ? You are not in uniform", I tried to explain

that as a Sikh with my long hair I had to wear a turban and this was a part of **my** uniform. He would have none of it and would have ordered me off parade, but, fortunately for me, the Adjutant who was watching the parade, noticing the incident, came up. I explained the position to him and he told me and the Sergeant Major to carry on adding that the matter would have to be referred to the War Office. Presumably the War Office gave me a special dispensation as I heard no more about it.

The only other problem of this nature that cropped up was over the question of my flying helmet. This was very important in those days of open cockpits and I got over this one by having a specially large one made to fit **over** my turban.

I confess that while I thoroughly enjoyed the period of preliminary training, first at Aldershot - despite the physical discomfort already referred to - and later at Reading, learning all about the theory of flight and rigging etc. of the flying machines of those days which were mostly wood fabric and wire and about aero engines, and realised all this was basically essential, I was impatient actually to get into the air.

I did not have long to wait, for on the successful completion of my course at Reading I was posted to the Preliminary Flying Training Station at Vendome in central France which was run by the RNAS (the Royal Naval Air Service) but where both RFC and RNAS cadets did their preliminary flying.

It was here that the cadets were sorted out, those who were considered fit to fly the single seater fighters of those days, the Sopwith Camel, the Sopwith Pup, the SE.5 etc., which required a lighter touch and more skilful handling than the heavier machines the RES etc; mostly used for artillery observation and

others. The heavier-handed pilots whose reflexes were supposed to be slower were put in this category while those who tailed in the various tests were declared unfit for flying and relegated to ground duties. All these of course had their important roles to play in war but human nature being what it is, the fighter pilots were considered the elite in a Corps which itself was considered elite.

Great was my delight therefore when, after successfully going through the various tests I was put into the first category and picked for further training as a fighter pilot. I was fortunate in picking up a knack of flying an aeroplane very quickly - being allowed to go 'solo' after only 2 ½ hours 'dual' - and what a thrill, truly unforgettable, it was to be allowed to go up alone to pilot the Caudron in which I had received my dual instruction for the first time.

I was fortunate in having as my Instructor a man who not only took a real interest in his pupils but became a good friend and it was due to his special interest that I learnt to pilot a plane so quickly. His name was Carr and he later came out to India as Air Officer Commanding the RAF there.

At my next posting which was at Filton near Bristol, well known as the location of the Bristol Aircraft Co. who brought out the well known Bristol Fighter, probably the best fighter aeroplane, on either side, in the closing months of the war and which I had the good luck to pilot in France in 1918 with No.11 Squadron. Again I was fortunate in having an excellent Instructor, a regular Army officer who had joined the RFC, Captain Chadwick who also became a good friend. Here at Filton we had our secondary flying and our preliminary training as fighter pilots. Starting with BE.2Cs which had a stationary engine and was

a stable plane, we learnt to fly the unstable planes with rotary engines. Beginning with the Avro 504 which was the most popular training plane at that time for fighter pilots we moved on to planes like the Sopwith Pup, the Nieuport and so on, ending up with the Sopwith Camel the most sophisticated fighter plane at that time—and the trickiest to fly.

At Filton we were taught aerobatics, the famous 'Immelmann' turn named after the renowned German ace, looping the loop, rolling, spinning, steep diving etc., all of which were so vital for the fighter pilot of those days whose life literally depended on his ability to manoeuvre his plane. Under Chadwick's expert and sympathetic instruction I soon got the knack of flying these sensitive planes and doing aerobatics in them and I won my 'wings' and became a full-fledged pilot inside a month of my posting at Filton.

From Filton I moved on to Yatesbury where after further flying various kinds of 'Scouts' as the single seater fighter planes were called we finally formed a Sopwith Camel Squadron, No. 28, and it was from here that we flew out to France. We were stationed at an airfield in Flanders near the village of Droglandt. This was really a marsh as most of the land in Flanders had been made into an airfield by putting cinder tracks on it. As the field was comparatively small, landing on these cinder tracks was quite tricky, but most of us knew how to handle our Camels and had no difficulty. It was a different story however when a Squadron of DH.4s which were heavier, and ran more after landing than a Camel did. The first four planes ran into the hedge at the end of the runway and the plan to have the DH. 4 squadron stationed at Droglandt was abandoned. Barker was my flight commander and initiated me into the art of aerial combat. A great

many pilots were shot down very early in their careers through sheer inexperience. Many never saw the enemy plane until they were hit and I was fortunate in being guided during my first flights over the lines by Barker who would fly close to me and often indicate by pre-arranged signals, as there was no such thing as aerial telephoning in those early days where enemy planes were and which direction they were coming from.

I recollect during one of these early flights that Barker signalled to me and before I realised what had happened, saw a Fokker diving on Barker and opening fire but before he got within shooting range Barker did a climbing turn and got on to the tail of the diving German shooting him down in flames. It all happened in a few seconds, almost before I realised what was going on.

On another occasion our Squadron joined up with two other squadrons to do a massive patrol against the German fighter squadrons posted across the lines not far from us including Richtofen's - the legendary Red Baron - who had been playing havoc with our artillery observation planes and balloons. It was an unforgettable sight when our three squadrons, 54 aircraft in all, Sopwith Camels, SE.5s, Sopwith two-seaters, assembled to cross over to the German lines. We soon ran into the enemy fighters and a regular dog fight ensued. In such a battle in those days each pilot had to look after himself and I soon found myself engaged in combat with a German Fokker. I was able to get into a position finally to dive on him and shoot him down. During the excitement of the combat, however, I had lost nearly 6000 ft of height without knowing it, and after the German went down I looked around for the rest of our formation. Not an aeroplane to be seen! I became rather anxious,



(Above) A dapper Hardit Singh Malik with his RFC wings

but then I looked up and saw a lot of our aeroplanes. Barker, after the battle, looked around for our aeroplanes, some of which had been shot down, and spotted me five or six thousand feet below. He brought the entire formation down to where I was, thus probably saving my life because alone in enemy country with plenty of German planes around, my chances of survival would have been rather dim. This indeed was one of the ways in which the inexperienced lost their lives.

Barker who became a good friend, was associated with probably the most vital and unforgettable experience of my life. The incident is well worth describing in some detail. We had had a spell of very

bad weather, preventing all flying and as happens at such times we were all feeling rather bored and restless. In those days without any navigational aids except the compass and one's own sense of direction and observation we did no flying when the sky was completely clouded and visibility at 1000 ft or less was practically nil. Barker got particularly impatient and, weather or no weather, had made up his mind to fly. He told the CO that even in the prevailing bad weather he felt that he could find his way to Richtofen's Squadron who were just across the lines from us and his plan was to fly over there with three other pilots, who would volunteer to go with him, and shoot up the Germans. Glanville told Barker that he was crazy and categorically refused to give his permission. Barker, however, persisted and he was finally able to persuade Glanville to call up Headquarters and see if the General would give permission. The General who knew Barker said that he had no objection to Barker's plan.

Three of us, Fenton, Cooper and I volunteered to go with Barker and almost immediately on taking off in our respective Camels we flew into thick cloud and as planned started to fly a compass course to the German airfield. I kept as close as I dared to Barker but we lost touch both with Fenton and Cooper. Barker and I realised that we were lost when we suddenly flew into a clear patch of sky in the clouds. A large number of German aeroplanes had flown into the same gap and before we knew what had happened we were engaged in a dogfight. We were completely outnumbered of course and both of us, I am sure, felt that we had had it. However, there was no time for such thoughts as I saw a German coming straight for me with his machine guns blazing.



Air combat over France involving a RAF Camel single - seat biplane fighter aircraft.

I fired back at him but we both missed. At the same time I felt a sting in the lower part of my right leg and smelt petrol which meant that the main tank, which was below my seat, had been pierced. At the same time the German who had hit me continued in his dive - foolishly - and presented an easy target. I automatically pressed both the triggers of my Vickers guns and riddled him with bullets and he went down in flames. At the same time my engine began to splutter and I realised that there was no

longer any petrol coming from my main tank which fed the engine by pressure and which had been shot through. (It was discovered later that the two bullets which had lodged in the lower part of my right leg must have come through the tank and it was a lucky break for me that they had come through the lower part which still had some petrol because if they had come through the petrol vapour in the upper part of the tank the plane would have caught fire and that of course would have been the end). I realised immediately

that my chances of survival were dim. I was about 40 miles over the lines in enemy territory, crippled, as without my pressure tank I could not do a climbing turn (so important in those days for aerial combat), completely isolated and exposed both to attack from the air and from the ground as I had to fly very low. At the same time I was not sure if I had enough fuel to be able to fly the distance to our lines. I felt sure that I would either be killed or taken prisoner. Almost immediately four German fighter aeroplanes caught



up with me and began shooting at my Sopwith Camel one after the other. They hit my plane several times but never hit me nor any vital part of my aeroplane (afterwards it was reported that my aeroplane had over 400 bullet marks on it!) I was scared at first but after the first few minutes when I felt the bullets hit the plane or ricochet over my head after hitting the wooden part of the plane immediately behind my head, I felt absolutely calm as if I was protected somehow and would not be shot down. In due course the four

German aeroplanes left me, having presumably exhausted their supply of ammunition and I continued my 'hedge hopping' westwards, being shot at and shooting such objects as I could spot on the ground, trucks, camps, groups of troops etc.

Great was my relief when I saw the Zillebake Lake, a familiar landmark just on our side of the lines. And, just as I saw this, my engine began to splutter showing that my fuel supply had given up. I landed almost immediately and as that part of the front was nothing but craters and shell holes, the result of constant fighting in the same area over about three years, I crashed without, however, hurting myself. I must have fainted however because I had been bleeding from my leg wound for about 45 minutes and the only thing I remember after the crash was lying in a stretcher by the side of my plane along with some other wounded soldiers, mostly Canadians.

This miraculous escape (for I should have been killed a hundred times) had a profound effect on my subsequent life as it convinced me that we die only when our time has come and this bred in me a kind of fearlessness, a most valuable asset in dealing with such crisis as I had to often in my subsequent careers.

The RFC, later the RAF, were unique in one respect in those days among the fighting services. Discipline there was, of course, because without that no Service can survive but there was comparatively little "hot air" and "red tape" associated with the older fighting services and so long as one did one's job, much was overlooked. I have vivid experiences of this. It was in the early summer of 1918 when I was with the famous No.151 "Bristol Fighters" Squadron at Biggin Hill, my C.O. Squadron Leader (later Air Marshal retired) Brian Baker put

me in charge of a flight of our planes that were being flown over to replace the planes lost at that time through some intensive bombing by the Germans. We flew over to St. Omer in northern France as per our instructions and handed over our planes. While waiting to fly back to England by the ferry plane, which was to fly me and my fellow pilots back we saw the transport, a large Handley-Page come in and land but we did not like the way the pilot handled the plane. After consulting the other pilots with me I informed the C.O. that we would not fly with that particular pilot. He was very angry and threatened to take action against me for insubordination. I persisted, however, and he finally arranged, under protest, to have us go back by a ferry boat which was fortunately available. As I was in charge of our little party the C.O. at St. Omer had no control over me. He knew it and I knew it and that was why he could do nothing.

When we got back to Biggin Hill, however, Baker told me that I was to consider myself under arrest as these were the orders he had received from the General Commanding the area, who had no doubt received the report from the C.O. at St. Omer. And then Baker added with a twinkle in his eye "Technically you are under arrest but you can go away for a week and do what you like, for news has just come in that the Handley Page you were supposed to fly back in, crashed on landing at Lympne (in England) and every one on it was killed. Thank God you refused to fly with that pilot!" I spent that week of my "arrest" very pleasantly with some old friends. When I asked my CO for leave to fly over to Colmar where my friend lived some two and a half hours flight from Nivelles, Heath said "No I can't let you fly, but you can have as much leave as you want and go by train".



(Above) Hardit Singh Malik with No.151 Squadron RAF, flying Bristol Fighters from Biggin Hill in 1918.

As a journey by train from Nivelles to Colmar at that time was completely impracticable I foolishly made up my mind to fly, whatever the consequences. And, at the earliest opportunity, on the excuse of testing my aeroplane I took off and headed due south for Colmar! All would have been well if the flight had succeeded. I could have flown to Colmar and got back after seeing my friend, saying I had lost my way and nothing would have been said.

Unfortunately however one of the oil pipes in my engine broke and I had to come down when I was only about half an hour from my destination. To cut a long story short I was able to hand over my damaged machine to the RAF at Nancy and so got back to my Squadron after about ten days absence without leave mainly by getting lifts from various people.

I fully expected to be court-martialled for having deliberately disobeyed the General orders and particularly my CO's instructions and was reconciled to this mentally as I knew I deserved to be punished. However, Heath, my CO was absolutely wonderful about it. He pretended to be very angry with me but no action was taken and I am sure that he must have persuaded the General to overlook

this lapse on my part in the spirit of 'Well the lad has done his bit in the war so what the hell, the war is over anyhow. Forget it!' Talk about being magnanimous! What about racial feeling? From what I have already written it will be clear that I was not the victim of any racial feeling. My fellow officers, superiors and also the airmen, mechanics, riggers etc. who worked under me never showed any signs of racial prejudice. I got along very well with them and I believe that on the whole they respected me for being loyal to my own faith and traditions.

The only exception was an incident when I was serving with No.11 Squadron in the summer and autumn of 1918. Among the pilots in this Squadron was a South African. Previously I had known a number of South Africans and got along well with them. One or two of them had particularly become good friends. This man, however, was a thoroughly unpleasant fellow, foul-mouthed, dirty, obscene, a thoroughly nasty piece of work. When I joined the Squadron, he was often heard speaking about "natives" being in the R.A.F. One night, in mess when we were all at dinner, he made a very rude remark about me which was heard all over the room. Before there could be any

reaction to this, my observer "Jock" Crighton jumped across the table, got hold of him by the neck saying "Apologise, you bastard, or I will wring your neck!" He apologised and I had no further trouble. Our C.O., Major Heath, realizing that this man was a misfit, had him transferred immediately.

The other incident was of a different kind. After the war I got 8 months leave and came back to India with the intention of joining the R.A.F. at the end of my leave. Among the officers on the military transport on which I was travelling was a Captain Keene of, I think, the 28th Punjabis.

We became quite friendly and one day after he had had several drinks he said to me "Malik, I advise you not to serve in the R.A.F. in India". I was taken aback by this remark and asked him to explain himself. He said "You know we don't want Indians in the R.A.F. All the mechanics and riggers in the Squadron will be Britishers and one fine day you will find that your plane will break up in the air and that will be the end of you."

I was furious at what Keene had said particularly as I realized that he was being sincere and friendly, and I was determined more than ever to stay on in the R.A.F. However, I could never try this out as soon after I returned to India, I got married and decided to get out of the RAF and get into the Indian Civil Service.

(The autobiography of Sardar Hardit Singh Malik by his daughter Harji. Extracts from his memoirs are reproduced with permission of his family)

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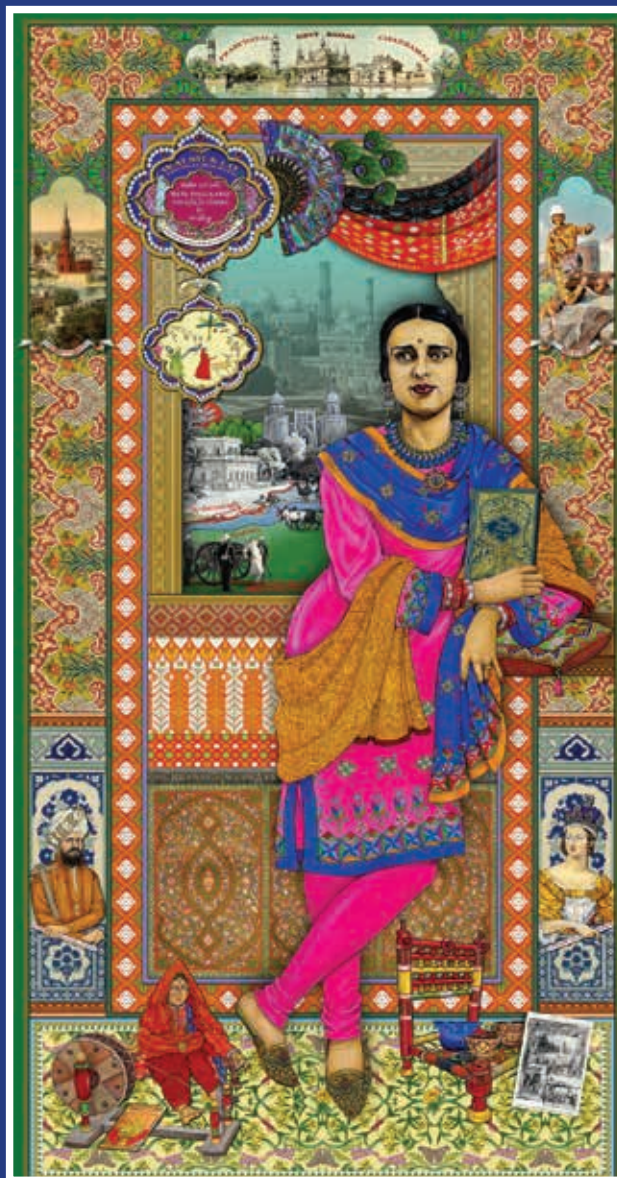
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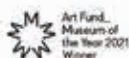
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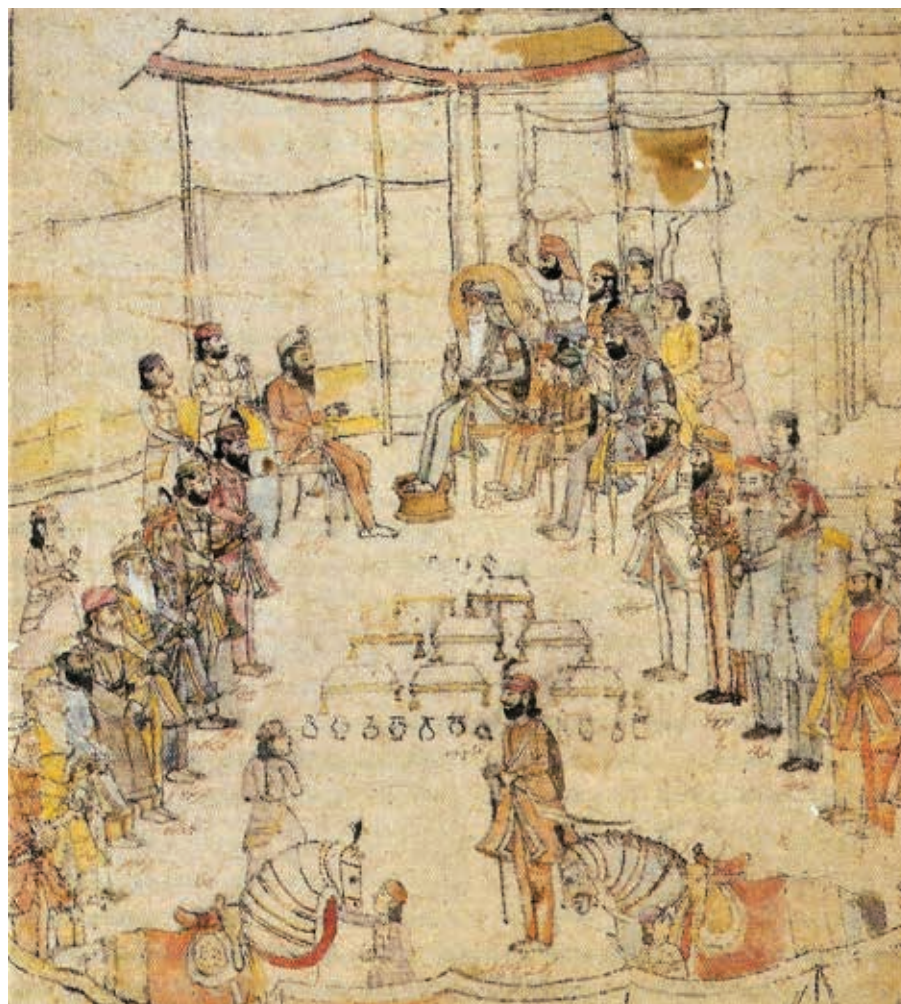
Essex Cultural
Diversity Project

AN AMERICAN IN PUNJAB AND AFGHANISTAN, 1827-1839

Jean-Marie Lafont

Early relations between the United States and India are yet to be fully assessed, particularly in their triangular connections with France in the aftermath of the Treaty of Versailles (1783). The result of this treaty was the exit from the British Empire of a new world power in North America. But in this same period, in Asia, almost every Indian state quickly passed under British hegemony between 1792 and 1818. With the lone exceptions of Punjab and Sindh, the map of the subcontinent was increasingly “turning red,” the color of British territories.

The capitulation of Lord Cornwallis to Washington and Rochambeau at Yorktown on October 19, 1781, and the 1783 Treaty of Versailles which gave birth to the United States of America left a lasting impression on the minds of British officers in charge of India. After Yorktown, Lord Cornwallis went to India, where he was appointed governor-general thrice—and commander-in-chief twice. He died in India in 1805. His obvious task was to prevent India from following the path of America. In 1795, when Lord Wellesley was sailing to India to assume his governorship, he wrote about French and American agents at work with Scindhia in Northern India in order to malign the East India Company. In September 1803,



Delhi was captured by the British after the battle of Patparganj. The victor, Lord Lake, commander-in-chief of the British armies in India, was a former officer of Cornwallis in North Carolina, and the officer he appointed as the first British Resident in Delhi was Colonel Ochterlony, who later became famous in the Anglo-Nepalese War and is still remembered today by the mighty column erected in his

(Above) Court of Lahore Watercolor on paper, 28.5 cm. x 24 cm. Probably by Imam Bakhsh Lahori, c. 1835, Philadelphia. Although the Library could not establish its provenance, it is likely to have come from the collection of Josiah Harlan, says author Lafont and art historian Barbara Schmitz.

honor on the maidan adjacent to Esplanade in downtown Calcutta. Ochterlony settled in Delhi in what remained of Dara Shikoh's residence (the "library") and was said to take a "walk" every evening with his 13 wives, riding as many elephants. But this was not the only reason for him being an extraordinary English officer: he belonged to a loyalist family of Boston which migrated to Canada after the Tea-Party. He then joined the English army in India, and was Resident at Delhi from 1803 to 1807. His mission was to make sure that under no circumstances would India go the way America did in 1776-1783, with or without French help.

Josiah Harlan was born in Newlin, Chester County, Pennsylvania, in 1799, the year Maharaja Ranjit Singh captured Lahore and founded the Sikh kingdom of Punjab. His eldest brother, Richard, was a physician, and young Josiah seems to have dabbled in medicine and surgery before he sailed on a merchant ship to Canton. Returning to America, he sailed out again—to Calcutta where the Bengal army, being short of surgeons during the Burmese War, enrolled him in July 1824. He served in Rangoon in 1825, then in Karnal with a regiment of Native infantry. He was on leave in Ludhiana in 1826 when he was informed that an order had been issued for the dismissal of temporary surgeons from the British army.

In 1827, Harlan asked and got permission from the British authorities to cross the Sutlej River, perhaps—as he himself declared later—to go by land to Saint-Petersburg. Proud of being "a free citizen of the United States", a fact that was often sarcastically noted by British travelers and political officers in their writings, his plan was in fact to join Maharaja Ranjit Singh's service. He was aware that

the Maharaja had French officers serving him since 1822 and that, since the early days of Washington and La Fayette, cordial relations could be easily established between the French and the Americans. However, the Maharaja did not allow Harlan to enter his territories. So Harlan decided to go to Kabul through Bahawalpur, Kandahar and Ghazni in September 1827. He seems to have had at least three reasons for doing that.

The first was to study the natural history of these unknown areas, since Harlan had a keen eye for science and medicine. The second was to work as an agent for Shah Shuja-ul-Mulk, the exiled King of Afghanistan who resided with his retinue in Ludhiana, British territory, waiting to reconquer his throne. He hoped for the help of British subsidies, if not a British army. Harlan's third motive was, perhaps, to try to recover the papers of William Moorcroft and George Trebeck who had been murdered near Mazar-e-Sharif in Northern Afghanistan while on an ill-concealed spying mission for the East India Company. For this last mission Harlan had no official appointment from the English authorities in India, but he had the secret help and financial backing of John Palmer, the "Prince of Merchants" of Calcutta. Palmer's long arm extended from the Governor-General of India to Captain Wade, the assistant political agent at Ludhiana in charge of "Sikh" affairs. From 1826 onwards, the French generals in the service of Ranjit Singh and the Maharaja himself fell within his reach through the commerce that developed with members of the court.

We do not have much information on Harlan's first sojourn in Afghanistan. Like the rare *frangis* traveling in that country at that

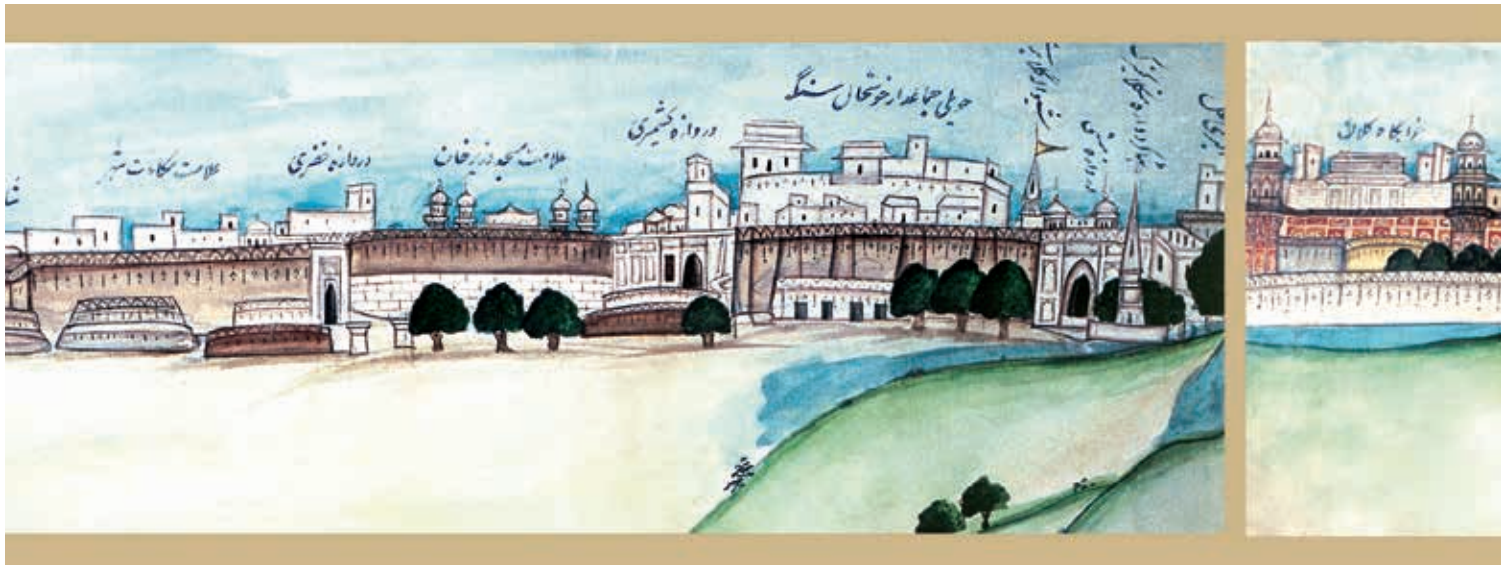


Josiah Harlan

(Above) Photograph from the book *Central Asia. Personal Narrative of General Josiah Harlan (1823-1841)*.

time, he was welcomed by Jabbar Khan, one of the half-brothers of Dost Mohammed Khan, Emir of Kabul. Born of a Shia woman, Jabbar Khan was the head of the powerful Qizilbash Shia community in Afghanistan. Most of his hereditary estates were in Laghman, north of Jalalabad, on the way to Kafirstan. Jabbar Khan was a close friend of the French officers in the Lahore service, having received generals Court and Avitabile in Laghman in December 1826, when they were on their way from Persia to Lahore to join Maharaja Ranjit Singh. Whatever Harlan did in Kabul was most certainly known to General Allard in Lahore, and therefore also to Maharaja Ranjit Singh.

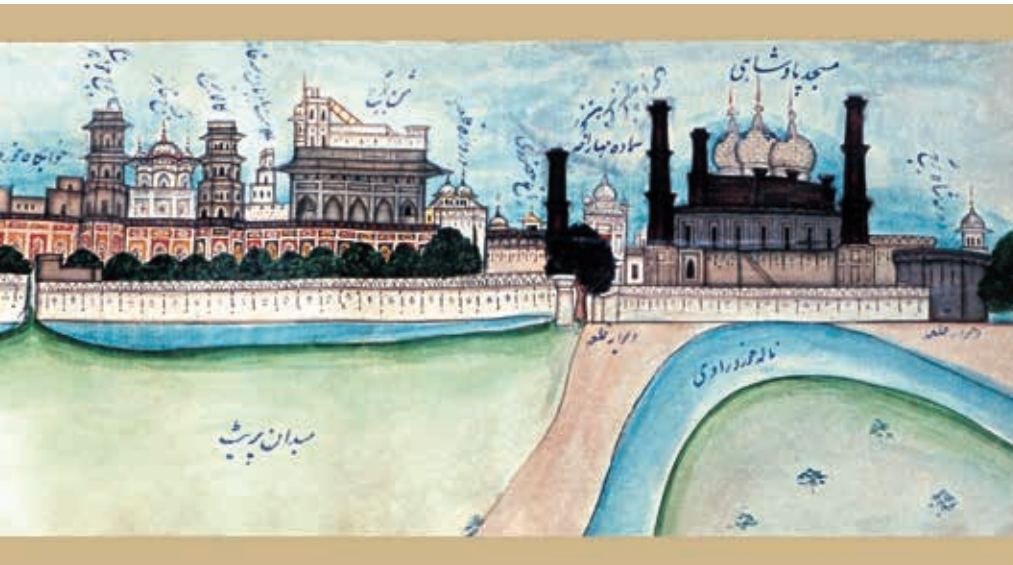
In early 1829 Harlan left Kabul and reached Lahore where he resided for a while, having enough money to live on without seeking any employment from the Maharaja. Ranjit Singh himself offered him the brigade of Oms, one of his French officers who had just died and whose elite regiments were stationed at Shahdara, on the right (north) bank



(Above) Two complementary views of the fort and city of Lahore Gulgashat-i-Punjab Maharaja Ranjit Singh Museum, Amritsar.
 (Courtesy: Department of Cultural Affairs, Government of Punjab, Chandigarh).

(Below) The Darbar of Maharaja Ranjit Singh. Gouache on paper, stuck on wood panel, 91.5 cm. x 32 cm.
 Artist unknown, c. 1850. Maharaja Ranjit Singh Museum, Amritsar.





of the Ravi River. Harlan refused, saying that he was a medical practitioner and not a military man. He even informed Ranjit Singh that he planned to return to the United States. However, we know from British secret reports that Harlan had started practicing medicine in Lahore with considerable success. Realizing that he could not induce Harlan to join him as a military officer, the Maharaja offered him the position of Governor of Nurpur and Jasrota in December 1829.

These were two old Rajput principalities in the Himalayan foothills between Jammu and Kangra which Maharaja Ranjit Singh found difficult to integrate into his kingdom, especially since the Dogra brothers at Jammu were also quietly trying to extend their influence over them. Apparently Harlan lived there for some time though there is no information on how he managed this difficult appointment. But in March 1831 he was back in Lahore, recalled by the Maharaja because of the many complaints of influential people against him. In Lahore he took up residence with General Allard who afforded him protection during those difficult times. There were apparently no serious faults

on Harlan's side since in May 1832 Ranjit Singh appointed him Governor of Gujrat (now a district in Pakistan) and invested him with a *khilat* (dress of honor) which was put on him by General Allard. He was even presented with an elephant and given the *sanad* conferring upon him the necessary authority for his government.

Harlan had to sign a contract, which was deposited in the State Archives in Lahore, and swear on the Bible that he would faithfully serve the Maharaja. A few months later he was called back to Lahore because of the complaints of infuriated zamindars: this per se is not to be taken as a charge, since the *Umdat-tawarikh* has several examples of Ranjit Singh using his "French" officers to settle local affairs in which the zamindars complained, and the Maharaja burst into a rage against these oppressive and intolerant landholders. A very rare letter of Harlan—in his own hand—preserved today is addressed to General Allard dated October 1833, in which he stated that the complaint he had just made to the Sarkar (Ranjit Singh) was not intended against him (Allard), but against Ventura whose policies

he could not stand. The fact that Ventura had *jagirs* (estates) in the district of Gujrat might be the cause of the out-burst, but we have no attested connection between these two facts. However, Harlan soon resumed his duty in Gujrat.

For whatever it is worth, the British Resident of Punjab Henry Lawrence's pseudo-testimony in his novel, *Adventures of an Officer*, says that the American Governor of Gujrat "is a man of considerable ability, great courage and enterprise." That he was a jolly fellow is also attested by the Reverend Wolff who was received in his residence in Gujrat where he could hear him singing Yankee Doodle "with the true American snuffle." Wolff described him as "a fine tall man, dressed in European clothing and smoking a halics" who introduced himself as "a free citizen of the United States, from the city of Philadelphia." During their discussions Harlan laughingly summarized his contract with the Maharaja as follows: "I [Ranjit Singh] will make you Governor of Gujrat. If you behave well, I will increase your salary. If not, I will cut your nose!" The observant Wolff concluded that—"the fact of his nose being entire proved that he had done well."

During his early years in Ranjit Singh's service Harlan kept in touch with Shah Shuja-ul-Mulk, the exiled king of Kabul who informed him of what was going on in Afghanistan. When in 1833 the Shah was preparing for one of his attempts to recover his throne, he was expecting Harlan to join him with 500 troops and a lakh of rupees. Harlan did not join the Shah during his disastrous expedition to Kandahar in 1834, most probably because of his duties in the Punjab kingdom. But the Kandahar affair served as a diversion: with Dost Mohammed Khan being engaged



(Above) Maharaja Ranjit Singh Bahadur, King of Lahore, Gouache on paper, 21.7cm x 17.3 cm by Imam Bakhsh Lahori, Lahore, 1841 (Courtsey: Guimet Museum, Paris).

in Kandahar against Shah Shujaul-Mulk, Maharaja Ranjit Singh sent General Hari Singh Nalwa and General Court with their brigades who in a swift move annexed Peshawar and its province up to the Khyber Pass to the Punjab kingdom. Peshawar had been conquered and annexed to Afghanistan by Mahmud Ghaznavi in 1001-1005 AD. Ranjit Singh celebrated his own *fait d'armes* by ordering salvos of guns and illuminations in every city in the kingdom.

Dost Mohammed Khan protested against this annexation, and in 1835 he made his first attempt to recapture Peshawar through a jihad against the *kafirs* (the Sikhs) The *jihad* was joined by almost all the Muslim tribes of the Khyber Pass. British intelligence predicted that if Ranjit Singh was defeated, the whole Muslim population of Punjab would rise against the Sikhs, and the Maharaja would have the utmost difficulty in saving his kingdom. Well aware of this fact, Ranjit Singh sent his best troops, including his French brigades under the command of General Court, who began to encircle the entrance of the Khyber Pass in order to contain the tens of thousand jihadis or ghazis—the present-day mujahideen—who were pouring out of Afghanistan. General Court asked the Maharaja's permission to carry out a night attack on the Afghans. Ranjit Singh's strategy was to wait for more time, let the Afghans come out of the Khyber and then encircle and destroy them entirely. For that he needed a stratagem to keep Dost Mohammed Khan busy while he was maneuvering his units in an encircling move. The stratagem Ranjit Singh devised was to send an embassy to the Khan, and he selected two emissaries: Fakir Syed Aziz-ud-Din, his trusted minister of foreign affairs, and his American

Governor, Josiah Harlan. That was on May 11, 1835.

We have several accounts on the way the negotiations took place in the Afghan *darbar*. There were tumultuous debates concerning the qualifications of the ambassadors themselves ("The *Farenghis* [are] like trees, full of leaves but producing no fruits."), a gift of a copy of the Koran by Harlan to Dost Mohammed Khan and a fiery theological exchange between some Maulvis and Fakir Aziz-ud-Din on the Sharia, the Muslims and the kafirs. Amidst all this, Ranjit Singh was tightening the noose. Suddenly Dost Mohammed Khan was informed that the Afghan army was almost completely surrounded. It was a rout. Almost 60,000 men with horses and camels headed for the safety of the Khyber Pass. Dost Mohammed Khan, before jumping on his horse, ordered Fakir Aziz-ud-Din and Josiah Harlan to be delivered to his brother Sultan Mohammed Khan to be kept as hostages. Already bought by Harlan, Sultan Mohammed Khan sent them back safely under escort to the Punjab camp.

This apparent victory did not solve anything for Ranjit Singh, since the Afghan army had escaped unhurt before the Punjabi troops could complete their encircling move. The Maharaja was greatly incensed against Fakir Aziz-ud-Din. We might trace his growing discontent with Harlan also to that event, although several sources confirm his dismissal from the Punjab service in April 1836 was for another reason. Harlan was supposed to prepare a magical medicine for Ranjit Singh at the exorbitant price of one lakh rupees: a price to be paid in advance "as he did not trust the Maharaja"! Harlan was dismissed, paid his dues and escorted across the Sutlej River, to British territories. Wade

reported his arrival in Ludhiana. Soon after he informed Calcutta of Harlan's desire to enter the service of Dost Mohammed Khan at Kabul: "His declared intention is to bring down [to Peshawar] an army to avenge himself on his former master [Ranjit Singh] for the injuries he has received at his hands."

Harlan retraced his journey to Kabul where he was warmly received ("like Themistocles") by Dost Mohammed Khan and given the second regular infantry regiment to train, the first being trained and commanded by Rattray, a British subject. We have no details concerning the military training Harlan was able to impart to the troops under his command. We know that he was a member of the Kabul *darbar* although there were various levels of participation in such *darbars*. We also know he participated in the war launched by Dost Mohammed Khan to recapture Peshawar in 1837. The time was propitious for the Afghans, since Maharaja Ranjit Singh had called back to Lahore all his French Generals with their brigades in order to impress Lord Fane, commander-in-chief of the British army, who was in Lahore to attend the wedding of Prince Nau Nihal Singh in March. Lord Fane was impressed, but Jamrud narrowly escaped a storming by the sudden flow of ghazis who came out of the Khyber Pass. Peshawar was saved by the heroic deeds of General Hari Singh Nalwa, who was fatally wounded at Jamrud. But the Nalwa managed to fix the Afghans at the fortress of Jamrud, whose garrison sustained a terrible siege until they were relieved by the French brigades which made a forced march from Lahore to Peshawar in a couple of days. Maharaja Ranjit Singh then entrusted the civil and military command of Peshawar and its province to his three French



(Above) Fakir Syed Aziz-ud-Din Watercolor on paper.

generals, Allard, Court and Avitabile, who kept their brigades with them. There was no further attempt by the Afghans against Peshawar till 1849, after the British army defeated the Punjabis at the battle of Gujranwala. They were then repulsed by a British column into the Khyber Pass.

In his memoirs, Harlan laid claim to victory in the battle of Jamrud and the death of Hari Singh Nalwa. British historians, not very happy to acknowledge the efficiency of an American, usually preferred to praise Rattray and Campbell, two English deserters in the Afghan service at that time. What is sure is that after Jamrud, Harlan's influence in Kabul increased. He has left us in his memoirs one of the best and most

vivid descriptions of Amir Dost Mohammed Khan. In September 1838 Harlan was attached to his troops to the expedition against Mir Murad Beg of Qunduz. As he wrote in his memoirs, "1,400 cavalry; 1,100 effective infantry; and 100 artillery; total of fighting men, 2,600; camp followers, 1,000; grand total, 3,600 men; horses, 2,000; camels, 400; elephant, one," which elephant was sent back from Bamiyan to Kabul because he could not sustain the cold anymore. Harlan and his men crossed the lofty passes of the Hindukush, stayed at Bamiyan on their way to Qunduz as well as on the way back. And as Harlan proudly wrote: "There upon the mountain heights unfurled my

country's banner to the breeze, under a salute of twenty-six guns." Harlan was back in Kabul in spring 1839, just in time to meet with the British advance troop of what was later known as the First Anglo-Afghan war. From the evidence that is available, his participation in the war is not clear at all.

But in Kabul, Harlan met one Dr Kennedy who left an interesting portrait of him. Despite the common prejudices of a British gentleman for an American "adventurer," Dr Kennedy made a number of sagacious and positive observations. We quote: "There was at this time at Kabul a certain 'free and enlightened citizen of the greatest and most glorious country in the world [i.e. the USA...]' in the person of a Dr. Harlan.... I met him one morning and was surprised to find a wonderful fund of local knowledge and great shrewdness in a tall manly figure with a large head and gaunt face, dressed in a light shining pea-jacket of green silk, maroon coloured small clothes, buff boots, a silver lace girdle fastened with a great silver buckle larger than a soldier's breast plate, and on his head a white catskin foraging cap with a glittering gold band, precisely the figure that in my youth would have been the pride and joy of a Tyrolean Pandaen pipe band.

Though he dressed like a mountebank, this gentleman was not a fool, and it will not be creditable to our Government if he is not provided for, as there is no law making it penal to have served against us, and the President and the Congress would have required an answer at our hand had we made it so."

British authorities in India did provide for Dr. Harlan, for he was sent back to Ludhiana with the British forces returning to their

barracks in September 1839 after the capture of Kabul. After a short stay there, he was transferred to Calcutta, and then sent back to the U.S.A. at the expenses of the East India Company. That was the end of his Indian adventures. He reached Philadelphia in August 1841 and a year later published *A Memoir of India and Avghanistaun*. This memoir was an objective—albeit terrible—analysis of the mechanisms and consequences of British colonialism in India: machiavellianism of the invaders, rapacity of the civil servants and the revenue collectors, a systematic looting of the country by a handful of colonizers, a general impoverishment of the population and a growing indebtedness of the peasants. According to him, the natives of India were no less slaves “than the enslaved Africans for whom the English affect the warmest sympathy.” These results were not the side effects, or the collateral damage, of a system whose implementation would be globally positive for the Indians: it was the perfection and willful accomplishment of a policy leaving to the peasants the smallest possible portion to survive, an analysis corroborated at the same period by French natural historian Victor Jacquemont and confirmed for the 1830s by several eminent specialists of British India today.

Moreover Harlan was the first to publish inside information concerning the way the British army bought its way to Kabul in 1839, describing the corruption on a great scale of the political agents from Kandahar to Ghazni to Kabul. He emphasized the miseries inflicted upon the populations in this war, and the political, spiritual and moral destabilization such a war was going to imprint on the tribes of Afghanistan. Harlan

looks at these tribal populations sympathetically, more as a sociologist than as a historian, and the exactitude of his descriptions is striking for people who know Afghanistan. Some other aspects of his testimony concern the vain glory of the British military units during this campaign, victories which were purchased and not won, decorations raining on Kabul particularly, which did not recompense any military courage. He cites a Political Head of Mission, MacNaghten, who was nothing but a “Bombaste furioso,” and the magisterial incompetence of the political officers. When the revolt arose ultimately and the Afghan tribes started collecting to repulse the invaders, an indecisive army hesitated to move and ended up in a last stand on the hills of Gandamak, between Jalalabad and Kabul.

A Memoir of India and Avghanistaun was to be followed by *A Narrative*, which was never published in its entirety. Considering the magnitude and precision of Harlan's accusations, which interpreter and adviser to the British government in Afghanistan Mohan Lal's *Life of the Amir Dost Mohammed Khan of Kabul* confirmed with more detail a couple of years later, British authorities in Calcutta took all necessary steps to prevent the sale and distribution of the book.

Harlan spent the next 30 years of his life in the United States. He purchased and sold some estates around Philadelphia, married in 1849 and had a daughter. In the 1850s, when the American Government was considering the import of camels for military use in the deserts, Harlan supplied a lot of information coming from his experience in North-West India and Afghanistan. During the Civil War in 1861, he raised a regiment for the Union Army, called Harlan's Light

Cavalry, later known as the 11th Cavalry. He served as its colonel in the Army of the Potomac until he retired due to ill health in 1862. He then lived for a couple of years in Philadelphia, with his souvenirs, his papers and his collections. He also suggested to the government the import of vine-trees and other fruit-trees from Afghanistan into the U.S., and he even prepared an estimated budget—\$10,000—for an expedition to be sent to collect the plants from Afghanistan.

Some years after the end of the Civil War, Harlan moved to San Francisco where he again practiced as a physician. He died there in October 1871. His wife returned to Philadelphia, where she died in 1884. Their daughter Sarah went to live in West Chester, Pennsylvania, and she had many papers, diaries, memoirs, drawings and correspondence of her father kept in several milk cans in her house. In 1929, a fire destroyed Sarah Harlan's house, burning whatever was left of General Harlan's adventures in Punjab and Afghanistan. Harlan had already published some extracts of his *Narrative* in 1842.

Three completed chapters of this manuscript were given in 1908 to the Chester County Historical Society, from where they were published by Frank E. Ross in 1939 under the title *Central Asia. Personal Narrative of General Josiah Harlan (1823-1841)*. That is all we have now of what Josiah Harlan wanted to tell us about his extraordinary life in Punjab and Afghanistan.

Jean-Marie Lafont is a senior research scholar with the Centre of Human Sciences, and is the author of Maharaja Ranjit Singh: Lord of the Five Rivers.

ANAND KARAJ

THE SIKH WEDDING AND ITS SIGNIFICANCE

Bhayee Sikander Singh

Living together of male and female adult individuals is the core of human social existence. The basis of organised society has been the entity of the family, from a couple to a family, to the tribal family, village family, to a nation as to family and then family of nations. On every stage there is a commitment shared, values shared, shared objects of faith and worship of God heads. One may argue that in present societies the priorities of values have changed, instead of sharing values of culture and commonality of religion and Divinity, society subscribes to the commonality of economic interests and “divinity of the dollar” takes priority. In any case, man’s development from the days of the lone hunter in the wild to a productive social being affirms that at worst man is a social being.

Every society at various stages of evolution developed its own practices and ceremonies depending upon the level of its socio-economic religious status. Also, each social organism, heathen or God fearing, had its own objects of worship and practiced ways of life.

A Sikh is enjoined to move and progress towards God head while simultaneously discharging his duties towards his fellow beings. This cannot be achieved









by withdrawing from society, by renunciation and least of all, celibacy. When Sikhism was founded some 500 years ago, the prevailing socio-religious orders dictated that no one could attain spiritual heights, enlightenment or redemption (so to say) without giving up his family life and severing himself from society. In contrast, the Sikh Gurus declared a family man, living a productive life in society as nobler and more righteous. The renunciators who rejected social responsibilities were termed as parasites and burden on the society.

Thus 'Grahasth', or family life is a significant aspect of practices of Sikh way of life and an important one. Marriage of two individuals

of opposite sex therefore is a landmark in the progress of both the individuals in their journey of life. Love of progeny and the urge to bring it up and protect the offspring is a natural instinct in all living beings and humans too. The concept of family is thus rooted in the bonding of the male and the female its intrinsic by product becomes the nucleus of an organized society. From it evolved the institution of marriage - of commitment to a mate, both as nucleus of social order and the basis of procreation in a social order.

Forms of marriage differed from society to society and from time to time. The Hindu law gives, for example, Manu and some Rishis,

referred to various types of marriage viz. Brahm, Dev, Arsh Prajapat, Asur, Gandharav, Rakkshas and Paisach.

In short almost all and every kind of cohabitation, willing or unwilling were sanctified.

However, Sikhism being a way of life which, not promising bounties of heaven or prospects of hell in after life, emphasises upon redemption in this present existence and creation of heaven on earth and not hereafter. The incidence of entering the threshold of 'Grahasth', the commended way of life, becomes of special importance. Hence the importance of the Sikh wedding ceremony, the Anand Vivah or Anand Karaj.



Image by: Karan Sidhu




The ceremony, whereby this step, an important juncture in two person's life is celebrated, is known as 'Anand Karaj'. Literally it means the 'Act Blissful'. But the word 'Anand' means and connotes much more than happiness and joy. It in fact describes a state where bliss follows attainment. It is a state rather than a momentary experience.

The actual Anand Karaj ceremony is simple and straight forward. It is to be conducted in the presence of Sri Guru Granth Sahib, our living Shabad Guru, presiding over a congregation or 'sangat' of friends and relatives. It begins with reiterating to the bride and groom, the underlying precepts of Sikh way of life, the importance and responsibilities of the family way of living (Grahasath) and the essence of Guru Ram Das Sahib's composition of 'lavan' in Raag Suhee (page 773 of Sri Granth Sahib). The couple is then reminded of social, legal and religious concepts involved in this way of life and if the two accept the same, then the four shabads are read out and alternately sung while the couple circumambulates the presiding Guru by way of commitment. Finally the prayer, or Ardas is said declaring the two as husband and wife.

As in a Sikh's way of life there are no rituals to be performed as such. The music, the hymns singing and even the symbolic walk around the Holy Book (lavan) are extras – to create the proper atmosphere and frame of mind. The 'lavan', the walk is from our cultural ethos of reaffirming commitment and consecration. Its a vow of acceptance of the way of life and the final Ardaas, the prayer which are of essence. The rest is cultural celebration, reiteration and rejoicing.

The meaningfulness of the whole cannot be understated. Sangat is holy congregation which in the presence of Sri Guru Granth





Sahib incorporates the presence of Almighty when the “Word” resides in its midst. This ‘Word’ is embodied in the Book – Guru Granth Sahib. The traditional injunction to the Sikhs states “If you want to see the visage, the physical manifestation of the Almighty then look into the face of congregation (Sangat), and if you want to hear His voice, read aloud the “Word” (Shabad) from the Book.” Thus while performing this ceremony one is supposed to be sitting in the consciousness of God’s presence in our midst. Thus we invoke Akal Purakh’s presence the bride and the bridegroom are so to say in His lap, He who is the Source of all love and affection.

The aim of married life is union, not physical and contractual alone, but an intellectual and spiritual merger. The scripture says: “They are not called husband and wife who sit together, Rather they are true husband and wife who have one Spirit in two bodies”.

A married life is progression towards this state of existence. Since this relationship has to be primarily based on love in its ultimate experience it has the potential of giving one a glimpse of the experience of the Great Love for the Divine Being. This is the love that liberates. It is not passive adoration but a dynamic and total commitment. Just as there is no going back from one’s commitment to one’s Creator, the Great Love, similarly there is no going back from one’s commitment to one’s love here on earth too. The dedication is complete. This relationship is not a barter of feelings, for barter can only be of material objects. This is a surrender of the self, it is compassionate giving and non-calculative. It is Divine because it raises one above pettiness and bonds of constricting human ‘ego’.

This union of souls thus, is a microcosmic representation of the macrocosmic union with the Universal Soul towards which all should be striving. It is in this respect that amongst the Sikhs a married life is given such noble sanctification and importance.

Our conjugal relations are designed not merely to promote worldly comfort or to perpetuate the human race, but to provide the best means of approaching God

and cultivate our lives in such manner as to make them most useful and fruitful. Thus marriage becomes not a mere contract to be repudiated at will, but a sacrament, a holy union consecrated in accordance with the Divine Will.

The four main hymns called "lavan" which are sung when the couple goes around the holy Book were written by the fourth Guru to celebrate the wedding of the Individual Soul with the Great Spouse, the Universal Soul. These are the four stages in the progression of merger of two souls. The four circles that the couple walks are symbolic of going through the four stages are symbolic of commitment and consecration of a life to be lived in union. Since our lives are not to be renunciatory, but participative with the world, society and the nature, we walk anti-clockwise because the universe too revolves in the direction. The concept being of transformation through active participate and dynamic living and not withdrawal from or negation of life.

These hymns describe the stages in the evolution and progress of this life of union. These are 'Fear' (not dread, but fear of the unknown) the Guru calls it the chaste fear (Nirmal Bhao), love (Vairag) a yearning for someone whom one feels separated from and the final stage of effortless one ness called "Sehaj" a state of effortless co-existence in joy of his presence.

In the Indian social environment pre-martial love is not common, therefore all these stages come after marriage. But in a society where love supposedly precedes marriage, these stages are relevant too.

Only the point of social or contractual undertaking called marriage shifts to occur after the second stage. However, the validity of the four phases in the union of two souls is quite pertinent and is universal. The first step or phase of this union in Sikh ethos is that of 'fear'. Before love is born there is a fear of one another. It is a fear of the unknown. It is not a slavish fear, it is a disciplinary fear.

In Gurbani it is likened to the fear of the Lord:

Those who fear the Lord have nothing to fear, But those who do not fear

Him have much to fear. This is a kind of fear with which one treads towards another, explores each other mindful of not offending and hurting each other's sensibilities.

Love is a delicate and sensitive art. This fabric is to be knit with care, patience, compassion and sympathy. Such moral sensitiveness, this accommodating sympathy, is called Nirmal Bhao or the Holy Fear in the scripture. Out of this (Fear) 'grows' 'Love'. The word used for it is 'Chhao'. Again this word too has a much wider connotation – it means enthusiasm, eagerness, tinged with hope and optimistic pleasure.

It is not sheer infatuation. Enthusiasm may wear off as it does. The vicissitudes of life may dampen the eagerness and the charm of marriage. It is the ever renewing Love which is inherent in human nature which survives.

Is not God the oldest being? Yet His lovers say:

My Lord is ever new and fresh.

Thus it is only this kind of Love that lends eternity to the relationship in the face of fading physical glamour, aging youth and transience of the mundane. It is valid for human to human relationship as much as for individual to the universal spirit. The third stage is of transition from this Love, to a state of complete harmony and oneness of the two spirits. This stage is of pathos, sadness, a yearning for uniting with the separated. It is the eternal yearning of the individual soul for the God-head the universal soul.

The third hymn begins with the line:

Love comes into the heart which withdraws Itself from all other affections.

As mutual Love evolves into a complete fusion of personalities, other affections of friends, parents and soon fade into a secondary position. This is a separation from the old attachments and complete absorption into the new, prime love. Whereas in the beginning Love is immediate and compelling and can stand no separation, constant association and understanding develop constraint and self control. This is Vairag, the penultimate transitional stage to absolute effortless co-existence. The fourth and the final stage is that of Sehaj, a state of complete harmony and oneness, of perfect balance which knows no mistrust. An involuntary faith is developed. This is the stage which transcends causation and here effort is eliminated. The past, present and future of the two merge into one. It is a fusion of identities.



This is an eternal state. This is the same state in which a devout finds himself when he experiences the Universal. This is what the scripture calls *Ek Roop Doi Murti*- 'One spirit in two bodies'.

In brief this is message to the four 'chhants' in Raag Suhee of the Fourth Guru on page 773 of Sri Guru Granth Sahib.

The Anand marriage is as much temporal as spiritual. Therefore it is a practice of the traditionalists that before the ceremony could be performed, the bride and the groom's consent to some fundamentals is required to be taken.

* While it is for the wife to be content with the lot of her husband, it is obligatory on the part of the husband to provide comfort, protection, honour and respect to his wife.

* Since legally, Anand Karaj is valid for two consenting Sikhs under the Anand marriage Act, the bride and groom are required to confirm that all ceremonies and practices in their married life will be in conformity with the of Sikh Dharam.

* That the two individuals being joined in matrimony will not believe in any divinity other than One Akalpurakh, the directives of the Ten Guru and the (Word) or Shabad as enshrined in Sri Guru Granth Sahib.

* Amongst Sikhs husband and wife have an equal status. Traditionally they are referred to as two wheels

of the same chariot of life. Family life called *Grahasth* is the most sacred and the highest order. Faithfulness and fidelity of husband to wife is deemed as essential as faithfulness and fidelity of wife to husband.

It is only after the couple consent to the above fundamentals of the Sikh way of marriage, is the ceremony of a lavan and Ardaas is to be conducted.



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LIBERATION OF GURDWARAS IN BANGLADESH

(late) Captain Bhag Singh



The liberation of Bangladesh from the tyrannical rule of the Pakistani military junta was hailed throughout the world, and the Sikhs throughout the world also realized a partial fulfilment of their daily prayer: 'O God grant unto us the seva and sambhal (service and administration) of our

gurdwaras separated from us with the partition of the country.' There were about 12 known gurdwaras left in what was East Pakistan, of which (1) Rayer Bazar, (2) Sangat Tola, (3) Guru Nanak Shahi Gurdwara, Ramna, (4) Chittagong, (5) Sylhet, and (6) Mymensingh gurdwaras were of historical

(Above) Gurdwara Nanakshahi Dhaka, a Sikh Temple in Dhaka, Bangladesh.

importance. Of these gurdwaras, those at Rayer Bazar, Chittagong and Sylhet are connected with the visit of Guru Nanak and Sangat Tola is connected with the visit of Guru Tegh Bahadur. Near about the time Guru Nanak visited Dacca, the Ramna and Mymensingh gurdwaras were established as Sikh centres for parchar by Bhai Almast and Bhai Bulaki, the Guru's two most enthusiastic and devoted disciples, who converted a large number of people to Sikhism, so much so that the Bengal *sangat* came to be known as *Bara Sikh Sangat*, being one of the biggest Sikh congregations.

Land Worth Lakhs Usurped

While most of the gurdwaras were left unattended in 1947, the seva of Gurdwara Ramna, Rayer Bazar, Sangat Tola, Mymensingh and Chittagong was performed by Bhai Swaran Singh, Mata Kanchan Devi (known as *Sikhair Ma*), Bhai Hari Singh and Mai Giasri Devi, widow of the last Chittagong *granthi*, Bhai Sunder Singh, against heavy odds.

These *sewadars* remained in Pakistan at the risk of their lives, because at that time powerful groups, including the Pakistani Government officials began to usurp the Sikh landed property, worth lakhs of rupees, attached to the *gurdwaras*. On the vast land of Ramna Shahi Gurdwara, were built the Dacca University and the Race Course, and only 1.63 acres of the premises were left.

And even of this shrunken area of 1.63 acres, the major portion was occupied by squatters. The Rayer Bazar Gurdwara land and the well dug by Guru Nanak were levelled by the Pakistani Government about 1960, and plots auctioned for house-building. Portions of the Sangat Tola Gurdwara, too, were occupied by squatters.

Bhai Swaran Singh Died a Martyr's Death

After the Pakistani Army's crackdown on 25th March 1971, it became impossible for Mata Kanchan Devi and her son, Bhai Kirpal Singh, and Bhai Hari Singh to remain in East Pakistan, and because of great hardship they migrated to India in severe privation. Bhai Swaran Singh, despite his age of about a century, and his involvement in legal battles against the squatters on the Rayer Bazar and Ramna property, with the financial help of a Muslim devotee, Mohd-ul-Malik Haq, doggedly stayed on, only to be shot dead along with his Muslim friend, by the Pakistani Razakars, presumably at the instance of parties who wanted to clear the obstacles between them and complete usurpation of the vast property.

Mohd-ul-Malik's sons buried both their father and Swaran Singh, side by side, in the courtyard of the house, from which they had been dragged out and shot dead. On one occasion, Swaran Singh is said to have been offered three lakhs of rupees for permitting extension of the University building on the Ramna Gurdwara premises. But he refused to part with the sacred land.

Property Abandoned

The historical gurdwara at Chittagong continued to be looked after by Mata Giasri Devi, who eked out an existence from the rented portion of the gurdwara, while the landed property and another *gurdwara*, built by Sikhs employed in the Railway there before partition, a short distance away, were abandoned as ownerless property. The Sylhet gurdwara has yet to be explored.

Although the desecration and illegal occupation of gurdwara property in East Bengal had been a subject of correspondence between The Sikh Cultural Centre, Calcutta, and the SGPC, and in spite of publicity and appeals, now and then, in *The Sikh Review*, *The Spokesman*, and *Khalsa Samachar* to draw the attention of the conscientious Sikh organizations, the general attitude of our premier organizations remained apathetic. However, on the appeal of a devout Sikh, Shri Jatindra Mohan Chatterjee, who had been at one time a Deputy Collector of Dacca and had been of great help in the upkeep of the *gurdwaras* at Dacca and Mymensingh, and whose heart and soul are in the holy places of the Gurus, the Chief Khalsa Diwan made a representation to the Ministry of External Affairs in Delhi. The Diwan's General Secretary, S. Sant Singh, succeeded in making arrangements for a Sikh deputation to visit Dacca, and to sort out matters with the administrative and revenue departments of the government. Before, however, the deputation could do so, political turmoil erupted in East Pakistan, followed by the Pakistani Army's crackdown. In the circumstances, the liberation of Bangladesh, was a godsend for the Sikhs to retrieve the places sanctified by the Gurus.

Sikh Deputation's Mission

The Managing Committee of Takht Shri Harimandir Sahib at once took the initiative. A deputation consisting of S. Joginder Singh Jogi, Advocate of Dhanbad; S. Sant Singh of Muzzafarabad; Bhai Amar Singh of Aligarh; S. Hari Singh, Chief Engineer of Patna and Giani Gurbachan Singh, Manager of Shri Harimandir Sahib, came to Calcutta on 23rd December, collected documentary and historical evidence, included



(Left) A photograph of a rundown Sikh Gurdwara at Shujatpur. It is believed that the Sikh sitting on the chair is probably the Granthi who stayed back after the partition of 1947 to look after the Gurdwara. It is believed that he was killed in 1971 by sympathisers of the Pakistan Army.

(Right) This picture was probably taken in the early 1950s. During the Liberation of Bangladesh Gurdwaras such as this one was either damaged or wrecked during the war.

me in the deputation, and went to Bangladesh on 27th December. The first two and myself went by air and the others by road. We also took with us Bhai Hari Singh, the *granthi* who had escaped to Calcutta when Mymensingh was occupied by Pakistani troops.

Two Gurdwaras Located

As soon as we reached Dacca, we began a search for the lost holy places. With the help of Bhai Hari Singh, who was born, brought up and spent all his life in Dacca, and documents, we succeeded in locating first the Ramna and then the Sangat Tola *gurdwaras*. It is interesting to note that Baba Pritam Singh Panchi, *granthi* of 5 Sqn. of 63 Cavalry, and an educational havildar of that unit had already begun prowling about in search of Ramna Gurdwara. When we met them and pointed out the ravaged room as the real gurdwara, their joy knew no bounds. Next day, all the jawans of the 5th Sqn. were on the spot, clearing the litter, debris and dirt, cutting the overgrowth on the roof and walls, and rendered the room and its baradari reasonably suitable for installing *Guru Granth Sahib*. On the 1.63 acres of the

Ramna *gurdwara*, there were about a hundred pukka and thatched structures belonging to squatters, as a result of their invasion in the last 24 years, in spite of the best efforts and legal battles waged by Swaran Singh.

It is still quite a problem to oust these usurpers, and only a couple of surrounding constructions have been got vacated.

After roaming a maze of lanes and bylanes, we located the Sangat Tola Gurdwara and to our great surprise found that Sikh jawans of another unit, who had become aware of this gurdwara accidentally, were already there performing kirtan after they had cleaned the place.

This place had some semblance of a gurdwara – in an almira we found three manuscripts and two old printed recensions of *Guru Granth Sahib*, a few pictures, including an old original painting of Guru Tegh Bahadur, which, though moth-eaten at places, was indeed a fine piece of Mughal art. Later, among the waste paper, we found two *hukamnamas* of Guru Gobind Singh. A greater portion of this building also had been occupied by squatters. Before the Pakistani Army's crackdown, this

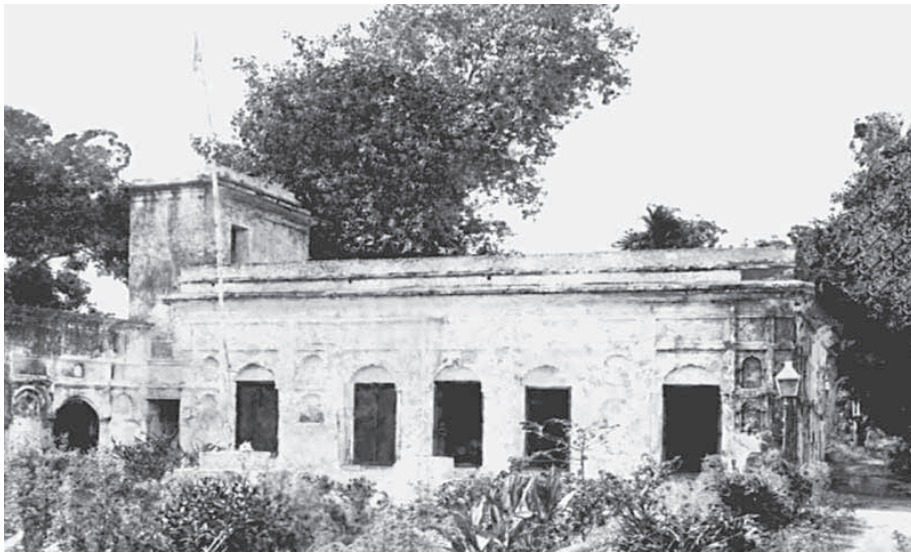
gurdwara was looked after by Mata Kanchan Devi, known as *Sikhair Ma* (Sikhs' mother). But she was brought to India by her son, Bhai Kirpal Singh, an Indian citizen, before the crackdown.

Search for Rayer Bazar Gurdwara

Next day, we went out in search of Rayer Bazar Gurdwara, the very first place where Guru Nanak had a well dug.

We could not find any trace of the place as indicated in Bradley Burt's *Romance of an Eastern Capital*, or in *Notes on the Antiquities of Dacca* by Syed Aulad Hassan, or in Dacca: *(A record of its changing fortunes)*, by Ahmed Hasan Dani, nor after consulting survey, topographical or feature maps.

The potters' colony during Guru Nanak's days is now an elegantly exclusive area in Dacca. Bhai Hari Singh, who, in earlier days, had known the gurdwara, which had been a place of yearly pilgrimage for Hindus and Muslims alike even during the Pakistani regime, seemed puzzled. 'It was somewhere here,' he said, vaguely encircling an area with his index finger.



Modern Buildings Straddle Gurdwara Land

Assessing all the possibilities and probabilities, we entered the premises of a bungalow and asked an educated young man if there was, or ever had been, an old well in or near his house. He said that there was no such well. But when we insisted that his house concealed a holy well, he rang up his father, a district officer. “Yes”, came the reply: “There used to be a holy well and a small building, where next door now stands a building.” As indicated, we rushed next door to find that the building was occupied by a U.N. official who was out at that time. According to a marble slab on the gate, the building had been erected in 1964. Since the servants could not say anything about the well or the vaulted gurdwara room, that evening we met the father of our original contact, the young man.

This gentleman, who was a Government officer, told us all about the holy well, a vaulted room with a verandah, a tree by its roadside, of the yearly *mela* that used to be held and the holy water that had medicinal properties for curing all sorts of ailments. When we showed him a picture, he recognized it

elatedly and said: “Yes, exactly like this was the place, and the well was known as Guru Nanak’s well.” But that was before 1961 when the whole of Dhanwandi was levelled to the ground, converted into plots and auctioned to the people by the Pakistani Government. Now, a vast area, formerly belonging to the gurdwara, was covered by modern buildings. Mr. Haq (that is the officer’s name) and his family became our best friends and helped us greatly in obtaining evidence of witnesses, living around the area, in support of his statement. He helped us to obtain copies of survey maps and assured us that he would give evidence whenever and wherever required to testify to the existence of the *gurdwara*.

Guru's Guidance

The problem now was how to obtain effective and legal possession of the two gurdwaras at Dacca, clear the squatters and to regain the Rayer Bazar site. Resort to legal action would be a long-drawn process beset with uncertainties and not without ill-will and rancour, and therefore we ruled it out. Moreover, we did not intend to stay there long, nor could we leave one or two *sewadars* amidst a host

of opponents. We could think of no workable plan, but the events that followed were nothing short of the Guru's guidance and our predicament seemed to end.

Audience with President

The deputation from Takht Patna Sahib had not come with any solution, except to report on the position of the historic gurdwaras and to present *saropa* (Sacred Robe) to the President and the Prime Minister of Bangladesh on the liberation of their country. Therefore, we decided to fulfil the second object also and through the Secretary-General of Bangladesh, we were given audience by the Acting-President of Bangladesh, Syed Nazrul Islam, to whom we presented the *saropa*. In the course of our talk, we told him of our mission of locating our historic gurdwaras in Dacca, to which we had been denied access during the 24 years of the Pakistani regime. The President was sympathetic and we took the opportunity to invite him to the Ramna *gurdwara*, that we had located first and wherein we wished to hold divine service next morning.

The President accepted this invitation. We could not meet the Prime Minister, as it was too late that evening. Moreover, we came to know that he had some previous appointments. But despite his commitments, he sent word to us that he would attend our divine service if he could find the time.

Having invited the President to divine service, we had to render the gurdwara fit for the occasion. In conjunction with our jawans, we feverishly began to make arrangements for the white washing, and the erection of a shamiana and other decorations. We worked till 4 a.m. Next morning, most of the

Sikh and Hindu jawans and officers, along with a large number of Hindu and Muslim men and women, came. The jawans of 5th Sqn. brought the *Guru Granth Sahib* from their Regimental Gurdwara.

President at Gurdwara

The President of Bangladesh arrived and remained for about two hours through the *kirtan* and the usual ceremonial speeches.

In welcoming the President, I referred to the history of the gurdwaras in Bangladesh. S. Joginder Singh 'Jogi', who, after working overnight, had prepared a speech in Bengali, welcomed the President. In our speeches, we hinted at the unauthorized structures set up by squatters.

The President, in his 45 minute speech, made an unequivocal statement on the secular nature of the country that Bangladesh is going to be and made it clear that all religions would be honoured and the damage done to the gurdwaras, temples, churches, or mosques by the Pakistanis would be repaired at Government expense. He sounded a clear warning that his government would not tolerate desecration and unauthorized occupation of religious places by any individual or group.

This speech had an immediate effect, for, as soon as the function was over, a pleader who had built some houses and another structures in close proximity of the main Gurdwara room offered to vacate the premises immediately.

Leaving Giani Gurbachan Singh and Bhai Amar Singh behind to locate gurdwaras at Chittagong and Mymensingh, myself, Jogiji and Sant Singh returned to India.

Audience with Mujibur

On 27th January, S. Joginder Singh

Jogi, S. Sant Singh and I again went to Dacca by road to present *saropa* to Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, who had been released by the Pakistani authorities and returned to his people and also to sort out the legal complications related to unauthorized occupation of the gurdwaras. In Calcutta, on our second trip to Dacca, we were joined by Giani Fauja Singh, ex-*jathedar* of Sri Akal Takht, Amritsar, a representative of the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee, Amritsar.

In our absence Giani Gurbachan Singh accompanied by Bhai Amar Singh went to Chittagong and were able to locate the historic and another gurdwara built by Railway Sikh employees before partition. They also found the Mymensingh gurdwara, and at both the places they made arrangements for the *sewa* and *sambhal* of the historic gurdwaras. The deputation this time including Giani Fauja Singh, called on Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, Prime Minister of Bangladesh, and presented a *saropa* to him. A memorandum, requesting the Government of Bangladesh to rediscover and restore to the Sikh community the two historic shrines - Guru Nanak Mandir and Well, in Rayer Bazar (now in Dhanmandi) and Gurdwara Suthra Shahi Akhara, Urdu Bazar, Dacca - which had, during the Pakistani regime been occupied by squatters, also was handed over to him.

The Prime Minister gave a very sympathetic and patient hearing to the deputation and ordered an inquiry into the matter. In another petition made on behalf of the deputation, the Government of Bangladesh was requested to withdraw its petition filed with the High Court for acquisition of the land of the gurdwara at Ramna.

Sheikh's Offer

The noble Sheikh offered to the deputation free land for setting up new *gurdwaras* and funds for repairing the *gurdwaras* and assured the deputation that Sikhs in Bangladesh would have absolute freedom of worship. We simply pleaded for restoration of our historical gurdwaras, and nothing more. This is receiving his attention, but we do not yet know how far he will be able to go in fulfilling our hopes.

Interim Management

In all the above *gurdwaras*, interim arrangements for holding divine service and administration have been made, thanks to the Takht Sri Harimandir Sahib committee who are providing men and money.

The deputation had to return to India to attend a meeting especially called by the Prabandhak Committee of Takht Sri Harimandir Sahib, Patna, at which it was decided to set up a Board of Management for Bangladesh gurdwaras, comprising representatives from all prominent Sikh institutions of the country and from abroad. Until, however, the formation of the Board, a 21-member interim committee has been constituted to look after the administration of the Bangladesh gurdwaras, with S. Joginder Singh Jogi as Convenor.

On March 6, Sardar Jogi and I again went to Bangladesh to do what we can to establish our right, as far as possible and feasible, to the occupancy of at least the premises of the historic gurdwaras. Luckily, in addition to the finances and *sewadars* provided by Takht Harimandir Sahib, Patna, an offer has been received from Sardar M. S. Rana, M.A., LL.B., and his wife, Dr (Mrs) J. K. Rana, to work in Dacca, where they had been from



Lt Gen AAK Niazi of the Pakistan Army signing the surrender documents in Dacca On his right is Lt Gen J.S. Aurora, GOC-in-C, Eastern Command, who accepted the surrender. Others seen in the photo are Vice-Admiral N Krishnan, Air Marshal HC Dewan, Lt Gen Sagat Singh and Maj Gen JFR Jacob.

1936 to 1938, during the course of their service, to serve the cause of gurdwaras and to set up a free medical unit in Bangladesh, without any remuneration. Their offer has been thankfully accepted. They propose to take up the responsibility about the end of April.

Sikh Pilgrimage in April

It is proposed to take a contingent of Sikhs from India on pilgrimage to the Bangladesh *gurdwaras* in April, God willing – *insha-Allah*. The community should be grateful to Shri Jatinder Mohan Chatterjee, Deputy Collector (Retd.), a savant and a great devotee of Guru Nanak and Guru Gobind Singh, for keeping alive, by sustained correspondence, the interest of our premier religious bodies, that is, S.G.P.C., Chief Khalsa Diwan,

The Sikh Cultural Centre, Calcutta and the local Singh Sabha, in our historical *gurdwaras*, and providing to the deputation, clues of historical, district and revenue records pertaining to the *gurdwaras* in East Bengal.

I salute the Sikh officers and jawans whose pioneering effort always makes it possible to rediscover, retrieve and reestablish our historical gurdwaras - whether in Baghdad or Bangladesh.

I should like to end this account by acknowledging my gratitude to S. Joginder Singh Jogi, without whose spirited leadership, initiative, legal acumen, hard work and sacrifice of his professional earnings, the success so far of our mission would not have been wholly possible. We have still a long way to go. Out of

the 4 *gurdwaras* so far located or found, not one completely belongs to us yet. Major portions, and the Rayer Bazar Gurdwara completely, are under unauthorized occupation. It will be a tough nut to crack. We cannot gloat over the small gain we have made-no doubt not without hard labour. There is still a hard struggle ahead. I hope, however, that with continued interest and patronage of Sri Patna Sahib Managing Committee, aided by the S. G. P. C, and sustained efforts of Sardar Jogi, the task will be accomplished.

The writer is a veteran of World War II (1939-45), wherein he earned an MBE for his chivalry and distinguished service.

FOOTPRINTS OF GENERAL HARI SINGH NALWA IN KASHMIR

Dr. Jasbir Singh Sarna

The name of the lionhearted Sardar Hari Singh Nalwa (1791–1837) is one of the most revered and loved names in Sikh history. If Sher-i-Punjab Maharaja Ranjit Singh was a policy maker, then Nalwa Sardar was an adventurous commander-in-Chief of the Khalsa Army, who implemented those policies. Sardar Hari Singh's bravery, courage, fearlessness and benevolence were unparalleled. He was known for his dauntless courage and unique chivalry. Some historians consider Sardar Hari Singh Nalwa as one of the most successful army generals of the world.

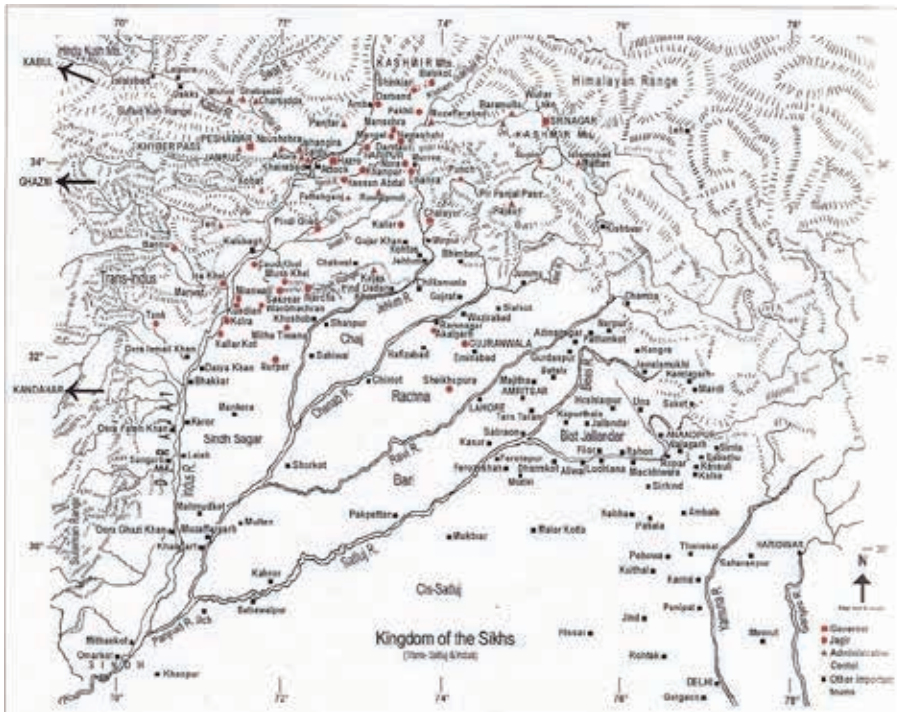
Sardar Nalwa was a confederate of the Khalsa state. He was a far-sighted administrator, a successful personality and a beacon of virtue. His wisdom and foresight prevented, after eight consecutive centuries, Afghan aggression into Punjab. He was so proficient in guns, archery, swords, spears, bombs, cannons, bayonets and horsemanship that achieving victories for the Sikh kingdom became a virtue of his deeds. Sher-i-Punjab, when he saw Sardar Hari Singh killing a Nal (lion), bestowed upon him the title of Nalwa. The battles of Attock, Kashmir, Kasur, Multan, Hazara, Nowshera and Peshawar in which Sardar Nalwa fought valiantly is a golden chapter in Sikh history. Among the Pathans and Afghans, Sardar Hari Singh Nalwa's name

was so terrifying that when Afghan children would not stop crying, their mothers would say "Hariya Rangila" (meaning child, shut up, Hari Singh is coming). This is also mentioned by Olaf Caroe in his book.

March to Kashmir:

When the Khalsa forces marched to Kashmir in 1814 CE, Sardar Hari Singh Nalwa was commanding the Khalsa forces. When Shah Shuja was defeated by his brother Shah





to Kashmir along with his army and on other side Sardars Hari Singh Nalwa, Sham Singh Attari, Dewan Mohkam Chand, Dal Singh and Jeevan Singh along with 12,000 Khalsa troops reached Srinagar via Bhimber, Rajouri and Peer Panjal. Muhammad Khan's forces fought hard. During the battle for possession of Shergarhi soldiers were killed on both sides. The Khalsa forces cremated the Sikh soldiers at the site of Shaheed-Ganj (where the Bunga is now the shrine of Akali Phula Singh).

The Khalsa forces captured Shergarhi, freed Shah Shuja from captivity and took him into their custody. The Khalsa forces demanded from Wazir Fateh Khan half of the booty and nine lakh rupees as promised. The Khalsa forces came to Lahore with Shah Shuja and the 'Kohinoor Diamond' to Sher-i-Punjab.

To conquer Kashmir, the Khalsa forces marched on 20 April 1819 from Lahore. In this campaign, Sher-i-Punjab divided the army into three parts. The first vanguard was that of Sardar Hari Singh Nalwa, Prince Kharak Singh and Akali Phula Singh. In the second squad, Diwan Mohkam Chand, S. Sham Singh Attari, S. Hukma Singh Chimney, S. Jwala Singh and others. Sher-i-Punjab had a reserve force of 10,000 so that support could be sent whenever required. When the Khalsa forces from various directions broke like lightning on the morning of July 3, 1819, in the field of Shopian with the forces of Muhammad Jabbar Khan, the ruler of Kashmir, a fierce battle took place. In the battlefield, when Nawab Jabbar Khan, attacked Nalwa, Sardar Nalwa cut off Jabbar Khan's left hand with his sword. The Nawab was seriously injured and fled to Afghanistan via Muzaffarabad, hiding in the border mountain passes along with his

(TOP): Sardar Hari Singh Nalwa's jurisdiction as a Governor, General and Jagirdar.

(LEFT): A very rare painting showing Hari Singh Nalwa at the Court of Lahore, executed during his lifetime: c.1830.

Standing (left to right): Khidmatgar, Rattan Munshi Vihariwala, Bishan Singh Munshi, Sarkar Ranjit Singh (seated), Hari Singh Nalwa, Raja Dhian Singh, Raja Hira Singh, Khidmatgar (Names are as inscribed in Persian).

Mahmud and reached Attock, Jahan Khan was the Kiledar (fort keeper) of Attock. He captured Shah Shuja and sent him to his brother, Atta Mohammad Khan, the governor of Kashmir. From Kabul, Wazir Fateh Khan was following Shah Shuja. When he was informed that Shah Shuja was in Kashmir, he sought the help of Maharaja Ranjit Singh. He assured that half of the plunder of Kashmir and nine lakh rupees would be given to the Khalsa forces. On the other hand, Shah Shuja's Begum (wife) sent a messenger to Maharaja Ranjit Singh that if her husband would be returned safe from Kashmir, she would present the Kohinoor diamond to the Sher-i-Punjab. The Maharaja keeping both the above points in mind and at the same time considering that the Khalsa forces would be aware of the route to Kashmir, ordered the troops to march towards Kashmir.

"The joint Sikh-Afghani expedition to Kashmir was undertaken in 1812" (Parmu, 1977, P 47). On one hand Wazir Fateh Khan proceeded



The Fort of Jamrud at the entrance of the Khyber Pass. It was built by Sikh General Hari Singh Nalwa in 1836. (Inset) Attack of the Khyber. Watercolor on European paper, 28.5 cm. x 19.3 cm. By Imam Bakhsh Lahori, Lahore, 1827-1843.



Sardar Hari Singh Nalwa distributing land to poor landless Muslim farmers in Kashmir: by R.M. Singh, 20th century.



Hari Singh Nalwa on Elephant (image from Wikipedia).

troops. Thus, after nearly five hundred years (1325 AD to 1819 AD), the flag of the Khalsa began to fly on the beautiful land of Kashmir.

In this battle a large quantity of Afghan ammunition came to the hands of the Khalsa". "Thousands of swords, guns, bayonets, horses, tents, etc. came into the hands and 22 cannons (18 were fit for use) came into the hands of the Khalsa". (Prem Singh Baba, 1937, p 104). In this battle many soldiers were killed. There dozens of soldiers of the Khalsa forces also achieved martyrdom, including the brave Sardar Jodh Singh Rusa. The Khalsa forces celebrated an impressive victory and entered the city of Srinagar in high spirits on the afternoon of July 4, 1819.

Prince Kharak Singh proclaimed throughout the city that no citizen need be alarmed as the Khalsa Army had come to the rescue of the Kashmiri people. The Kashmiri people not only welcomed the Khalsa forces but also showered flowers. Prince Kharak Singh encamped at Shergarhi fort and stationed the rest of the chiefs and troops at suitable places. News of the victory of the Khalsa forces in Kashmir reached Sher-i-Punjab in 'Shahabad'. The Khalsa Panth's well-known and fast paced informant S. Jamal Singh 'Lamtange' was sent. Sher-i-Punjab was overjoyed to hear this news and donated one lakh and twenty five thousand rupees to Darbar Sahib, Amritsar for the prayer of thanksgiving. Following the orders of Sher-i-Punjab, after fierce battles, Muzaffarabad and Darband regions were merged into the Khalsa Raj. (Mohammad Latif, page 419).

There was military rule in Kashmir for a few weeks. Dewan Ram Dayal was appointed in Bhimber, Bhai Ram Singh Pargan-i-Dar of rivers, S. Sham Singh Attari, S. Jawala Singh and Misr Diwan Chand were appointed administrators of Baramulla and Srinagar. General Sardar Hari Singh Nalwa was appointed Supervisor of the entire army. Diwan Moti Ram was appointed as the first

Governor of Kashmir, and keeping a small army in Kashmir for a while, Sardar Nalwa took the rest of the army to Lahore. When this victorious army reached Lahore, Sher-i-Punjab led this army near Shahdara. When the Khalsa forces reached Lahore, riding on elephants and horses it was a procession of Khalsa glory. When Sardar Nalwa's elephant entered the Lahore gate, people rained roses, kewra and flowers from the roofs of the houses.

Governance Administration:

The ideal of the Sikh Empire, the famous adventurer and Khalsa army's Mir-i-Karwan of Struggles, Sardar Hari Singh reached Srinagar on August 24, 1820. On 25 August, he took over governor charge from Diwan Moti Ram. "Informing Kashmir of the deplorable situation, the Maharaja nominated Sardar Hari Singh Nalwa as the Nizamat of Kashmir". (Mohammad Din, Part 3, p 16). Hari Singh Nalwa first checked the treasury documents and found that the collection of revenue and salaries of the troops had been suspended for four months. Looting, robbery, quarrels and massacres were at their peak and the people had reached the brink of revolt.

Declarations:

There was no room for such irregularities for a general who was a staunch fighter, loyal and unwavering to the Sikh state. The very next day, the Sardar informed the people in writing and in all the cities that "The Khalsa had established the Khalsa state in Kashmir after great sacrifices. Therefore, the people of Kashmir should be treated in good faith and the people should cooperate. Revenue should be deposited in the royal treasury before any austerity measures are taken. Even after the proclamation, if the government finds out that someone is obstructing

it, it will not be good for the people." Simultaneously he ordered revenue reforms and instructed farmers to "liquidate their arrears or face dire consequences" (Parmu, p. 121).

According to historians, these steps had a profound effect and in a short time Sardar Hari Singh Nalwa emerged as an efficient administrator of Kashmir.

Revenue:

The wise and efficient administrator Nalwa Sardar reviewed all the old and new records of revenue and realised the new proposals of revenue.

"According to Ain-a Akbari, the tax of Kashmir was 30,11,619 Kharwar which was equivalent to an estimated Rs. 15,52,825. During the rule of Afghans, the revenue was estimated at Cilki Rs. 60,00,000. During the reign of Khalsa Raj, Diwan Moti Ram proposed Rs. 21,00,000 Nanak Shahi. Sardar Hari Singh Nalwa deducted another Rs. 800,000 from the Diwan's revenue and left only Rs. 13,00,000" (Prem Singh, Baba,P:118-119)

Sardar Hari Singh collected all the remaining revenue from the people and sent Pandit Birbal Dhar, Pandit Sajram Dhar, Mirza Pandit Dhar and Khwaja Munwar Dhar to the Lahore Darbar. Unfortunately, all the members of the delegation died except Pandit Birbal Dhar (due to cholera) near Hast Nagar, Rawalpindi. Birbal presented all the accounts in the court and established his reputation.

Restrictions on Vagar Custom:

From time immemorial, a negative and cruel custom of 'Vagar' has been prevalent in Kashmir. It is also mentioned in Kalhan Pandit's book 'Raj Trangni'. Whenever government work or military equipment had to be transported from one place to another, thousands of oppressed

and poor Kashmiris were caught and taken to work. Whenever the time came for harvesting etc., these poor people used to join hands with the Parganadars and Chaudharis and take bribes for bandhukulashi. When Sardar Hari Singh saw the scene with his own eyes in many places, he inquired into it. The Nalwa Sardar immediately issued instructions and a special proclamation to save the Kashmiris from vagar. The famous tourist Bernier wrote that the city of Pattan was built by Shankar Verma with the help of this 'Vagar work'. When King Aurangzeb came to Kashmir in 1664, he captured 30,000 Kashmiri vagars and transported all the royal equipment on their backs from one place to another throughout Kashmir.

Agriculture and Pashmina:

Before the arrival of Sardar Hari Singh Nalwa in Kashmir, crops were completely destroyed due to floods and bad weather. Farmers did not have enough seeds to sow. When Sardar Nalwa saw the pitiable condition of the Kashmiris, he immediately visited Rajouri, Poonch and Muzaffarabad.

He immediately brought about 2000 kharwar paddy from Rajouri, Poonch and Mazaffrabad and distributed it among farmers and Zamindars at cheap rates.

This paddy was sold earlier at the rate of Rs 16 per family, but Sardar Nalwa distributed paddy seeds at Rs 3 per family and also stopped the tax on the new crop. Thus in 1821 AD. the paddy crop in Kashmir was grown in surplus.

The first production of pashmina was a quarter of what it was during the Afghan period. Sardar Nalwa greatly reduced the tax on pastures from herdsmen, shepherds and gave them financial assistance.



Champion of the Khalsaji, Sardar Hari Singh Nalwa on horseback inspecting his troops; the fort of Fatehgarh (Jamrud) in the background highlights the popular misconception that this citadel was built in the Sardar's lifetime: by Brij Lal, early 20th century.

Storms, Sailors, Handicrafts and Saffron:

After the days of Nowruz (1821 AD), torrential rains lashed the Kashmir Valley, causing many dams and bridges to collapse and causing heavy loss of life and property in many places. The bridges of Khanyar Mohalla, Pampur, BejBihara,

Rainawari, Kavadora, Khanabal etc. were also damaged. Sardar Hari Singh Nalwa not only rebuilt the new bridges but also provided financial assistance from the royal treasury for the construction of new houses, livestock etc. to the Kashmiris. To meet the food shortage, thousands of kharwars

of food grains from Punjab were imported and distributed among the needy Kashmiris at cheaper rates.

Kashmir has been an important destination for aquaculture farms which used to grow vegetables, flowers and fruits on which the government levied heavy taxes. Sardar Nalwa not only gave considerable tax relief but also expanded their farms by giving thousands of rupees to the government exchequer.

Kashmir saffron was considered world famous. It has been cultivated since ancient times and has a unique history. However, after 1800 AD its sowing was very limited. Most of its cultivation is in the area of Pampur. Sardar Nalwa paid special attention to the cultivation of saffron. A large gathering of landlords in the area inquired about the stagnation in its sowing. The landlords elaborated on the severity of the government levy, lawlessness, looting of saffron beds, theft, poor financial condition etc.

Hari Singh Nalwa, thereafter not only removed all the weaknesses but also helped to increase the economic conditions of the farmers. Similarly, the artisans of paper-making skills were given a lot of financial support from the royal treasury and they were able to stand on their own feet. Kashmiri paper was much better than other countries. Sherjangi, Kalamdani, Hastmasti, Dah Masti and Hari-Riya varieties of paper were considered very popular and good.

Some time later, when Sardar Nalwa freed himself from the interior administration control of Kashmir, he conquered other areas including Pakhli and Dhamtaur and annexed them to the Khalsa Raj in April 1821. In May 1821, Sardar Nalwa, through his scribes Sehaj Ram, Pandit Mirza,

Khwaja Manohar Shah, Chandra Bhatt, etc; sent all the accounts of his governorship to Lahore, including Farda, registers, etc., to Maharaja Ranjit Singh so that the Maharaja could have a glance at the progress of Kashmir. Maharaja Ranjit Singh was overjoyed to see the reckoning and not only praised Sardar Nalwa, but also bestowed precious khellets. According to the author of 'Muqmal Twarikh Kashmir', he presented a chained elephant, a precious necklace and a pair of gold bracelets to Nalwa. The entire area of Pakhli was also handed over to Sardar Hari Singh Nalwa as jagir by Maharaja Ranjit Singh.

Reformation of Khakhas And Bambas:

The peculiarity of Sardar Hari Singh Nalwa was his name not only stirred the ranks of Afghans and Pathans, but also shook the ranks of rebels and tyrants.

The prominent leaders of one such people, the Khakhas and Bambas, were Tarbuland Khan, Muzaffar Khan, Ghulam Ali Khan, Sharandaj Khan, etc. who became very rebellious at the very beginning of the Khalsa rule in Kashmir. During the time of Dewan Moti Ram, they never paid a single penny to the government treasury, nor did they follow government orders. Secondly, they also had the backing of the Afghans. Sardar Hari Singh Nalwa first came and reined them in the Baramulla area. "He not only collected the arrears of revenue from them but also recovered the war ransom at the rate of Rs. 5 per household. After this, on both sides of the Jhelum, Nalwa along with Sardar Tek Singh (son of S. Sham Singh Attari) and S. Hukma Singh Chimney with a platoon of infantry, one night raided their villages and arrested all the prominent leaders and inflicted such educational

punishments on many that all the others got back on track". (Walter Lawrence, The Valley of Kashmir,)

Their chief leader was handcuffed and sent to Sher-i-Punjab in the city of Lahore under the supervision of a large army. Sardar Nalwa not only recovered all the revenue from them but also confiscated all the weapons as punishment. Apart from these, he also cleared the rebels in other small areas. When all this news reached Sher-i-Punjab at the Lahore Darbar, he was overjoyed and sent a special praise to Praised Hari Singh Nalwa.

Coins, Measurement and Establishment of Courts:

Sardar Hari Singh, was not only an efficient administrator in Kashmir but also remained, a far-sighted, champion of the Khalsa and the pride of the Sikh state. A special order, Sardar Hari Singh Nalwa was given the right to issue a coin in his name by Maharaja Ranjit Singh.

On one side of the coin was inscribed in Persian letters 'Sri Akal Sahai and Samat 1878' and on the other side was inscribed 'Hari Singh' and below it was inscribed 'One Rupee' (Walter -The Valley of Kashmir, P. 905).

"The Hari Singh Rupee is very popular in Kashmir till date [1890 AD] and this coin called Hari Singhia Rupee which he issued in Kashmir. To this day it runs everywhere in Punjab too". (Raisni-Punjab, p.191)

Similarly Maulana Mohammad Din also writes in his book, that was "Hari Singh also issued a coin of his name in Kashmir which became famous by the name of Hari Singhia. What a price it was today to pay eight annas. Silver coins called Hari Singhia Paisa were also issued. These coins were minted in 1821 at Srinagar. In rupees 10 mashe was pure silver in rupees. In this way he

established a mint on behalf of the Sikh Empire to facilitate revenue collection in Kashmir and Peshawar.

Sardar Nalwa ordered uniformity measurements and scales at all places. The measurements were usually as follows: 17 tola equal to one paa, 6 Paa or 1.5 seer equal to 1 manuta, 4 manuta made one Trakh and 16 trakh or 96 seer equal to one kharwar. Police stations were set up at appropriate places to hear the grievances of the people, courts were set up to give justice to the people and verdicts were promptly decided. Kashmiris who had migrated to other places returned in thousands to Kashmir.

Construction of Shrines:

Sardar Nalwa was imbued with the spirit of Sikhi from his childhood. From a militaristic point of view, Nalwa built the forts of Uri and Muzaffarabad and established the settlements of Shaheed Ganj in Srinagar and Guru Bazar (near Shergarhi Fort) where Nihangs and Akalis settled permanently. Guru bazaar was inhabited by Sikh granthis and Hindu Sadhus.

Sardar Hari Singh Nalwa established the historic seven Gurdwaras at Matan Sahib, Gurdwara Chhevin Patshahi Baramulla, Gurdwara Guru Nanak Sahib Hari Parbat, Gurdwara Chhevin Patshahi Kathi Darwaza Srinagar and Gurdwara Chaie Guru Har Rai Sahib, Devi Angan (Srinagar). Sufi also wrote, "He came to Gurdwara Chhevin Patshahi Baramulla and performed Ardas. Mr. Nalwa attached three villages to the Gurdwara as jagir, namely Janbazzpura, Nadihall and Vadera" (Sarna, 1997, page 74).

Sardar Hari Singh Nalwa also visited Gurdwara Chaie Guru Har Rai Sahib. Giani Budh Singh writes, "When Sardar Hari Singh Nalwa became Governor of Kashmir, he visited



(Above) General Hari Singh Nalwa in full battle regalia; the inscription of the Sardar's name in English seems to suggest that the portrait was commissioned following the British annexation of the Punjab.

Gurudwara on Sammat 1877. In 1820 AD, he visited Gurudwara Chaie Guru Har Rai Sahib Devi Angan Hal bazaar, then happily wrote a jagir of three hundred and sixty rupees. This lease is in the possession of Bhai Sant Singh Ji which was issued on 24th Assu 1878 Bikrami, written that Jagir's caretaker Mutbina was 'Muhiwal Bans Bhai Hari Singh Ji'. (ChonveRattan , 1937, p 419). Later on after the demise of Munshi Sant Singh, Jathedar Lachhman Singh took care of the historic Bir of Guru Granth Sahib with utmost care. Nowadays, the historic Bir is at Gurudwara Sikh Orphanage, Chief Khalsa

Dewan Amritsar. Bunga Akali Phula Singh, where Akalis reside at Shaheed Ganj also came into existence during this period.

The official residence of Sardar Hari Singh Nalwa used to be in front of Shergari Ghat, while the white-towered house for summer residence was built on the banks of the river Jhelum, which lies between the present S P College and the Nidous Hotel. (Parmu, p. 312) .Hari Singh also built a magnificent garden on the banks of the river Jehlum. He also provided financial support to the royal treasury for the construction of many mosques and temples.

Farewell:

Ranjit Singh was to conquer more territories with the help of Sardar Nalwa, and annex them to the Khalsa Raj. The Maharaja recalled Sardar Nalwa from Kashmir and appointed Diwan Moti Ram as Governor of Kashmir. Before leaving, Sardar Nalwa visited Srinagar. A huge Darbar was held in which prominent Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims came together.

Preparations were made to see off Nalwa Sardar from Kashmir on 6 November 1821 AD. Sardar Hari Singh Nalwa was responsible for expanding the frontiers of the Sikh Empire to beyond the Indus River right upto the north Khyber Pass. In the time of Sardar

Hari Singh Nalwa, prosperity and brotherhood were at their peak in Kashmir. He was regarded as a beloved servant of the people and an efficient governor.

Dr Jasbir Singh Sarna is a voracious writer in Punjabi, English and Urdu. He is a Poet, Scholar, Historian and has written about 52 books. Hailing from Kashmir, he remains founder-editor of the monthly Shamshir-e-Dast Amritsar.

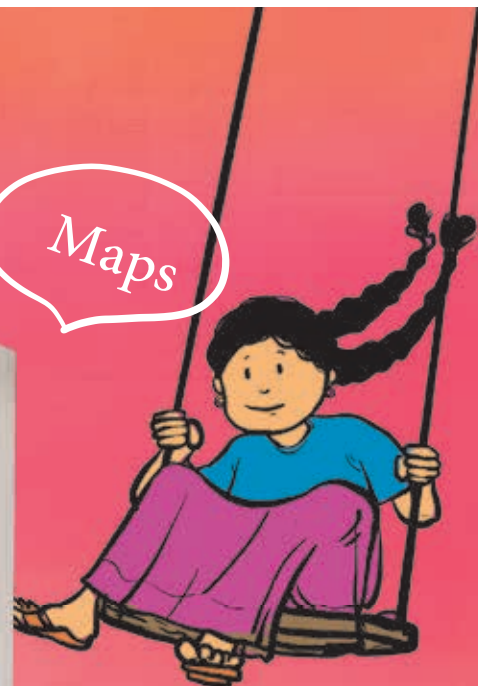
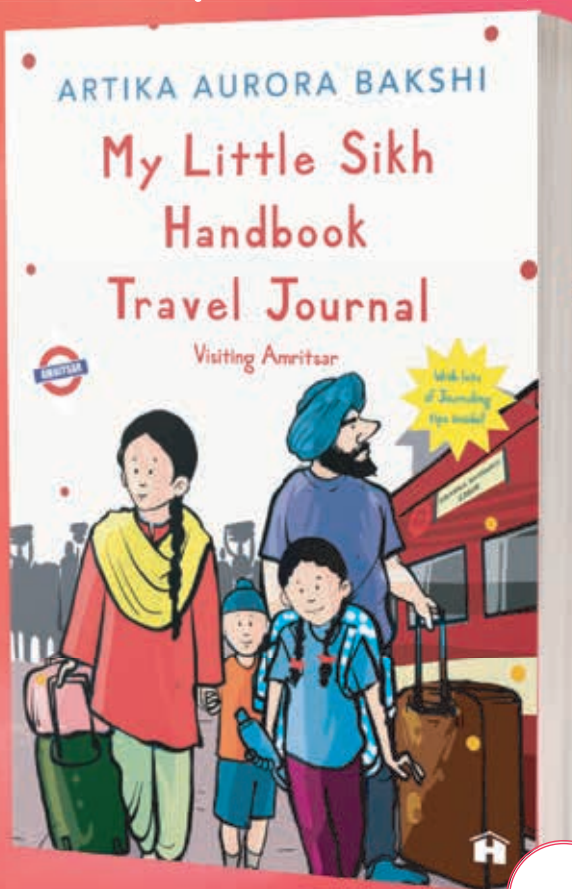
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BOOK REVIEW: THE STORY BEHIND THE LAST QUEEN

Interview by: Artika Aurora Bakshi

Excerpts with permission from Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *The Last Queen*, first published by HarperCollins India.

"I really want this book to reach the Sikh community because I think that Maharani Jindan's life is very inspiring for everybody, particularly, women", says Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, the well-known author of books including *The Mistress of Spices*, *The Palace of Illusions*, *The Forest of Enchantment*, & her latest, *The Last Queen*.

Chitra is known for giving a voice to women, contemporary, and those who have been long forgotten in the dusty pages of history and mythology. Her immigrant stories have a heart, and many women, especially those who find themselves on foreign shores, can relate to them. Some of her characters have played pivotal roles in mythology and history, yet have somehow been relegated to the sidelines, with their male counterparts taking up places of prominence. From Tilo to Draupadi, and now Maharani Jindan, Chitra's evocative writing and deft fictionalisation, lets the reader relate with these characters, and find inspiration and understanding in their joys, tribulations, trials, and their motivations.

Why Jindan?

One of the things I always find really amazing is how story ideas come to me. I had gone to Kolkata for the Calcutta Literary Meet, to present my book, *Before We Visit The Goddess*. As I walked into the auditorium, William Dalrymple was talking about his book, *Koh-i-Noor*. He was talking about the various people who had possessed the Koh-

i-Noor. And just as I was walking in, I saw the painting of Maharani Jindan on the screen, which later became my cover. He spoke about the tough life she had had, about how her son had been taken away from her when he was very young, about how she had lost the entire kingdom, and her imprisonment by the British. He spoke about how she never lost her courage and spirit, refusing to give in or give up.

When I heard all that, I thought of how amazing this woman was, and that I would like to know more about her. The more I read about her, the more intrigued I was. She rose from humble beginnings. Her father was the kennel keeper in Lahore Qila. For her to become a queen of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, and for him to have loved her so much that he promised her that she would be his last queen, she must have had some personality, and not just beauty and intelligence. That is when I decided that I had to write a novel about her. I also felt that it was really unfair that she had been almost erased from history. I found out later that it was partly the British who were responsible for this. They spent



a lot of time, effort, and money on slandering her because she had been so beloved by the people.

“I was afraid that I would break down when I learned what the British have done, but now that everything I cared for is lost, a strange calm descends upon me.”

As I researched, I saw the complexities of her character. I learned a lot of things as I went through the research process, especially, how to behave when everything around you is falling apart. For her, that happened several times in her lifetime. I was amazed at her courage, dignity, and spirit, and how she stood up against all those who wanted her to fail in her case, the courtiers, the other queens, and the British.

The Research Process?

My book *Before We Visit The Goddess* had been released, and I was writing *The Forest of Enchantment*. Luckily, during that time I had already started gathering material for my

research on *The Last Queen*. As soon as *The Forest of Enchantment* finished, the pandemic started, and all movement came to a standstill. I could not go to the university library, where I have always done a sizable amount of research. I always go to places that have some importance in the lives of my protagonists. Due to the restrictions, I could not go to some of the places that I wanted to, like the *qila* on the banks of the Ganga, outside Benares, where Maharani Jindan was incarcerated.

The other place I really wanted to visit was the hotel in Calcutta, where she met up with her son after many years of being separated from him.

I always feel that historical places carry an atmosphere with them, and if you are there, you can feel what people would have felt when they were there. It was disappointing that I could not travel, but with every cloud, there is a silver lining.

T h a n k s
to the
internet, I
managed
to get
hold of
s o m e
g o o d

During the research process, Chitra did a lot of reading on Sikhism and the teachings of Guru Nanak Dev Ji. Both Maharaja Ranjit Singh and Maharani Jindan held the writings of the Gurus in high regard, and the foundations of the Sikh Empire were laid on the principles and tenets of Sikhism.

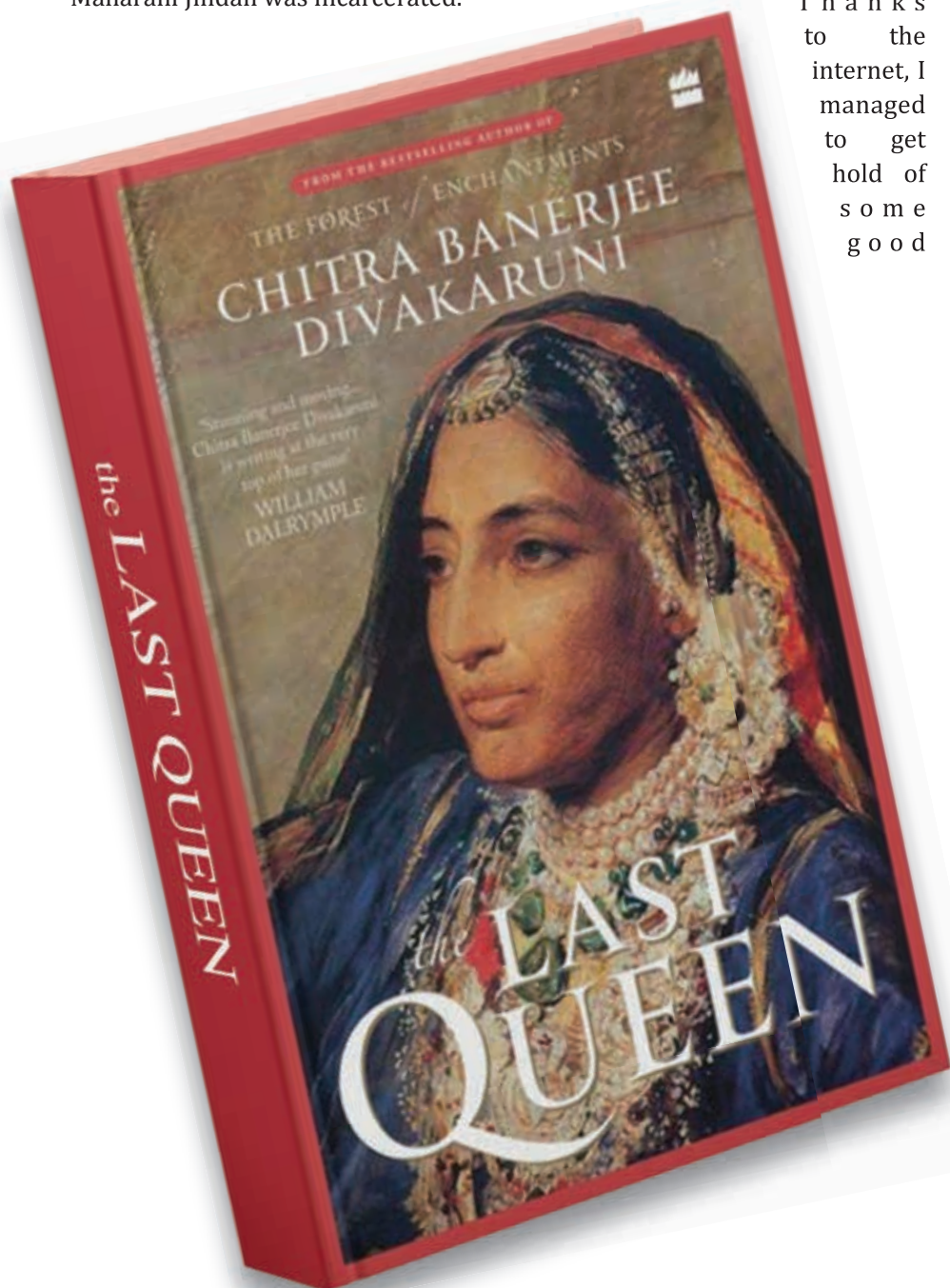
photographs and paintings of those places, for example, the streets of Lahore and the *qila*, and I spent a lot of time just looking at them.

Luckily, I had the books that I had collected pre-pandemic too. All this made it easy for me to get into her character and write her story.

How are women today different from the women you write about?

In my personal opinion, one way the women today, and back in those days, are the same, is that no matter where you live, the US, India, Sri Lanka, or any other country, there is a certain amount of fighting that women have to do against social forces. If you look at Maharaja Ranjit Singh's mother-in-law, Sada Kaur, she was a powerful lady. Even when Jindan came to court, there was quite a roar.

The men at that time did not like it. They felt threatened. Unfortunately, we still have people who think the same. Maharani Jindan was not just Dalip Singh's mother,



she was the mother of the Khalsa Army. She took pride in this role, loving the soldiers as her own, feeling connected with them, as a mother would. There was a kind of inclusiveness in that approach, and even today, these qualities can be brought by women into the workplace. Things have changed, but there is still some resistance to gender equality.

It is good for us to read books like *The Last Queen*, and think for ourselves as to how much things have changed for women, and whether the change has been for the better. While things have changed in the cities, there are large rural areas in India, the US, and many other countries, where things have not changed much.

Women still find it difficult to break past certain social barriers, and do not have access to education, healthcare and justice. Cases of domestic violence in rural areas do not even get a chance to get to the higher courts. Having said that, things were tougher for women in those days, not just for influential women like Jindan, but also for the ordinary women, for example, the servants who worked in the *qila*.

Why women? And how much prominence do you give to the men in the story?

I feel strongly about what we women face. I do a lot of activist work in the community here, in the field of domestic violence and women's education. That is why I am very interested in women and what they feel. I have seen a lot of women in really tough places, and if given the chance and the support, they do manage to rise. In *The Last Queen*, you will see that men, like the Maharaja, have been given their prominent place.

Maharaja Ranjit Singh's greatness cannot be ignored.

“I'm caught in a whirlwind. A hurried bath, clothes pulled on somehow. Biji dabs me with sandalwood paste, takes a couple of bangles from her arms and slides them over my wrists. She drapes the phulkari dupatta over my head. A ragi begins to sing a shabad.

I find myself sitting in front of the Guru Granth Sahib, the sword on a cushion next to me. After prayers have been chanted, it is tied to my dupatta. The sword is heavy, but I carry it proudly around the holy book while the ragi sings the Lavan, describing how the souls of the bride and groom have merged into one. ”

From humble beginnings, as the head of one of *misls*, to having a vision, and then uniting all the *misls*, shows determination, brilliance and grit. That is what stories are made of. He was way ahead of his times, having an empire where different people, from different religions, thrived. While writing the novel, I tried to think like Jindan, and feel her love for her husband, and how she understood and shared his vision.

Marriages during those times were based on political alliances, but theirs was a relationship that was based on love and attraction. That is what I wanted to show. Though Jindan is the main character of my

story, I have also given prominence to the men in her life, like her husband, the Maharaja, her brother, and most importantly, her son, Dalip Singh. It is not just a historical novel of courage and resistance, it is also a love story too.

The research process is very similar in both historical fiction and nonfiction. Why historical fiction?

I love imagining the inner worlds of these characters. In nonfiction, we can give only the facts, the way things unfolded. Historical fiction, while keeping those facts central, allows the writer to understand and project the emotions of the characters, just as I have done with Jindan. What did she feel when she first saw Ranjit Singh? What did she feel when she got married? He had not been there! He sent his sword.

She got married to the sword and came all by herself to the Lahore Qila, where she had to strive to make her place, amongst all the other queens who were working on securing their own positions. The women in the *zenana* viewed each other as rivals. You will not find emotions in history books. That is where historical fiction comes to play. History tells us that mother and child were separated by the British. Novels such as this, give emotion to that fact. The little boy was taken on the pretext of an outing, to see the parrots, not knowing that he would not get to see his mother for a long time.

I choose historical fiction because it deals with the human heart, and in the end, we all live from that human heart. The whole point of a historical fiction novel is to show how people felt as they went through these events and to bring humanness to these events so that we connect. It is when we connect with characters who have been important in history,

that we can learn from their lives.

Their stories inspire us, just like when Jindan escaped from the *qila*, where the British had imprisoned her.

“My only weakness is Dalip. I haven’t seen him for almost a year now. I thought I would get used to his absence and the futility of my sorrow, but each time I think of him, it feels as though someone has cut away my heart and rubbed salt on the wound. I have wept so much this past year that I fear I have ruined my eyesight.”

She had been very ill at that time, yet she undertook the arduous journey to Nepal. This inspired me. Here I was, complaining about my challenges, whereas this woman, in those times, with all her challenges, did not let anything stop her. Her grit and determination gave me encouragement.

And that’s what historical fiction does; It inspires!

Quality of resources available?

I had to do a lot of piecing together. There was hardly any book on her. I had to look at a lot of sources that talked about Maharaja Ranjit Singh and Maharaja Dalip Singh, and the history of the times, so that I could then use that to fill in the gaps in her life and her character. For example, when Maharaja Ranjit Singh died, the court was in turmoil and all we know about her is that she and her baby were sent off to Kashmir. But what happened there, nobody knows. We just know that after some months, when all the mysterious deaths in the Lahore Qila were over, she returned. I

tried to put all the facts together and imagine what she would have felt in those circumstances and why she did the things she did. Her relationship with her brother is also an important facet of her character, something that has not been shown in history books. In the novel, I wanted to show how sibling relationships function, and even though politically it was a wrong move on her part to involve him in court affairs, she was motivated by the love she had for him, someone she had grown up with, out of love.

The process of writing?

I need some time between books to clear my head.

When I first started writing, it used to take a long time, because those characters would be in me. I would find myself deeply entrenched in their world. Now, after all these

Fact- When Chitra writes, she tries out the recipes from the region featured in her stories. While working on *The Last Queen*, she enjoyed cooking *Makki ki Roti* and *Sarson ka Saag*. She tried out the buttermilk, which is a staple in Punjab. Since Maharaja Ranjit Singh was fond of Mughlai cuisine, she even tried some of those recipes.

years, it is much faster. While I am writing a book, I go through my life as if in a daze. While writing *The Last Queen*, I felt as if I was in all those places where Jindan had been. In my mind, I was with all the characters who had been a part

of Jindan’s life. I try to imagine the dynamics of the characters, which is quite an intense process.

Once the book is done, I send it out into the world, for the readers to start interacting with the characters that I have brought to life. My family is very understanding. They know my writing routine. I do not like being disturbed.

I stay in my own space, without talking much. I am sure it is annoying, but credit goes to my family for understanding my writing process. During Covid, it was a bit challenging as we were all working from home. My son was home from university. I would shut myself in my study. My instructions were very clear. No one was allowed to disturb me unless there was an emergency. Without their support and understanding, it wouldn’t have been possible. Credit goes to my husband for having put up with many hurriedly cooked dinners, and a wife, who many a time seems lost in her own world.

The story of writing?

It’s quite a mystery for me, for when I was growing up, I never thought I would be a writer. I always loved reading, but I never had any inclination toward writing. I didn’t think I had stories to tell. It all started after I immigrated to the US, which was one of the biggest events that influenced my life. I moved from a world I knew so well to one where I was by myself, in the middle of America, studying, working, far away from my family and homesick. I missed India.

That was when I felt that I had to write in order to express myself. And that’s how I started writing immigrant stories, not just about me, but also about so many other immigrant women and what they feel, their gains and losses. The story of an immigrant is not only

about losses. There are gains as well. That was a powerful experience. At the same time, my grandfather passed away in India. He was my mother's father, and he had been a big influence in my life. He was the one who used to tell me the stories of the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* when I was growing up in India. He encouraged me to become a reader. When he passed away, I was in the US and could not go home for his funeral. It was a big shock to me. It was at that time that I started writing stories about India, and appreciating my own culture. For people who have immigrated, culture becomes more meaningful when they have children because they want to make their children understand the importance of what's left behind.

Many of us in the diaspora make it a point that our children don't lose touch with their heritage. It's that same impulse that made me want to write so that these experiences are there for others to read about. One of the things that I have been very happy about with *The Last Queen* released in India was that many people reached out and said that the book really brought about an awareness of that period, about how Jindan fought against the British, making them understand the importance of freedom. The generations today take independence for granted.

The Last Queen brings to light the struggle and hardships people like Jindan had to face. There are so many stories like hers, where people took a stand to fight for freedom, for independence and to preserve what belonged to them. India gained independence in 1947, but as time goes by, we have forgotten the story of the struggle. As readers read the story of Jindan, hopefully, they will realise the value of what we have. Another lesson we learn is that

infighting and treachery weakens nations. The British used the policy of divide and rule to gain control. But it was the infighting and treachery of the court that destroyed the

“His voice is hesitant, his intonation imperfect, but he says it, the victory cry that has kept our people resilient through centuries of persecution. 'Jo bole so nihal, Sat Sri Akal.'

I mouth the words along with him. Whoever utters this will be happy: Eternal is the Great Timeless Lord. It is Dalip's final gift to me.

It is also my final gift to him.”

mighty empire. One of the hopes of a historical fiction novel is that by making us remember and connect with the feelings of the characters, and what they faced, we learn from them.

The Koh-i-Noor: The Jewel in the English Crown?

The debate is ongoing. My personal view is that since it was taken from a minor ruler, whose kingdom had been forcibly annexed, you can't say that he offered it to the British Empire. The Koh-i-Noor has changed many hands, through invasions and deals, but they were all exchanges where powerful adults were involved. With Dalip Singh, that was not the case.

The British were regents, and that did not give them the right to force Dalip Singh into doing what suited their interests. This debate will never end, and even if it comes back, the next question would be, 'where will it come back to?', especially since the Sikh Empire as it stood at its height, is not there, with the

areas now being part of different sovereign nations.

What next?

After writing Maharani Jindan's story, I wanted to go deep into the history of the Indian Independence Struggle. Jindan's story takes place at an important time in our history. The Sikh Empire was the last empire standing for the British to complete their annexation of India. It was around that time that the Sepoy Mutiny, which we call the First War of Independence took place. It failed, and a lot of people lost their lives. But it was a concerted effort, where many kingdoms tried to get rid of British occupation to get back their autonomy. I wanted to follow that to its end when the British actually left India. My next novel is about Independence, centred around a family with three daughters, who are differently impacted by Independence. My story highlights this amazing moment, which was also distressing because of the Partition and the ensuing violence. If all goes well, it will be released this year, which is India's '75th Year of Independence'.

There were many facets to the character of Maharani Jindan, and as one reads through *The Last Queen*, her humanness, with its strengths and flaws, comes to light, making her admirable just the way she was.

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni is an award-winning and bestselling author, poet, activist and teacher of writing. Her work has been published in over 50 magazines, including the *Atlantic Monthly* and *The New Yorker*. Her books have been translated into 29 languages. Several of her works have been made into films and plays. She lives in Houston. For more information, please visit her website www.chitradivakaruni.com.

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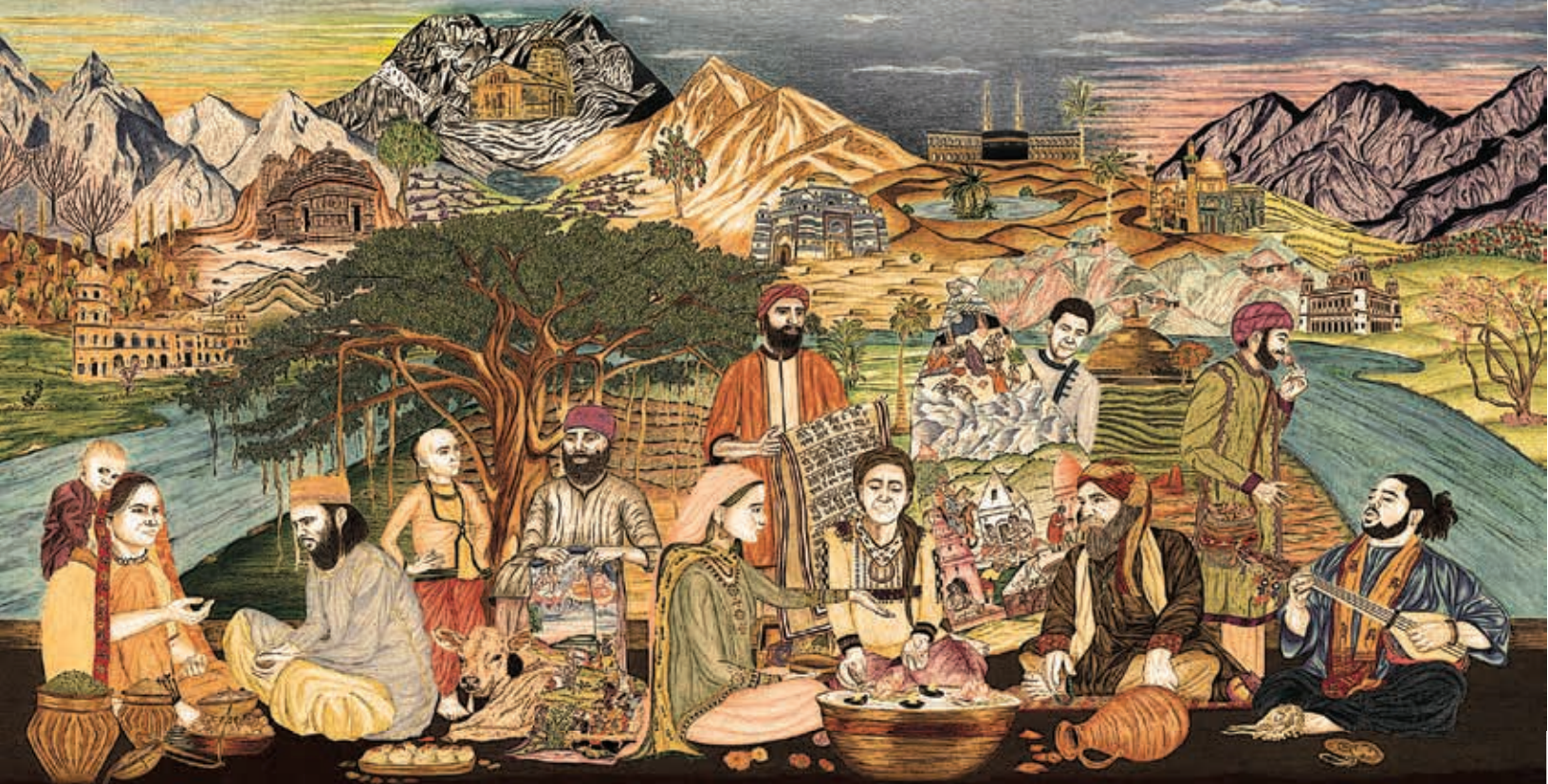
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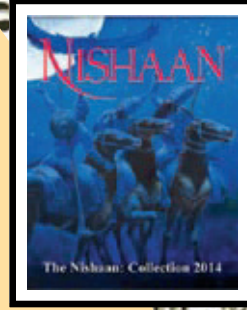
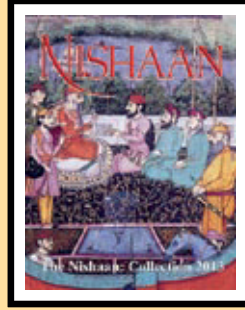
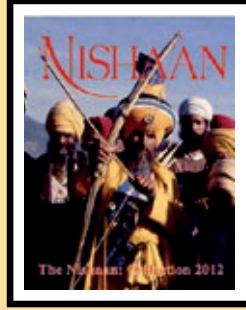
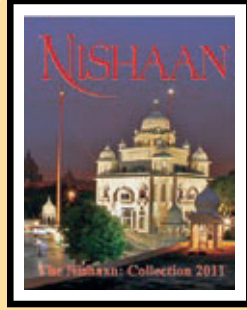
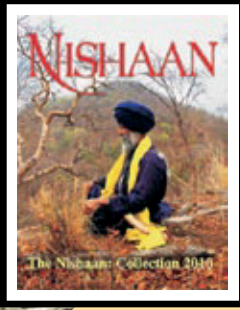
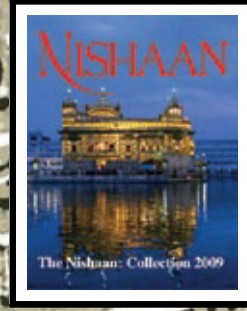
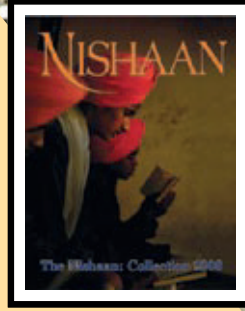
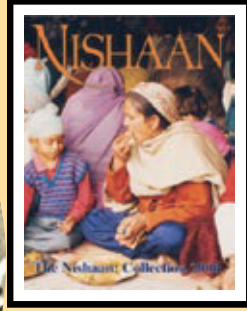
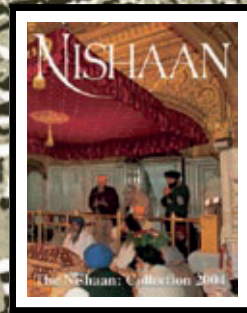
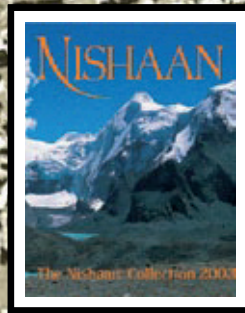
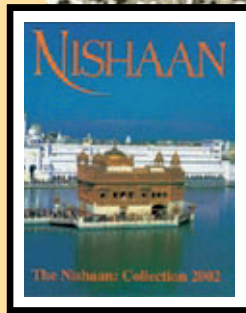
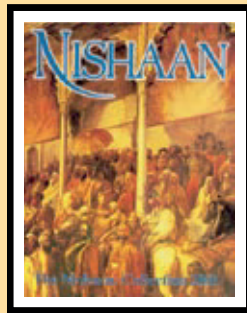
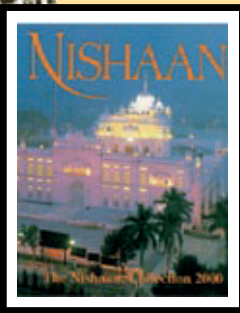
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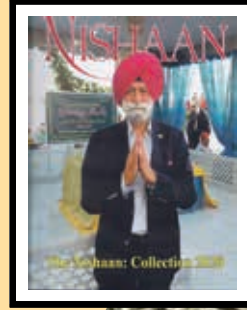
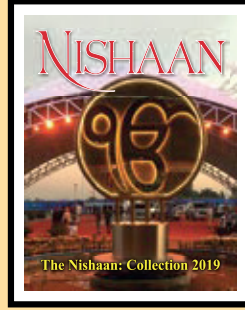
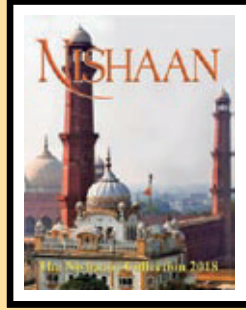
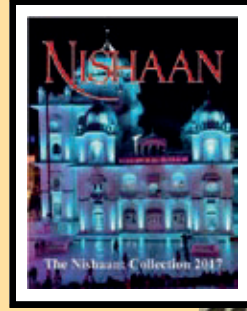
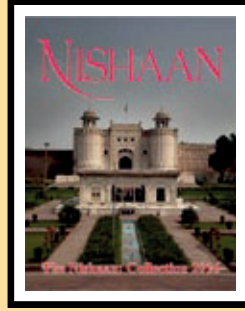
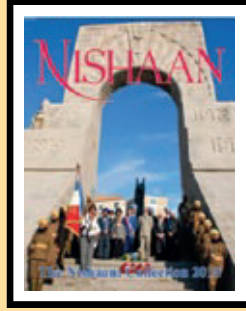
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