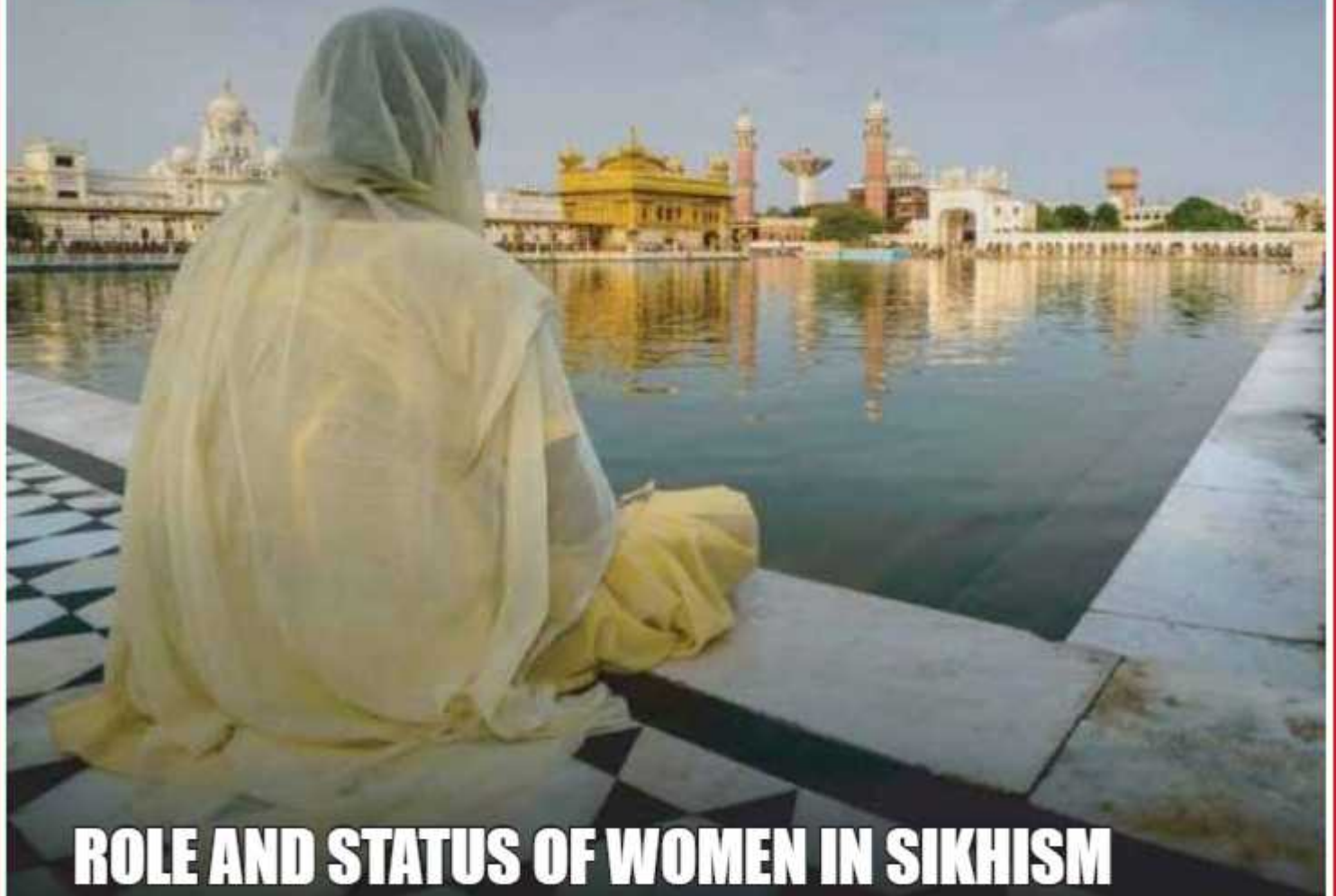


ISSUE I / 2023

NISHAAN

NAGAARA



ROLE AND STATUS OF WOMEN IN SIKHISM
SIKH: A STUDENT FOR LIFE

THE
KIKAR LODGE
Nature Retreat

INTIMATE. LUXURIOUS. TRANQUIL.

We have a large Private Forest Reserve with 40 fabulous Cottages, Suites, & Luxury Tents, which are most elegantly designed. Step into a space where you can be productive, connected and rested.

ACCOMMODATIONS



Garden View Rooms/Suites



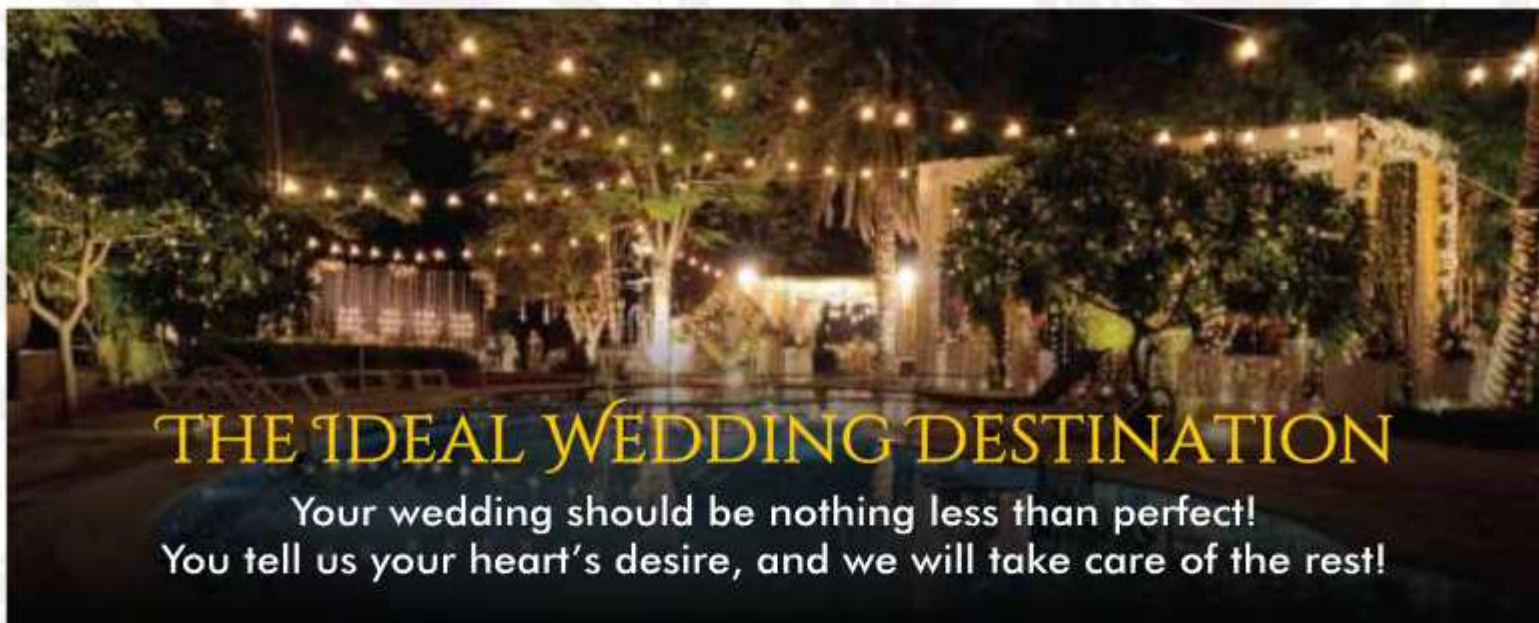
Forest View Cottages



Pool View Cottages/Suites



Dream Luxury Tents



THE IDEAL WEDDING DESTINATION

Your wedding should be nothing less than perfect!
You tell us your heart's desire, and we will take care of the rest!

Catering

You can count on our seasoned team of culinary experts to delight your guests with remarkable cuisines. Choose from our impressive repertoire of food options inspired from both Indian and global cuisines.

Wedding Planning

From decoration to catering, stationery, photographer and everything in between, our dedicated wedding coordinators will ensure that your special occasions run smoothly and flawlessly! Leave all your worries to us.

Adventure Activities



Night Forest Safari



Horse Riding



Quad Biking



Flying Fox
Zip Line - 2.2 K



Rappelling



Archery



Bird Watching
Nature Trails



Cycling



THE KIKAR LODGE
Nature Retreat

The Kikar Lodge

Village – Kangar, Nurpur Bedi,
District Ropar, Punjab – 140117, India

Corporate Office

E-2, 2nd Floor, Defence Colony,
New Delhi – 110 024, India

Sales / Reservations: +91 7888690208, delhi.sales@thekikarlodge.com

Follow us on : [f /thekikarlodge](https://www.facebook.com/thekikarlodge)

www.thekikarlodge.com

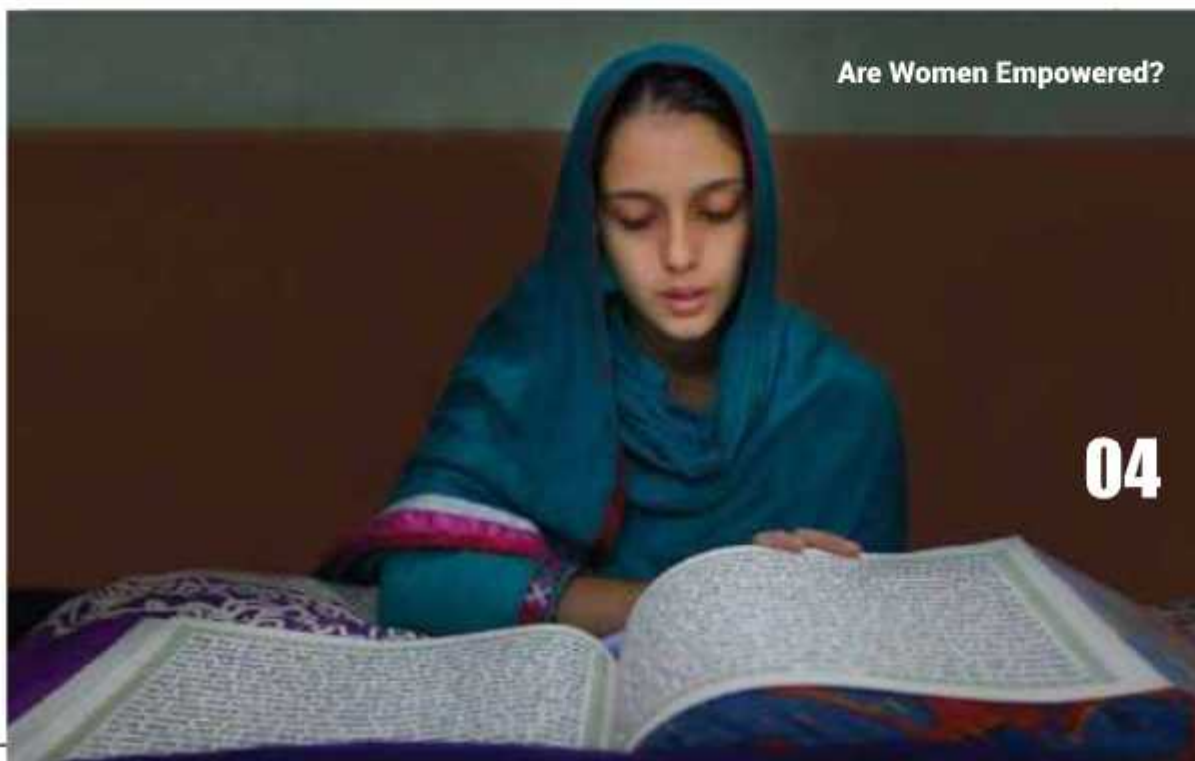
CONTENTS

ISSUE 1 / 2023



Cover photograph:
-Frank Bienewald

Editorial HISTORY AND HERI STORY Dr. I.J. Singh	03
Are Women Empowered? Harpreet Kaur Ahluwalia	04
Women Emancipation and Empowerment – A Sikh Perspective Dr. Devinder Pal Singh	08
Gender Equality in Guru Nanak's Thought Dr. Nadia Singh	10
Sikhi, the Big Bang, The Black Holes and Beyond Part-2 Dr. Hardial Singh Dhillon	16
Sikh: A Student for Life Bhupinder 'Bo' Singh	20
That We Lose No More Artika Aurora Bakshi	24
Panj Takht	30
Sikhs and Sikhism in Nepal Santokh Singh Bains	38
Battle of Sobraon	44
Role and Status of Women in Sikhism -Through Guru Nanak's Perspective Dr. Aasif Rashid Wani	50
Peshawar Express <i>From Nishaan's Collection</i> Krishan Chander	58
Speaking to Young Minds Book Reviews	64
Karamjit Singh, Vice-President, Sri Hemkunt Foundation Inc., New York S. Karamjit S. Interview by Bhupinder 'Bo' Singh	68



EDITORIAL

HISTORY AND HER-STORY

Our local gurdwara spawned an energetic Sikh Women's Association which hosted a program to celebrate the life of Mata Sahib Kaur. Sahib Kaur had a brief but telling part to play when the first *amrit* ceremony was held by Guru Gobind Rai in 1699. This event marked the beginning of the Khalsa institution.

From this dramatic beginning, a nation was created; these were the final touches to the message of Guru Nanak that matured under the tutelage of the nine Gurus that followed him. Gobind Singh was the tenth in that line.

From that day, initiated Sikhs (*Khalsa*) look to Guru Gobind Singh as their spiritual father & Sahib Kaur as their spiritual mother.

When I got the call to speak about her, sure enough, like any "ten o'clock scholar", I hurried to my modest library for a spot of research. Can you imagine my surprise at the paucity of available information?

We have the names of her parents, but not her date of birth. Even the sources clash on when she appeared at Anandpur, where the institution of the Khalsa was founded - in 1699 or 1700.

Mata Sahib Kaur outlived Guru Gobind Singh and communicated with the far-flung Sikh community via letters and directives. A memorial to her stands at Bala Sahib Gurdwara in New Delhi. Interestingly, she spent her last years in Delhi, which was, at that time, under rulers absolutely and despotically against Sikhs.

And that makes me wonder!

What lessons can we draw? How little do we know of our pioneering women? How do I look at her and others like her?

The magic, the meaning and the measure of a life - indeed of history - are found not in the celebration of an individual or an event, but in the interpretation.

History is a narrative. What does it tell us about the time that Guru Nanak trod this earth, particularly about the place of women?

We all know that Sikhism's founder, Guru Nanak, spoke eloquently about women. He clearly rejected the restricted space of women in Indian life. Yes, one can preach a message of gender equality. One can exhort people to think, one can even legislate equal rights, but it is like taking a horse to water: there is no easy way to make it drink.

To make reality of a recommendation or even of legislation requires a revolutionary change in our mindset. A cultural paradigm shift is necessary and paradigm shifts do occur, but slowly and haltingly.

Our pioneering women were important voices and a significant presence in our journey forward that was started by Guru Nanak, to create an egalitarian society without gender inequality. But look at the management of our activities therein and one cannot escape the conclusion that our women are the invisible half.

Our onus is to see where we are now - at what point in that journey. The journey never ends.

I.J. SINGH

Editorial Director

Dr. I.J. Singh

Founder Editor

Pushpinder Singh

Editorial Panel

Bhayee Sikandar Singh
Inder Mohan Singh
Ganeev Kaur Dhillon
Artika Aurora Bakshi

Postal Address

D-43 Sujjan Singh Park
New Delhi 110 003
India

Printed and Published by

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

Associated with

The Chardi Kalaa Foundation
San Jose, USA

Email: nishaan.nagaara@gmail.com

Website: www.nishaannagaara.com

Facebook: @NishaanNagaara

Instagram: @nishaan_nagaara

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

ARE WOMEN EMPOWERED?

Harpreet Kaur Ahluwalia

The hand that rocks the cradle rules the world." The above quote is the truth and nothing but the truth. Though we choose to run down women yet existence simply cannot run without her as it is she who gives birth and equips her creations to face the harsh realities of this world.

God made us all equal in body, thoughts and emotions. Both men and women are made of five elements — air, water, fire, earth and sky and they both work in the same three gunas - *rajo*, *tamo* and *sato*.

But does a woman believe this? Who am I?

Why did I need Guru Nanak to make me aware of my importance? Why did he have to fight to change the society's mindset?

Guru Nanak used a two-sided dagger — on the one hand he asked man to give woman her due, and on the other hand asked woman to respect herself and believe in herself.

We have all heard of this fable — an eagle's egg fell into the enclosure of a hen. The baby eagle grew up thinking he was a chicken, just like the chickens he lived amongst, little realizing that he was to soar in the sky.

In actuality, we are all made up of our beliefs, thoughts, emotions, perceptions, ego and conditioning but along with this, woman has an innate quality of love, empathy and humbleness. She did not use them as her strengths; instead man has from times immemorial used it as her weakness. In this process of use and misuse she forgot that she is clay and not the clay pot.

If a lie is said a 100 times over, people start believing it to be truth. This is what, I believe, has happened with women.

While history has been replete with examples and sermons of adulating and respecting women and granting women liberty, justice and independence in what they desired and wanted — the reality was quite different.

The truth is that there has been too much talk yet too little action on the ground.

Rules, regulations, diktats, customs were made by men with the primary objective to rein in women; to constrain them and make them do what men wanted to make women fall in line voluntarily by making them believe that they are venerable and need help, support and protection. Women were consigned to do tasks that were transactional — back bending and domesticated. They were considered a bad omen. A girl child was a curse and marriage her only destiny, making her feel despised even for natural phenomena like menstrual cycle, *sutak* etc.



Photo by: Amardeep Singh

A Woman's life was written with a pencil which could be changed with an eraser as, when and wherever needed. To hide the guilt of suppressing her, manipulating her and using her, society then decided to give her false veneration and put her on a pedestal as Devi or Goddess. Religious leaders seized this opportunity to demolish all resistance that could occur from her side, by manipulating and creating verses that degraded the woman as a being. She had to prove herself repeatedly through tests that were high as Everest and deep as an ocean. The objective was to make her fail in her own eyes and make her focus only on her outer beauty by totally erasing her inner beauty and strengths.

Tulsi Das equated a woman with dhol, ganwar, pashu, etc. In the Mahabharata, Draupadi was used in gambling as a commodity. The Devadasi system forced women to be married to God and then abused by power brokers. The Sati system burned her alive after her husband's death, clearly indicating that her usefulness was only limited to her husband's life. Kanyadan was created and no rights in property were given to her. She was mentally conditioned like a chained elephant who believes that he is not free even if left unchained.

In such a scenario, no person could gather courage to challenge the status quo but also to change it - by being a rebel. Sikhism crowned women with the identity of Kaur at a time when she had no identity. Kaur was given liberation from the bondage that society and religions across the world had imposed on her. Sikhism did not discriminate against women and gave free entry in temples along with the kitchen and even taught women the art of warfare.

On page (Ang) 473 of the Sri Guru Granth Sahib, Guru Nanak says — "from woman man is born, within woman man is conceived, to woman he is engaged and married. Woman becomes his friend, through woman the future generations come. When his woman dies, he seeks another woman. To woman he is bound. So why call her inferior and bad? From her kings are born. From woman, woman is born, without woman there would be no one at all".

First Mehl:

ਭੰਡਿ ਜੰਮੀਐ ਭੰਡਿ ਨਿੰਮੀਐ ਭੰਡਿ ਮੰਗਣੁ ਵੀਆਹੁ ॥
ਭੰਡਹੁ ਹੋਵੈ ਦੋਸਤੀ ਭੰਡਹੁ ਚਲੈ ਰਾਹੁ
ਭੰਡੁ ਮੁਆ ਭੰਡੁ ਭਾਲੀਐ ਭੰਡਿ ਹੋਵੈ ਬੰਧਾਨੁ ॥
ਸੋ ਕਿਉ ਮੰਦਾ ਆਖੀਐ ਜਿਤੁ ਜੰਮਹਿ ਰਾਜਾਨੁ ॥
ਭੰਡਹੁ ਹੀ ਭੰਡੁ ਊਪਜੈ ਭੰਡੈ ਬਾਣੁ ਨ ਕੋਇ ॥
ਨਾਨਕ ਭੰਡੈ ਬਾਹਰਾ ਏਕੋ ਸਚਾ ਸੋਇ ॥

Sikhism and the gurus empowered women. Guru Nanak admitted women in sangat without restrictions and ensured that his message was for both men and women. Guru Angad encouraged education. Guru Amar Das condemned the customs of sati, and female infanticide and advocated widow remarriage. Guru Hargobind announced women to be the conscience of the human race and finally, Guru Gobind gave her a separate identity. She was a Kaur right from her birth till death and was free of changing her surname.

Sikh history has some highly empowered Sikh women who helped shaped Sikhism along with the Gurus - Bibi Nanaki, Mata Sahib Kaur, Mata Khivi, Bibi Bhani, Mata Gujri, Mata Sundri, are a few names. The Sikh philosophy calls upon all men to cultivate the superior qualities of a woman that come naturally to her. Sikh history also has had strong warrior women - Bibi Sharan Kaur, Mata Bhago, Bibi Nirbhai Kaur, Bhadur Deep Kaur, and many more. But unfortunately, these women even after their strong contributions have been left out of the pages of Sikh history. None of these women are celebrated or created as role models. Irony is that the Sikh Rehat maryada has also been conveniently modified by today's gurdwara committees who have assigned secondary roles to women and with time she has forgotten that she is a complete being.

The truth is there is no one to blame. Women have been committing the cardinal mistake of getting caught in the man-woman distinction again and again and forgetting that they have no boundaries and are free to fly. But my question is that after 550 years, has this radical change happened, because this can only happen if a woman believes in herself, her abilities and her zeal to fulfil her dreams.

Harpreet Ahluwalia is a Woman Entrepreneur. Her contact details are: D-138, Sector 36. Noida 201303, email: ahluwalia138@yahoo.co.in

HEMKUNT BOOKS



School of Sikhism Activity Book 0

Size 10" x 7½" ISBN 81-7010-469-8 Rs.135.00

School of Sikhism Activity Book 0+

Size 10" x 7½" ISBN 81-7010-470-4 Rs.135.00

These books are meant for Nursery and KG children.



MY FIRST BOOK ON SIKHISM

The Sikh Gurus, Shrines, Symbols, Personages, Practices and Festivals.

Size 10" x 7½" ISBN 81-7010-206-5 Rs.125.00

MY SECOND BOOK ON SIKHISM

The Sikh Gurus, Personages, Religious Centres, Practices, Way of Life and Religious Beliefs.

Size 10" x 7½" ISBN 81-7010-254-5 Rs.125.00

THE ILLUSTRATED ARDAAS

With pictorial cues for easy learning. Text in Gurmukhi and Roman script with English translation. Suitable for class I & II. In full colour.

Size 10" x 7½" ISBN 81-7010-242-9 Rs.125.00

Stories from Sikh History Series

Book 1 (Guru Nanak Dev) ISBN 81-7010-015-1 Rs.165.00

Book 2 (Guru Angad Dev to Guru Arjan Dev)
ISBN 81-7010-016-X Rs.175.00

Book 3 (Guru Hargobind to Guru Tegh Bahadur)
ISBN 81-7010-009-7 Rs.195.00

Book 4 (Guru Gobind Singh) ISBN 81-7010-175-1 Rs.195.00

Book 5 (The Sikh Martyrs) ISBN 81-7010-010-0 Rs.205.00

Book 6 (Sikh Heroes - Banda Bahadur to 1947)
ISBN 81-7010-176-X Rs.185.00



Hemkunt Press

Printing & Publishing since 1948

401, Ansals Imperial Tower, C - Block Community Centre, Naraina Vihar, New Delhi - 110 028 (INDIA)

Tel: +91-11-4141-2083 | E-mail: hemkuntpress@gmail.com



WOMEN EMANCIPATION AND EMPOWERMENT - A SIKH PERSPECTIVE

Dr. Devinder Pal Singh

Women represent half of all humanity, yet they continue to face discrimination in various parts of the world. The feminist movement has done much to lessen gender discrimination in western societies. However, women in much of the world still face severe difficulties, such as violence, illiteracy, economic and social deprivation. It is increasingly recognized that better education and economic empowerment of women can play a significant role in uplifting the economic level of impoverished areas of the world and lowering birth rates, which is crucial for addressing climate change.

Having noted several general rituals and traditions of his time, Guru Nanak recognized that men often looked down upon women as inferior to them. They were thought of as commodities. He condemned this mindset and these practices. Thus, several centuries ahead of the feminist movement, Guru Nanak spoke out against gender discrimination in the subcontinent's highly male-dominated environment. He opposed established orthodoxy with the radical assertion that women were worthy of praise and equal to men. Besides, God is gender neutral. It is both man and woman, and its creative aspect is portrayed as that of a mother:

ਆਪ ਪੁਰਖੁ ਆਪੇ ਹੀ ਨਾਰੀ ॥

Āpe purakh āpe hī nārī.

God (Creator) is both man and woman. (M. 1, SGGS, p 1020)

Guru Nanak proclaimed that the same divine essence pervades through both men and women.

ਨਾਰੀ ਪੁਰਖ ਸਬਾਈ ਲੋਇ ॥

Nārī purakh sabā ī loīe.

*Among all the women and the men,
God's essence is pervading.
(M. 1, SGGS, p. 223)*

Bhagat Kabir, whose bani is also included in the Sri Guru Granth Sahib, articulates that men and women are all forms of the Creator (God).

ਏਤੇ ਅਉਰਤ ਮਰਦਾ ਸਾਜੈ ਏ ਸਭ ਰੂਪ ਤੁਮਹਾਰੇ ॥

*Ēte aurat marḍā sājē e sabh rūp
tumhāre.*

(O Lord!) You have fashioned all these men and women. All these are Your forms. (Bhagat Kabir, SGGS, p. 1349)

Guru Nanak asserted that rather than being denigrated and mistreated, women should be cherished and respected. He proclaimed:

ਭੰਡਿ ਜੰਮੀਐ ਭੰਡਿ ਨਿੰਮੀਐ ਭੰਡਿ ਮੰਗਣੁ ਵੀਆਹੁ ॥

ਭੰਡਹੁ ਹੋਵੈ ਦੋਸਤੀ ਭੰਡਹੁ ਚਲੈ ਰਾਹੁ ॥

ਭੰਡੁ ਮੁਆ ਭੰਡੁ ਭਾਲੀਐ ਭੰਡਿ ਹੋਵੈ ਬੰਧਾਨੁ ॥

ਸੋ ਕਿਉ ਮੰਦਾ ਆਖੀਐ ਜਿਤੁ ਜੰਮਹਿ ਰਾਜਾਨ ॥

ਭੰਡਹੁ ਹੀ ਭੰਡੁ ਉਪਜੈ ਭੰਡੈ ਬਾਝੁ ਨ ਕੋਇ ॥

ਨਾਨਕ ਭੰਡੈ ਬਾਹਰਾ ਏਕੋ ਸਚਾ ਸੋਇ ॥

*Bhand jammī ai bhand nimī ai
bhand mangan vī āhu. Bhandahu
hovai ḡostī bhandahu ḡhalai rāhu.
Bhand mu ā bhand bhālī ai bhand
hovai bandhān. So ki o manḡā
ākḡī ai jīt jamēh rājān. Bhandahu hī
bhand ūpjai bhandai bājḡ na koīe.
Nānak bhandai bāhrā eko sachā soīe.*

We all are born of women; we are conceived in a woman's womb. To a woman, one is engaged and married. One makes friendship with a woman; through woman, future generations are born. When a woman (wife) dies, a person marries another one; we are bound with the world through woman. So why should we talk ill of her? From her, kings are born. From a woman, a woman is born; without women, there would be no one at all. O Nanak, God alone is without a woman. (M. 1, SGGS, p 473)

Guru Nanak and his successor Sikh Gurus actively encouraged women's participation as equals in worship, society, and the battleground. They supported freedom of speech and women were encouraged to participate in all religious activities, including the reading of Sri Guru Granth Sahib. Guru Nanak granted equality to women by admitting them into the Sangat (congregation) without any restrictions or reservations. He asserted that his message was meant as much for women as for men.

Guru Angad, the second Sikh Guru, encouraged the education of all Sikhs, both men and women. Guru Amar Das, the third Sikh Guru, disfavoured the use of the veil by women. He encouraged women to take up a leadership role in society and assigned women to supervise some communities of disciples. In addition,

he forbade the practice of Sati (widow burning) and female infanticide and encouraged remarriage of widows. Guru Amar Das proclaimed:

ਸਤਿਆ ਏਹਿ ਨ ਆਖੀਅਨਿ ਜੋ ਮਤਿਆ ਲਗਿ
ਜਲੰਨਿਹੁ ॥ ਨਾਨਕ ਸਤੀਆ ਜਾਣੀਅਨਿਹੁ ਜਿ
ਬਿਰਹੇ ਚੋਟ ਮਰੰਨਿਹੁ ॥

Satīā ehi na ākhīan jo marīā lag
jala'nnih. Nānak satīā
jāñīānihi jē birhe chot marā'nnih.

Do not call them 'satee', who burn alive on their husband's funeral pyre. Nanak says: They alone be called 'satee', who die from the shock of separation. (M. 3, SGGS, p. 787)

Guru Ram Das, the fourth Sikh Guru, condemned the dowry ritual. He articulated:

ਹੋਰਿ ਮਨਮੁਖ ਦਾਜੁ ਜਿ ਰਖਿ ਦਿਖਾਲਹਿ ਸੁ ਕੂੜੁ
ਅਹੰਕਾਰੁ ਕਚੁ ਪਾਜੇ ॥

Hor manmukh dāj jē rakh dikhālēh so
kūr aha'nkār kach pājo.

A self-oriented person, who offers dowry and makes a show of it, indulges in only false egotism and a worthless display. (M 4, SGGS, p. 79)

Guru Hargobind, the sixth Sikh Guru, bestowing much respect for women, declared, "woman is the conscience of man". Guru Gobind Singh, the tenth Sikh Guru, made the Khalsa initiation ceremony open to men and women alike, proclaiming a woman being just as worthy. He bestowed the surname Kaur (meaning princess) to all the baptized women. Guru Gobind Singh conferred equality among the Khalsa, men or women, as they both could keep the 5 Ks. He instructed the Khalsa not to associate with kanyapapi (the person who sins against a woman). He also forbade Sikhs to exercise any proprietary rights over women captured in battle; they could not be kept as slaves or wives but were to be treated with the utmost respect. Sikh doctrines also emphasize that both men and women carry the same divine essence. Thereby they possess an equal right to cultivate their spirituality and achieve salvation.

Women can participate in all religious, cultural, social, and secular activities.

Even during the Sikh revival movement that started in the 1870s, the Singh Sabha raised its voice against the purdah system, female infanticide, child marriage, sati, bad conditions of widows, the practice of dowry and extravagant expenditure during marriage ceremonies. Remember all this was happening in India's male-dominated Muslim and Hindu societies hundreds of years before the feminist movement.

Equality for women has always been one of the main attributes of Sikhism, and a great number of women have made significant contributions in the past. Sikh history is replete with exemplars that portray women as equal to men in service, devotion, sacrifice, and bravery. A few examples in this regard are Bibi Nanaki, Mata Khivi Ji, Mata Gujari Ji, Mata Sahib Kaur, Mai Bhago, Rani Sahib Kaur, Rani Sada Kaur, and Maharani Jind Kaur. And this progress is continuing. Today, women are playing leadership roles in the Sikh faith, including leading congregations. They work with men in Langar (community kitchen), join the Sangat (congregation) and participate in other social and religious activities in the gurdwaras. They enjoy the same voting rights as men to elect the members of the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee, which administers Sikhs' places of worship.

Unfortunately, Sikh society has not been able to fully overcome old cultural traditions and live up to the ideals of gender equality taught by Sikh Gurus. Most of the Gurdwara managements and the profession of Granthis are primarily male dominated. Ritual services like chaurseva (a ceremonial whisk waving over the Guru Granth Sahib) and Sukh-aasan (protocol followed at the end of the day to "retire" the holy Scripture to a special room called

Sachkhand) at Harmandir Sahib are still mostly male-dominated. Besides, Women are still not allowed to assist in carrying the palanquin carrying the holy Sikh Scriptures to and from the Harmandir Sahib. Even though the Sikh religion discards the notion that a menstruating woman is impure, the above situation prevails as patriarchy in Sikh society still holds the same as taboo.

However, it is heartening to note that the Sikh diaspora is taking the lead in opening many aspects of this ritual life for women. Another concern is that sex-selective abortions, driven by a desire for male children, are driving down the sex ratio in Punjab. It is encouraging to note that most Sikh religious organizations, including the Akal Takht, have spoken up against this practice.


In light of the Sikh doctrines proclaiming the equality of men and women, we should all pledge to make this world free from prejudice, irrational traditions, and gender discrimination. Let us strive together to create a world where each woman has easy access to the opportunities to reach her desired potential in life.

Dr. Devinder Pal Singh, Ph.D. is a Physicist by training, a teacher by profession and Sikh theologian by choice. He has published two books: *Science and Sikhism-Conflict or Coherence* and *Dharam te Vigyan*. His two booklets are 'Guru Nanak's Scientific Attitude' & 'Dharam, Vigyan te Vidiarthi'. He has written 150 articles, about 30 Radio Talks, and over 75 TV Talks and Youtube presentations on various aspects of Sikhism. Presently, he is serving as Director, Center for Understanding Sikhism, Mississauga, ON, Canada. He is also the Editorial Advisory Board Member of The Sikh Review journal published from Kolkata, WB, India. His email id is: c4usikhism@gmail.com.

GENDER EQUALITY IN GURU NANAK'S THOUGHT

Nadia Singh





Sikhism as a faith tradition is widely celebrated for its egalitarian ethos. This religious tradition was founded by Guru Nanak over five hundred years ago. He was a revolutionary thinker and philosopher, who questioned the dominant religious and societal practices of the time, which were devoid of rationality and instead forged a new spiritual pathway founded on the ideals of equality, justice, and humanism.

Guru Nanak was strongly committed to annihilation of socio-cultural inequalities in the Indian society. Yet, in the modern Sikh community, caste and gender discrimination continue unabated. Between the early 1990s and late 2000s Sikh / Punjabi communities became infamous for the practice of sex selective female foeticide; among diaspora Sikh communities there have been several cases of honour killings and forced marriages; women only have a symbolic presence in major Sikh institutions and organisations. It is in this context that the article attempts to analyse what explains the continued existence of gendered inequalities and subordination of women in Sikh society and polity, despite Guru Nanak's strong emphasis on equality of all human beings.

Guru Nanak and rejection of ritualism

Guru Nanak (1469-1539), the founder of Sikhism castigated societal rituals and practices that bred discrimination and

subjugation of certain socio-economic groups in society, including women and low caste people. He was born in a socio-cultural milieu wherein caste and gender discrimination received both religious and social sanctification.

For instance, low caste communities were regarded as "untouchables" and were prohibited from entering and praying in Hindu temples. Manusmriti, the dominant Hindu scripture denigrated women by portraying them as dependent creatures, requiring constant protection and supervision, first by the father, then by the husband and later by the son. Women were denied the right to receive education, enter an assembly, train in a profession, or acquire an inheritance.

If a Hindu woman's husband died before her, she was deemed inauspicious and expected to perform sati by burning herself on the funeral pyre of her husband. Widows were required to lead an ascetic life, wherein they were prohibited from dressing in colourful clothes or wear any adornments. There were also several superstitions attached to menstruating women. During the menstrual period, upper caste Hindu women were considered "polluted" and segregated from the rest of their family so that the pollution did not spread to them. They were not allowed to cook, have their meals with the rest of the family and enter places of worship during this

time of the month. Ironically, such prejudices continue to hold in many parts of India even till date.

Guru Nanak questioned these rituals, which lacked a scientific or a rational basis and gave divine sanction to the degradation and injustice experienced by large sections of humanity. He vehemently opposed these discriminatory practices. His disdain of empty ritualism is best exemplified when as a child of eleven he refused to undergo the *upanayama ceremony* and wear the sacred thread to confirm his status as a member of a privileged caste. He challenged the practice of categorizing people into inferior and superior categories based on an accident of birth. He questioned the priest performing the ceremony and said, "How can one categorise people through such means? It is their actions which make them good or bad." Instead, he proclaimed,

***"Make compassion the cotton,
contentment the thread,
continence the knot and truth the
twist. This is the sacred thread of
the soul and if thou has it
O' Brahmin then put it on me"***
(AGGS, M1: 471).

In her work, *The Feminine Principle in the Sikh Vision of the Transcendent*, Nikki Guninder Singh has analysed how Guru Nanak's close relationship with his sister Nanaki, after whom he was named, caused him to be deeply empathetic and sensitive to the discrimination that women faced in the cultural milieu of his time. It is believed that Bebe Nanaki was an especially strong influence on the young Nanak in his formative years. She was the first to recognise his deep philosophical outlook, even when his parents were perturbed by his unconventional thinking and lack of material pursuits. She would

often protect young Nanak from his father's wrath. As a young man, Nanak went to live with his sister in her marital home when his father became increasingly vexed at his lack of ambition. It is said that Bebe Nanaki also encouraged him to give a musical form to his sermons and introduced him to the rabab.

Gender equality in Guru Nanak's thought

Gender equity was one of the core tenets of his philosophy. He believed that the divine resided in the heart of every human being, including women and vehemently opposed the societal and cultural practices which accorded an inferior status to women in society. He considered the equality between men and women a core principle of an egalitarian society. He gave a clarion call for equity and justice to women in society and provided a scriptural basis for equality between the two sexes, which was not common in the dominant religious practices. There are several passages in the Gurbani, which reflect his attitude towards women in society. The most famous of these is:

***"Of woman are we born, of woman
conceived. Why treat her with
disdain, from whom are born
Kings? From a woman, a man is
born. Without a woman, there can
be none. Nanak, only the one True
Lord, is without a woman"***
(AGGS, M 1, p 473).

Guru Nanak rejected all forms of ascetism and elaborate forms of worship which excluded women and contributed to their stigmatization. His views on women were unlike those of the Hindu and Jain strands of thinking, which either elevated a woman to the status of a *Devi* (Goddess) or reduced her to a

seductress who prevented males from attaining enlightenment and salvation. In contrast, Guru Nanak emphasised on the equal part played by women and men in society. He rejected the idea of *sanyas* and spoke of the importance of *grihast*, wherein men and women played an equally important role in the creation of an ideal society. In his later years, he created the Kartarpur model of community-based living, where men and women participated as equal members in the practices of *sangat*, *pangat* and *langar*.

The *Manusmriti* legitimized the domination of women by men in all stages of her life; be it her father, mother, or son. In contrast to this, Guru Nanak said that there is one God or supreme being (Akal purakh) who is a genderless entity and everyone else is equal. He also abolished the idea of the Brahmin (priest) as an intermediary between humans and the divine and said that all humans are equal in their quest for the divine. According to Nikki Guninder Singh, Nanak's poetry has strong feminine imagery. In many of his hymns Guru Nanak portrayed his search for the divine, evoking the metaphor of a woman in search of her beloved. He was also deeply conscious of the gender injustices experienced by women, and the price that they pay during the times of wars and civil conflicts. For instance, Guru Nanak wrote several passages in the Babar Bani wherein he described the vagaries of war from a women's perspective. In the second paragraph of the Babar Bani he presented a heart wrenching treatise on the torment faced by women during the time of Babar's invasion. Here he compels us to see how gendered injustice is inherently connected to social, political, and economic

realities of the times and the price women pay because of their gender during wars and conflicts which are not of their making.

This tradition of gender equality was carried forward by the other Sikh Gurus as well. Guru Amardas condemned the practice of sati and actively campaigned for the emancipation of women from this cruel and inhuman societal practice. He also encouraged widowed women to remarry and denounced the practice of purdah. In contrast to Hindu scriptures like Manusmriti, which advocated that a married woman must treat her husband like God, Guru Amardas conceptualised

Singh included women as an integral part of the Sikh faith and freed them from the confines of caste, rooted in their birth and marital identities.

These ideals of gender equality in the practice of the Sikh Gurus were later institutionalised in the form of the Sikh code of conduct (rahit maryada) which emphatically denounced discrimination on the basis of gender in any form, forbade the practice of dowry, female infanticide and sati and actively encouraged widow remarriage.

During the period of the Gurus, women became active participants in the evolution and development of this burgeoning religious tradition.

role in liaising between the second and third Guru. Mai Bhago, a valiant woman led an army of forty Sikh men in the Battle of Muktsar (1705) against the Mughals.

The Battle of Muktsar was a David versus Goliath battle in which 250 Khalsa warriors fought against an army of over twenty thousand Mughal soldiers. Mai Bhago was one of the few survivors of this battle. She later became one of Guru Gobind Singh's personal bodyguards and accompanied him wherever he went.

Throughout the Guru period up to 1708, women and men were equal partners in the formulation of the

“Of woman are we born, of woman conceived. Why treat her with disdain, from whom are born Kings? From a woman, a man is born. Without a woman, there can be none. Nanak, only the one True Lord, is without a woman”
(AGGS, M 1, p 473).

marriage as the spiritual union of two souls. He wrote,

“They alone are called husband and wife who have one light in two bodies” (SGGS: 377).

Guru Ramdas denounced the practice of dowry, as an unwanted societal practice which resulted in the birth of daughters being unwelcome. Upon the creation of Khalsa, the tenth Sikh Guru, Guru Gobind Singh gave Sikh women the title of Kaur, which resulted in a distinctive identity for Sikh women, not dependent on either their fathers or husbands. Through this revolutionary step, Guru Gobind

At this time women provided leadership to Sikh institutions, composed poetry, and participated as equal members in the fight against injustice and religious dogmatism. There are numerous examples of women's contribution to the evolution and expansion of Sikhism. For instance, Mata Khivi, the wife of the second Sikh Guru, Guru Angad played an instrumental role in expanding the practice of langar for over thirty years. Such was her influence that langar came to be known as “Khivi ka langar.” Bibi Amaro, the daughter of Guru Angad and Mata Khivi formed an important

new Sikh community. However, this tradition began to be reversed from the time of Maharaja Ranjit Singh.

During this time, pomp and ceremony flourished, and ritualism was re-introduced in the Sikh faith, something the Gurus had shunned upon. In Maharaja Ranjit Singh's court, the practice of purdah and Sati were revived. It is believed that four of his queens performed Sati when he died. The emphasis on simplicity and intellectual pursuits espoused by the Gurus gave way to ostentation and show.

Egalitarian ideals of Gurbani and praxis among the Sikh community

It is a sad reality that today, the Sikh community is a deeply patriarchal society, and the gains of equality for women which were advocated by Guru Nanak have largely been reversed. The all-pervading influence of patriarchal values and sexist doctrines embedded in Indian society and polity again dominate and despite the spiritual prescriptions, present day Sikh institutions remain heavily male centric and ritualistic. The voices of women, symbols and imagery of equality remain largely underrepresented in the day-to-day functioning of Sikh organisations. For instance, the SGPC which yields immense influence in Sikh life remains dominated by men largely.

In everyday lives of Sikhs, the principles of gender equality are not being practised. Sons are considered an asset, and daughters a burden. While Punjab ranks high in terms of overall development score, among all other states of India, it ranks 19th in terms of the Gender Development Index. Until recently, Punjab was notorious for the widespread practice of sex selective female abortions. In 2001, the Fatehgarh Sahib district was estimated to have the worst sex ratio at all India level and was labelled with the infamous sobriquet of "a region of kudi maars – a region of daughter slayers." Many empirical studies in Punjab have highlighted how son preference is deeply entrenched in the psyche of the Punjabi population and continues even among the educated and privileged sections of the Sikh community and diaspora Sikh communities. For instance, in

Vancouver, Canada, a place with a large Sikh migrant population, some investigative studies found evidence of sex selective female abortions among families who already had one girl child. The evidence from this study created a tremendous furore and in 2021, a bill was introduced (though ultimately defeated) in the Canadian House of Commons outlawing sex selective female abortions.

While the practice of dowry is forbidden in the Sikh code of conduct (Rehat Maryada), this societal evil continues unabated in Sikh

**"Make compassion the
cotton, contentment the
thread, continence the
knot and truth the
twist. This is the sacred
thread of the soul and if
thou has it O' Brahmin
then put it on me"
(AGGS, M1: 471).**

households, leading to considerable financial burden on the daughter's parents. The girls' parents are not only expected to spend lavishly and host an opulent wedding for their daughter, but they are also expected to give expensive gifts, jewels, and cash to the groom's family.

These ostentatious practices, rooted in greed and avarice lead to further societal discrimination against the girl child and cause parents to see her as a burden from the moment that she is born.

Conclusion

To conclude, we establish that Guru Nanak and the subsequent Sikh Gurus rejected the various "isms" prevalent in Indian society – be it casteism, ritualism, religious dogmatism or sexism and created a vision of an egalitarian society. Guru Nanak's teaching not only provided a spiritual basis of a gender equitable society, but he also gave a practical blueprint for the realisation of his utopian vision in the form of the Kartarpur model of development, wherein men and women worked as equal partners for their spiritual and intellectual fulfilment. However, in subsequent centuries, the egalitarian vision of the Gurus was subsumed by the patriarchal super-structures in Indian society. If we pride ourselves as proud Sikhs, the disciples of Guru Nanak, we must seek the path of life from the teachings of our great Guru Nanak and reject the ritualism which Guru Nanak spoke against. If we want to truly become a model community, we must first build a society on the thought of Guru Nanak. The cornerstone of such a society is equality of women and men.

Nadia Singh is an Assistant Professor in Economics at the Northumbria University, Newcastle UK, & a fellow of the UK Higher Education Academy. Her research interests are focused in the area of development and gender economics. Nadia is also focused on the application of Sikh philosophy to issues of sustainable development and environmental governance. She recently co-edited a two-volume work for Palgrave Macmillan titled Faith Traditions and Practices in the Workplace: The Role of Religion in Unprecedented Times.

Available at all leading bookstores & online!

History

Fun
Facts

Maps



Turn the pages and revisit the history of
The Mighty Sikh Empire.

Himmat and Nanki are back, exploring the wondrous world
of the Sikhs. Read about Maharaja Ranjit Singh and the
glory of the Khalsa Army. Journey along the Koh-i-Noor,
as it finds its way to the Tower of London.



SIKHI, THE BIG BANG, THE BLACK HOLES AND BEYOND

PART-2

Dr. Hardial Singh Dhillon

The present age: current situation of the universe

Hitherto, we have established that both in Sikhi and Science, events leading to and immediately after the big bang are surprisingly similar. But the events described by science to be accidental are, in fact, according to Sikhi, the expressions of the will of the Akal Purakh. The ocean of energy stated by science, prior to the Big Bang (BB), is the trance state of the Lord, which lasted for countless number of years (Part 1); the narrative continues...

The Milky Way (our galaxy) is spread across 100,000 light years of space. Until the 1970s, only our solar system (the Sun and 8 planets) were known. In the last 25 years, we have gone from wondering if the universe is devoid of planets to knowing that the universe is streaming with planets; the milky way galaxy contains more planets than stars - hundreds and billions of them. (BBC2, Ep 2 - 1/11/21).

There are more than 200 billion stars in our galaxy alone. There are 2 trillion galaxies in the observable universe. 100 million years after the universe was born (13.8 billion years ago), the first star was born; after 9 billion years, our sun was

formed - we are half way to the life of our Sun. 5 billion years later, our Sun will die, giving rise to other stars. 10 trillion years later, the universe will die, leading to an expansion of the universe, followed by an age of darkness. (BBC 2, Ep 1 - 30/10/21)

Like science, however, SGGS boldly states, again and again, the existence of trillions of stars and galaxies.

ਕੇਤੇ ਇੰਦ ਚੰਦ ਸੂਰ ਕੇਤੇ, ਕੇਤੇ ਮੰਡਲ ਦੇਸ ॥
[M: 1, Paurhi 35, Japji, SGGS/7]

There are infinite (deities like) Inders (clouds), infinite moons; infinite suns and infinite spheres of motion (of solar systems).

ਤਿਥੇ ਖੰਡ ਮੰਡਲ ਵਰਡੰਡ ॥ ਜੇ ਕੇ ਕਥੈ, ਤ ਅੰਤ ਨ ਅੰਤ ॥ ਤਿਥੇ ਲੋਅ ਲੋਅ ਆਕਾਰ ॥ ਜਿਵ ਜਿਵ ਹੁਕਮੁ ਤਿਵੇ ਤਿਵ ਕਾਰ ॥ ...ਨਾਨਕ ਕਥਨਾ ਕਰਤਾ ਸਾਰੁ ॥ 37 ॥

[M: 1, Japji, Paurhi 37, SGGS/8]

There in this realm (of union with the Akal Purakh) one (sees) infinite planets, solar systems and universes. (So vast, that) if one endeavours to count, they appear endless. There (in this realm) one (sees) the appearance of infinite worlds and firmaments, (within all of which) the routine tasks/functions are manoeuvring in accordance with the prevailing divine command of the Akal Purakh

(i.e in this realm, the being sees the will of the Akal Purakh prevailing everywhere) ...O, Nanak! To sum this up is as hard as (biting upon) steel (that is, it is beyond narrative: it can only be realised). ॥37॥

ਪਉੜੀ ॥ ਖੰਡ ਪਤਾਲ ਅਸੰਖ ਮੈ ਗਣਤ ਨ ਹੋਈ ॥
ਤੂ ਕਰਤਾ ਗੋਵਿੰਦੁ ਤੁਧੁ ਸਿਰਜੀ ਤੁਧੈ ਗੋਈ ॥ ਲਖ
ਚਉਰਾਸੀਹ ਮੇਦਨੀ ਤੁਝ ਹੀ ਤੇ ਹੋਈ ॥...॥ 12 ॥
[M: 1, Malar ki Var, GGSJ/1283]

Paurhi ॥ There are countless planets and nether regions (of the cosmos) that I am unable to count. (O, Lord!) Thou are the creator and the carer (of this cosmos); thou both create and destroy all the countless organisms within the cosmos (lit. 8.4 million speciation - an expression to say, the whole creation) have stemmed from thee....॥12॥

...ਕਈ ਕੋਟਿ ਸਸੀਅਰ ਸੂਰ ਨਖੜੁ ॥...॥ 3
॥...॥10॥ Gauri Mahala 5, 275

(In this created cosmos of thine, O, Lord!), there are countless moons, suns and galaxies ...॥3॥...॥10॥

A single universe or multiple? What about organisms elsewhere?

Science, as yet, is busy with unravelling the mysteries of this universe but often does talk about the black holes that may lead into other universes. Scientific evidence

takes time to collect and to verify. The James Webb Telescope (launched on 24/12/21) may cast more light on this mystery of multiple universes.

Regarding life elsewhere? Science has found no evidence so far, but is not without speculations.

In the last 25 years, it has been confirmed that the Milky Way Galaxy contains more planets than stars – hundreds and billions of them; hitherto 4000 planets have been discovered.

The laws of nature that form planets are the same and universally applicable, so the laws of biology, chemistry and physics would be universally applicable too. Every living organism on earth requires water and the same would apply elsewhere. In fact, the universe is filled with water; great reservoirs have been detected throughout our galaxy, amongst gas clouds of giant nebulae.

Here on Earth, about 4 billion years ago, geo-thermal (supply of energy) would have caused chemicals to react in liquid water as a solvent, giving rise to life. Say the Astro-biologists, 'if you want to search for life (elsewhere in the universe) follow the water'. (BBC 2, Ep 2, 1/11/21)

Science should not be undermined or under-estimated for its brilliant discoveries. The process of photosynthesis, that utilises the Sun's energy to synthesise glucose and oxygen in plants, seems to be quite primitive in some earlier organisms (like cyno-bacteria, blue green algae etc) but very well established in higher plants. Such complex system involves 46,630 atoms, working together in unison – a major triumph of nature and

science, that enables organisms like us (animals) to be sustained and evolved, for their waste product, oxygen, is our life line. If this process could be repeated elsewhere in the universe (and there is no reason as to why it shouldn't be, since the laws of science are universally applicable), then organisms like us and plants, could exist on numerous planets where conditions, like that on Earth, are conducive to life. Over a 9 year period the Hubble Telescope has detected 2,500 planets, similar to the earth, with water. One estimate is that some 20 billion earth like rocky-planets could be circling their stars, where life is possible.

ਦੁਹਾ ਸਿਰਿਆ ਕਾ ਆਪਿ ਸੁਆਮੀ ॥ ਖੇਲੈ ਬਿਗਸੈ ਅੰਤਰਜਾਮੀ ॥

'The Akal Purakh alone is the Master of here and the hereafter; the omniscient Lord itself plays & rejoices the cosmic-melodrama'

The questions to be asked are – what are the chances of 'microbes' being detected? What are the chances of detecting highly complex organisms (like humans) that may have formed 'civilisations'? At present, only an educated guess is possible. Here on earth, it took 4 billion years to evolve into civilisation (i.e a continuity of progress), without any major losses. So, stability and time are the two major factors that are needed.

The nearest larger galaxies are some 2 million light years away. 'There is no conceivable technology that would ever allow us physically to leave our island of galaxy' – Prof. Brian Cox. (BBC 2, Ep 2, 6/11/21).

SGGS, however, boldly mentions the

existence of countless universes, as well as organisms elsewhere, whose daily chores and sustenance are within the hands of the Akal Purakh, whose divine command subdues everyone, only the Akal Purakh alone is devoid of it. Surprisingly, like the astrobiologists, it mentions the importance of water, and life been conceived in water:

ਸਲੋਕੁ ਮ: ੧ ॥ ...ਪਹਿਲਾ ਪਾਣੀ ਜੀਉ ਹੈ ਜਿਤੁ
ਹਰਿਆ ਸਭੁ ਕੋਇ ॥ ...॥ 1 ॥

[Assa Ki Var, M: 1, Shloke 1, Paurhi
18, SGGS/472]

First and foremost, water is the ingredient of life, that abides within all.

The formation of the world is attributable to the combination of air, water and fire:

ਪ੍ਰਭਾਤੀ ਮਹਲਾ 1 ॥ ...ਜਲੁ ਤਰੰਗ ਅਗਨੀ
ਪਵਨੈ ਫੁਨਿ ਤ੍ਰੈ ਮਿਲਿ ਜਗਤੁ ਉਪਾਇਆ ॥
ਐਸਾ ਬਲੁ ਫਲੁ ਤਿਨ ਕਉ ਦੀਆ ਹੁਕਮੀ
ਠਾਕਿ ਰਹਾਇਆ ॥ 6 ॥ ॥ 8 ॥ 7 ॥
[Parbhathi, M: 1, SGGS/1345]

Parbhathi Mahala 1 ॥It is realised through the Guru, that the Lord itself created the elements of water, fire and air (etc) and these three, together obeying the divine command, (helped to) establish the world. The Lord has endowed these elements with immense power, but with its divine command has prevented (them from being excessive in their pursuit) ॥6॥... ॥8॥7॥

Surprisingly, Kabir Ji in the following shabad indirectly accounts for the process of photosynthesis too:

...ਬ੍ਰਹਮ ਪਾਤੀ ਬਿਸਨੁ ਭਾਰੀ ਫੂਲ ਸੰਕਰਦੇਉ ॥
ਤੀਨਿ ਦੇਵ ਪ੍ਰਤਖਿ ਤੋਹਰਿ ਕਰਹਿ ਕਿਸ ਕੀ ਸੇਉ

॥ 2 ॥ ॥ 5 ॥ 1 ॥ 14 ॥

[Rag Assa, Kabir, GGSJ/479]

...O, florist! The leaves are an embodiment of Brahma (equivalent to the creative force, as they absorb solar energy), the branches are an embodiment of Vishnu representing sustenance (like sucrose etc, being translocated elsewhere) and the flowers embody Shiv-deity (destruction, after pollination is complete). In front of thy very eyes, thou have obliterated all three deities, to whom are thou (then) venerating? II2II II4II1II14II

(Note – the names of three deities mentioned above are regarded in Hinduism to be the ones who give,

this article to discuss the evolution of organisms; this topic has been discussed elsewhere (readers are guided to *Nishaan Nagaara*, Annual Issue 2021, pp.8-15, and *The Sikh Review*, February 2022, pp 12-21).

It suffices to say that countless organisms exist, here on earth; they have evolved through evolution to the highest state of being human and the process of evolution continues.

ਕਈ ਕੋਟਿ ਖਾਣੀ ਅਰੁ ਖੰਡ ॥ ਕਈ ਕੋਟਿ ਅਕਾਸ ਬ੍ਰਹਮੰਡ ॥ ਕਈ ਕੋਟਿ ਹੋਏ ਅਵਤਾਰ ॥ ਕਈ ਜੁਗਤਿ ਕੀਨੇ ਬਿਸਥਾਰ ॥ ...ਕਈ ਕੋਟਿ ਕੀਨੇ ਬਹੁ ਭਾਤਿ ॥ ਪ੍ਰਭ ਤੇ ਹੋਏ ਪ੍ਰਭ ਮਾਹਿ ਸਮਾਤਿ ॥ ਤਾ ਕਾ ਅੰਤੁ ਨ ਜਾਨੈ ਕੋਇ ॥ ਆਪੇ ਆਪਿ ਨਾਨਕ ਪ੍ਰਭੁ ਸੋਇ ॥ 7 ॥ [M: 5, Gaurhi, Sukhmani, SGGS/276]

many strategies...The Lord has created many millions of organisms of numerous forms, which by stemming from the Lord, always become absorbed within the Lord. No one knows the limit of such Lord, (because) O, Nanak! The Lord alone is (like itself) II7II...II10II

Says Prof. Cox, 'we are the most magnificent creation of nature,' and SGGS agrees and confirms human evolution through different speciation, has given rise to the human body; the only organism that is fully conscious on this earth.

ਪਉੜੀ ॥ ...ਤੁਧੁ ਜੇਵਡੁ ਦਾਤਾਰੁ ਮੈ ਕੋਈ ਨਦਰਿ ਨ ਆਵਈ ਤੁਧੁ ਸਭਸੈ ਨੋ ਦਾਨੁ ਦਿਤਾ
ਖੰਡੀ ਵਰਭੰਡੀ ਪਾਤਾਲੀ ਪੁਰਈ ਸਭ ਲੋਈ

॥ 3 ॥ M: 4, Bihagrhe ki Var, SGGS/549

Paurhi II ...I can see no other benefactor parred with thee; it is you who bestowed thy blessing upon all the universes and the parts there of (e.g other solar systems and galaxies etc), the nether regions, and the organisms of all the (fourteen) worlds II3II

sustain and destroy life respectively; in Sikhi, they are regarded as three instruments of nature; scientifically, the above paragraph is ample evidence of photosynthesis – the creative, sustained and eventually destructive forces of nature).

The planet earth alone contains countless organisms that resulted from eggs, placental wearing organisms, binary fission and seeds. It is beyond the scope of

(Within the nine) continents (of the earth) and via the (four) sources/mines of creation (namely, through eggs, the placental wearing ones, through binary fission, and from seeds), countless organisms have originated; within all skies and universes, there are countless millions of organisms.

There are millions of beings who continue to take birth; the Lord has enacted the world through

ਬਿਲਾਵਲੁ ਮਹਲਾ ੫ ॥ ...ਫਿਰਤ ਫਿਰਤ ਮਾਨੁਖੁ
ਭਇਆ ਖਿਨ ਭੰਗਨ ਦੇਹਾਦਿ ॥ ਇਹ ਅਉਸਰ ਤੇ
ਚੁਕਿਆ ਬਹੁ ਜੋਨਿ ਕ੍ਰਮਾਦਿ ॥ 3 ॥ ...॥ 4 ॥
8 ॥ 38 ॥

[Bilaval Mahala 5, SGGS/810]

...O, brother! Pursuing through countless lives, the being acquires a human-form, this body too is instantly perishable (why be so proud of it? Even being in this body, the being remains devoid of Lord's Nam). Being belated from this

opportunity, the being (once again) ends up pursuing the countless cycles of lives II3II...II4II8II38II

Science says we do not know why we are here, except that we are the result of the most complex of chemical reactions; without us the universe would be a void, a dead place. We are made to be curious; our thoughts and imagination reach the sky, amongst the canopy of the stars to explore them.

But SGGS gives us a firm guidance and says that upon this earth, thou, O, human, are supreme, and thy purpose of life is to unite with the Lord.

ਅਵਰ ਜੋਨਿ ਤੇਰੀ ਪਨਿਹਾਰੀ ॥ ਇਸੁ ਧਰਤੀ ਮਹਿ ਤੇਰੀ ਸਿਕਦਾਰੀ ॥4॥...॥5॥...॥ 12 ॥
Assa, M: 5, SGGS/374

The entire species are at thy service; only thou are the chieftain (of all) upon this Earth...II4II...II5II ...II12II

ਆਸਾ ਮਹਲਾ 5 ॥ ਭਈ ਪਰਾਪਤਿ ਮਾਨੁਖ ਦੇਹੁਰੀਆ ॥ ਗੋਬਿੰਦ ਮਿਲਣ ਕੀ ਇਹ ਤੇਰੀ ਬਰੀਆ ॥ ਅਵਰਿ ਕਾਜ ਤੇਰੈ ਕਿਤੇ ਨ ਕਾਮ ॥...॥ 1 ॥...॥ 2 ॥ 4 ॥
[Assa Mahala 5, SGGS/12]

(O, brother!) Thou have been bestowed with a graceful body; this is the apt time for you to unite with the Lord. All other self-indulgence tasks are of no consequence (i.e non-beneficial to thy soul)...II1II...II2II4II

There is no end to the universes either: wherever the organisms are, the Lord takes care of them all.

ਪਉੜੀ ॥ ...ਤੁਧੁ ਜੇਵਡੁ ਦਾਤਾਰੁ ਮੈ ਕੋਈ ਨਦਰਿ ਨ ਆਵਈ ਤੁਧੁ ਸਭਸੈ ਨੋ ਦਾਨੁ ਦਿਤਾ ਖੰਡੀ ਵਰਭੰਡੀ ਪਾਤਾਲੀ ਪੁਰਈ ਸਭ ਲੋਈ ॥ 3 ॥
[M: 4, Bihagrhe ki Var, SGGS/549]

Paurhi II ...I can see no other benefactor parred with thee; it is you who bestowed thy blessing

upon all the universes and the parts there of (e.g other solar systems and galaxies etc), the nether regions, and the organisms of all the (fourteen) worlds II3II

ਸੋਰਠਿ ਮਹਲਾ 5 ॥ ਕੋਟਿ ਬ੍ਰਹਮੰਡ ਕੋ ਠਾਕੁਰੁ ਸੁਆਮੀ ਸਰਬ ਜੀਆ ਕਾ ਦਾਤਾ ਰੇ ॥ ਪ੍ਰਤਿਪਾਲੈ ਨਿਤ ਸਾਰਿ ਸਮਾਲੈ ਇਕੁ ਗੁਨੁ ਨਹੀ ਮੁਰਖਿ ਜਾਤਾ ਰੇ ॥ 1 ॥...॥ 4 ॥ 2 ॥ 13 ॥
[Sorath Mahala 5, SGGS/612]

O, brother! I, the foolish one, did not appreciate a single benefaction of the Lord, who is the Master and provider of the countless universes, who imparts (sustenance etc) to all the organisms, who nourishes (all the organisms), and always cares for the welfare (of all) II1II...II4II2II13II

ਪਉੜੀ ॥ ...ਖੰਡ ਬ੍ਰਹਮੰਡ ਬੇਅੰਤ ਉਧਾਰਣਹਾਰਿਆ ॥ ਤੇਰੀ ਸੋਭਾ ਤੁਧੁ ਸਚੇ ਮੇਰੇ ਪਿਆਰਿਆ ॥ 12 ॥
[M: 5, Ramkali ki Var, GGSJ/963]

Paurhi II ...O, Lord – the redeemer of infinite number of beings of (multi-) constituents and the entire cosmos (systems like the galaxies and countless universes)! O, my eternal beloved! Thy glory suits unto thyself (i.e thy glory is known unto thyself alone) II12II

ਸਲੋਕ ਮ: 1 ॥ ਪੁਰਖਾਂ ਬਿਰਖਾਂ ਤੀਰਥਾਂ ਤਟਾਂ ਮੇਘਾਂ ਖੇਤਾਂ ॥ ਦੀਪਾਂ ਲੋਆਂ ਮੰਡਲਾਂ ਖੰਡਾਂ ਵਰਭੰਡਾਂ ॥ ਅੰਡਜ ਜੇਰਜ ਉਤਭੁਜਾਂ ਖਾਣੀ ਸੇਤਜਾਂ ॥ ਸੇ ਮਿਤਿ ਜਾਣੈ ਨਾਨਕਾ ਸਰਾਂ ਮੇਰਾਂ ਜੰਤਾਰ ॥ ਨਾਨਕ ਜੰਤ ਉਪਾਇ ਕੈ ਸੰਮਾਲੇ ਸਭਨਾਰ ॥...॥ 1 ॥

[M:1, Assa ki Var, Shloke 1, with Paurhi 8, SGGS/467]

The estimated account of all humans, trees, pilgrimages, the shores/banks (of rivers), clouds, fields, islands, worlds, spheres, the solar systems and universes; the lakes, mountains like the Mer-mountain etc., and the beings created by the four sources,

(namely, the eggs, placental, seeds and binary fission), only the Lord (who created them) knows. O, Nanak! Having created all the organisms, the Lord sustains them too...II1II

ਸਲੋਕ ਮ: 1 ॥...ਜਲਿ ਬਲਿ ਜੀਆ ਪੁਰੀਆ ਲੋਆ ਆਕਾਰਾ ਆਕਾਰ ॥ ਓਇ ਜਿ ਆਖਹਿ ਸੁ ਤੂੰਹੈ ਜਾਣਹਿ ਤਿਨਾ ਭਿ ਤੇਰੀ ਸਾਰ ॥...॥ 1 ॥
[Shloke M: 1, SGGS/465-6]

...Thou are omniscient of all the beings, and they only have thy protection, (O, Lord!), whether they live in water, or upon land, this or other planets or earths, or in other universes....II1II

Every single organism of all four sources of life, is dancing to the tune of maya, except those who obey thy command.

ਗੂਜਰੀ ਮਹਲਾ 3 ਘਰੁ 1 ॥...ਖੰਡ ਬ੍ਰਹਮੰਡ ਤੈ ਗੁਣ ਨਾਚੇ ਜਿਨ ਲਾਗੀ ਹਰਿ ਲਿਵ ਤੁਮਾਰੀ ॥ ਜੀਅ ਜੰਤ ਸਭੇ ਹੀ ਨਾਚੇ ਨਾਚਹਿ ਖਾਣੀ ਚਾਰੀ ॥ 5 ॥
...॥ 10 ॥ 1 ॥ 6 ॥
[Goojari Mahala 3 Ghar 1, SGGS/506]

...O, Lord! All the organisms are dancing (like puppets in the hands of maya); the organisms of all four sources of creation are dancing, the organisms of other spheres and cosmos, subdued by the tri-virtuous maya, are dancing too; but, O, Lord! Those who are devoted to thy wisdom, they perform the dance of being obedient to thy will II5II... II10II11II6II

In part - 3, we shall explore how the universe as we know it would end – the doomsday scenario.

Dr. Hardial Singh Dhillon Ph.D, Honorary Vice-President and a Trustee of the Multi-faith Centre of University of Derby, UK. hardialsd@yahoo.co.uk.

SIKH: A STUDENT FOR LIFE

Bhupinder 'Bo' Singh

Ever wondered why the followers of the path of Guru Nanak Ji are called Sikhs? The word Sikh means a student. The word Guru means the spiritual Master, Teacher – whose light removes the darkness of spiritual ignorance. In that context the word Sikh makes sense, as our Guru has made us – the followers – students for life. But Sikhs don't go to schools with classrooms, nor have a structured system of instructions, no formal examinations, where passing the examination implies understanding of subject matter, resulting in the promotion to next level. So, how does Guru's education system work?

Let us start with what it is like to be without the Guru in life? Guru Ji has provided the answer by saying:

ਗੁਰ ਬਿਨੁ ਘੋਰੁ ਅੰਧਾਰੁ ਗੁਰੁ ਬਿਨੁ ਸਮਝ ਨ ਆਵੈ ॥

"Gur bin ghor a (n) dhaar guroo bin samajh na aavai."

(SGGS, Pg. No. 1399)

Translation: Without the Guru, there is utter darkness; without the Guru, understanding does not come.

So, the light of understanding, which dispels darkness comes from the Guru. The transformation of the Sikh of the Guru becomes evident, when the blind chase (in darkness of ignorance) of material wealth from being the sole objective in life becomes secondary in life:

ਕਬੀਰ ਗੁਰੁ ਲਾਗਾ ਤਬ ਜਾਨੀਐ ਮਿਟੈ ਮੋਹੁ ਤਨ
ਤਾਪ ॥ ਹਰਖ ਸੋਗ ਦਾਤੈ ਨਹੀ ਤਬ ਹਰਿ ਆਪਹਿ
ਆਪਿ ॥੧੮੯॥

"Kabir gur laagaa tab
jaaneeaa miTai moh tan
taap. Harakh sog
dhaajhai nahee tab har aapeh
aap. 189."

(SGGS, Pg. No. 1374)

Translation: Kabir, one is known to have imbibed teachings of the Guru, when his bodily fever (of jealousy) and cravings of material acquisition are eradicated. He is not burned by (either the) pleasure or pain, and so he sees the Lord Himself everywhere. ||189||

The Guru's education transforms the state of mind (above pleasures and pains, jealousy, and desires):

ਗੁਰਮੁਖਿ ਉਪਦੇਸੁ ਦੁਖੁ ਸੁਖੁ ਸਮ ਸਹਤਾ ॥

"Gurmukh upadhes dhukh sukh sam sahataa."

(SGGS, Pg. No. 131)

Translation: Through the Guru's Teachings, one can endure pain and pleasure alike.

Now this is not in any academic curriculum, so this is not taught. The educational institutes with their structured education can make us valued experts in a chosen field, a respected authority figure, but becoming impervious to both - pleasure and pain - is not imparted. It is for this reason Guru Ji extols us

to get the education from the Guru in these words:

ਗੁਰ ਕੀ ਮਤਿ ਤੂੰ ਲੇਹਿ ਇਆਨੇ ॥
ਭਗਤਿ ਬਿਨਾ ਬਹੁ ਡੂਬੇ ਸਿਆਨੇ ॥

"Gur kee mut too(n) leh iaane.
Bhagat binaa bahu ddoobe siaane."
(SGGS, Pg. No. 288)

Translation: Take the Guru's understanding, you are ignorant unlettered; without devotion, even the clever (worldly educated) have drowned (in the world ocean).

Thus, the role and function of the Guru becomes clear. The academic education does not teach us on how not to get drowned in the oceans of desires and greed. The Guru's education changes life's priorities from desires, needs and consumption to keeping those in check. The consequence is that the ego is reined in and humility is inculcated. The walking on the Guru's path is called "Sikhee", which the Guru has defined as:

ਸਿਖੀ ਸਿਖਿਆ ਗੁਰ ਵੀਚਾਰਿ ॥
ਨਦਰੀ ਕਰਮਿ ਲਘਾਏ ਪਾਰਿ ॥

"Sikhee sikhiaa gur veechaar.
Nadharee karam laghaae paar."
(SGGS, Pg. No. 465)

Translation: (Those) imbibing the teachings of Guru's thought process; the merciful (God) grants His Grace, ferries them across (the worldly ocean).

Where is it that the Guru's education is imparted?

The Guru says:

ਗੁਰੂ ਦੁਆਰੈ ਹੋਇ ਸੋਝੀ ਪਾਇਸੀ ॥
ਏਤੁ ਦੁਆਰੈ ਧੋਇ ਹਛਾ ਹੋਇਸੀ ॥

"Guru dhuaarai hoi sojhee paisee.
Aet dhuaarai dhoi hachhaa hoisee."
(SGGS, Pg. No. 730)

Translation: Through the Gurdwara, the Guru's Gate, one obtains understanding. By being washed through this Gate, (mind) becomes pure.

Here, Guru Ji has shared how through the detergent of "Naam", the filth or dirt of mind is removed. The filth clinging to mind is pride, ego, greed, and desires, which have to be removed by becoming free of desires and imbibing humility. Coming to the Guru's door is to become humble. The Guru teaches us to shed ego in these words:

ਭੋਲਿਆ ਹਉਮੈ ਸੁਰਤਿ ਵਿਸਾਰਿ ॥
ਹਉਮੈ ਮਾਰਿ ਬੀਚਾਰਿ ਮਨ ਗੁਣ ਵਿਚਿ ਗੁਣ
ਲੈ ਸਾਰਿ ॥੧॥ ਰਹਾਉ ॥

"Bholiaa haumai surat visaar.
Haumai maar beechaar mun gunn
vich gunn lai saar. 1. Rahaau."
(SGGS, Pg. No. 1168)

Translation: O ignorant one, forget your egotistical intellect. Subdue your ego and remember the one supreme virtue in your mind – (of living by Naam or Divine virtues). ||1||Pause||

One who has made humility his/her own nature, becomes blessed as:

ਕਰਿ ਕਿਰਪਾ ਜਿਸ ਕੈ ਹਿਰਦੈ ਗਰੀਬੀ ਬਸਾਵੈ ॥
ਨਾਨਕ ਈਹਾ ਮੁਕਤੁ ਆਗੈ ਸੁਖੁ ਪਾਵੈ ॥੧॥

"Kar kirapaa jis kai hiradhai
gareebee basaavai. Nanak ieehaa
mukat aagai sukh paavai. 1."
(SGGS, Pg. No. 278)

Translation: One whose heart is mercifully blessed with abiding humility, O Nanak, is liberated here, and obtains Divine peace hereafter (in God's Court). ||1||
When Guru Ji has been given the reins, then the Sikh has relinquished ego, pride, desires, and ambitions. The feeling of having a master Guru

ਐਸੇ ਗੁਰ ਕਉ ਬਲਿ ਬਲਿ ਜਾਈਐ ਆਪਿ
ਮੁਕਤੁ ਮੋਹਿ ਤਾਰੈ ॥੧॥ ਰਹਾਉ ॥

"Aise gur kao bal bal jaeai aap
mukat mohae tarai. 1. Rahao."
(SGGS, Pg. No. 1301)

Translation: I am a sacrifice, a sacrifice to such a Guru; He Himself is liberated, and He carries me across as well. ||1||Pause||

who is all knowing, ushers in a kind of ego dampner in the student that she is just the dust at the feet of the master. This leads to the cultivation of humility in the student, leading to serenity:

ਆਪਸ ਕਉ ਜੋ ਭਲਾ ਕਹਾਵੈ ॥
ਤਿਸਹਿ ਭਲਾਈ ਨਿਕਟਿ ਨ ਆਵੈ ॥
ਸਰਬ ਕੀ ਰੇਨ ਜਾ ਕਾ ਮਨੁ ਹੋਇ ॥
ਕਹੁ ਨਾਨਕ ਤਾ ਕੀ ਨਿਰਮਲ ਸੋਇ ॥੩॥

"Aapas kau jo bhalaa kahaavai. Tiseh
bhalaiee nikaT na aavai. Sarab kee
ren jaa kaa mun hoi. Kahu nanak taa
kee niramal soi. 3."
(SGGS, Pg. No. 278)

Translation: One who claims to be virtuous, virtue does not draw near him. One whose mind has become the dust of all - says Nanak, his pristine reputation spreads around. ||3||

Guru Ji tells us that every human being has yearning for the state of 'Sahaj', un-rocked by the storms of life's crisis, which is obtained from following the teachings of the Gurus. It is innate human nature with which one is born but forgets after birth by becoming attached to the world. That human longing can only be fulfilled through the Guru:

ਸਹਜੈ ਨੇ ਸਭ ਲੋਚਦੀ ਬਿਨੁ ਗੁਰ ਪਾਇਆ ਨ
ਜਾਇ ॥

"Sahajai no sabh lochadhee bin
gur paiaa na jai."
(SGGS, Pg. No. 68)

Translation: Everyone longs to be in 'Sahaj' centered and balanced, but without the Guru, no one can.

It is only through 'Sahaj' that merger with divine takes place. The foundation of humility becomes the support the superstructure of 'Sahaj'. The Guru's teachings will inculcate 'Sahaj' where everything takes place effortlessly:

ਗੁਰ ਬਿਨੁ ਸਹਜੁ ਨ ਊਪਜੈ ਭਾਈ ਪ੍ਰਫੁਹੁ
ਗਿਆਨੀਆ ਜਾਇ ॥

"Gur bin sahaj na uopajai bhaiee
poochhahu giaaneeaa jai."
(SGGS, Pg. No. 638)

Translation: Without the Guru, 'Sahaj' (celestial peace) is not produced, O Siblings of Destiny; go and ask the spiritual teachers about this.

The experience of 'Sahaj' is what the student of the Guru reaps by reining in the ego. Such a student

like a sponge is constantly absorbing Guru's teachings and incorporating them in life. Thus, the seeker in life, a Sikh – the student for life feels the awe of the Creator in creation, and sings His praises:

ਉਤੇ ਉਪਮਾ ਤਾ ਕੀ ਕੀਜੈ ਜਾ ਕਾ ਅੰਤੁ ਨ
ਪਾਇਆ ॥

"UooRai upamaa taa kee keejai jaa
kaa a(n)t na paiaa."
(SGGS, Pg. No. 432)

Translation: Ooraa: Sing the Praises of the One whose limit cannot be found.

"Ooora = ਓ " is the first letter of Gurumukhi, and through it Guru Ji gives us the message of singing praises, employing acrostics. Guru instructs Sikh to write this:

ਲਿਖੁ ਨਾਮੁ ਸਾਲਾਹ ਲਿਖੁ ਲਿਖੁ ਅੰਤੁ
ਨ ਪਾਰਾਵਾਰੁ ॥੧॥

"Likh naam saalaeh likh likh a(n)t na
paaraavaar. 1."
(SGGS, Pg. No. 16)

Translation: Write the Praises of the Naam, the Creative power of the Lord; write over and over again that He has no end or limitation. ||1||

Guru Ji considers those hands beautiful which write the praises of the Almighty:

ਹਰਿ ਜਸੁ ਲਿਖਹਿ ਬੇਅੰਤੁ ਸੋਹਹਿ ਸੇ ਹਥਾ ॥
"Hur jus likheh beant soeh se
hathaa."
(SGGS, Pg. No. 709)

Translation: Those hands, which write the Praises of the infinite Lord are beautiful. When writing the praises, the Sikh is singing, listening, believing, and thus developing full faith in the Almighty, simultaneously filling the self with reverential love:

ਗਾਵੀਐ ਸੁਣੀਐ ਮਨਿ ਰਖੀਐ ਭਾਉ ॥

"Gaaveeaaai suneeaaai mun rakheeaaai
bhaau."
(SGGS, Pg. No. 2)

Translation: Sing, and listen, and let your mind be filled with love.

The Gurbani words become touchstones by which life is lived leading to emancipation:

ਸੁਨਤ ਕਹਤ ਰਹਤ ਗਤਿ ਪਾਵਹੁ ॥

"Sunat kahat rahat gat paavahu."
(SGGS, Pg. No. 288)

Translation: Listening, speaking, and living it (experiencing Naam), emancipation is obtained.

As long as we live, we are doing all these three things in life – listening, talking, and living a life. But when we live the life incorporating Guru Ji's teachings there is an inner transformation, as words are heard, utterings and actions are aligned. With its unlimited potential spanning the entire life, the final outcome is the merger of the Sikh in the Unlimited. The concept is that a Sikh, in complete humility subsumes to his/her Guru, the Master under whom s/he apprentices. The firm conviction of the Sikh in life is:

ਜੋ ਗੁਰੁ ਕਹੈ ਸੋਈ ਭਲ ਮਾਨਹੁ ਹਰਿ ਹਰਿ ਕਥਾ
ਨਿਰਾਲੀ ॥੧॥ ਰਹਾਉ ॥

"Joe gur kahai soiee bhal maanahu
har har katha niraalee. 1. Rahaau."
(SGGS, Pg. No. 667)

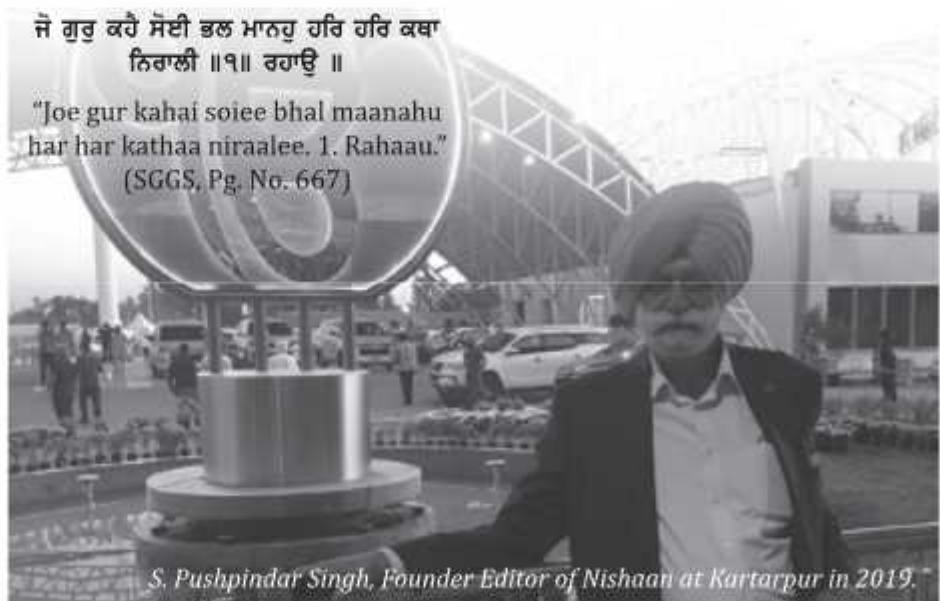
Translation: Whatever the Guru says, accept that as good; the sermon of the Lord, Har, Har, is unique and wonderful. ||1||Pause||

ਜੋ ਗੁਰੁ ਕਹੈ ਸੋਈ ਭਲ ਮੀਠਾ ਮਨ ਕੀ ਮਤਿ
ਤਿਆਗਿ ॥੧॥ ਰਹਾਉ ॥

"Joe gur kahai soiee bhal meeThaa
man kee mat tiaag. 1. Rahaau."
(SGGS, Pg. No. 1339)

Translation: Whatever the Guru says is good and sweet to me. I have renounced the intellectual wisdom of my mind. ||1||Pause||

The self-motivated Sikh, full of enthusiasm, ever ready to improve self, thus keeps scaling up on the self development ladder. The working environment in the Guru's school is different as the Sikh becomes his/her own critic, critically analyzing their own actions to make improvements as well as their own cheerleader. There is a great emphasis on learning in a group setting, which Guru Ji called 'Sadh Sangat'. It becomes a nursery of the peers where everyone is always on the lookout for areas of self-improvements. This nursery of Guru Nanak Ji is called a 'Dharmsal' – a place to practice 'Sikhee', first



S. Pushpinder Singh, Founder Editor of Nishaan at Kartarpur in 2019.

initiated in Kartarpur in 1521. But today we have put it aside, enamored by the western style institutional education. Guru Ji saw great value in putting spiritually elevated persons next to laymen, to be a source of empowerment and model for emulation to those striving to grow.

Additionally, this type of setting provides for continuous feedback about what the Sikh knows, and areas to be worked upon. The Sikhs higher on the rungs of the ladder of learning provide mentoring, guidance, and direction to those striving at the lower rungs. In such a nurturing arrangement those on the lower rungs can look up to those on upper rungs for counsel and support. There is a camaraderie amongst those Sikhs at a similar level. Thus, in this environment the mentor and the mentee are both encouraged to flourish.

This acts like a tight rope walk, but the other students provide the safety net in case of a fall, and also act as a support group to try again in case of a fall. In such nurturing environment the evil tendencies get purged by incorporating Guru Ji's teachings:

ਰਹਤ ਰਹਤ ਰਹਿ ਜਾਹਿ ਬਿਕਾਰਾ ॥ ਗੁਰ ਪੂਰੇ ਕੈ
ਸਬਦਿ ਅਪਾਰਾ ॥

"Rahat rahat reh jaeh bikaaraa. Gur
poore kai sabadh apaaraa."
(SGGS, Pg. No. 259)

Translation: The evil tendencies shall be slowly and steadily purged out, by the Shabad, the Incomparable Word of the Perfect Guru.

Thus, the collective psyche of the group is always ascending upwards in the spirit of 'Chardi Kala'. It is for this reason alone that Guru Ji has compared the Sikh to a mythical white swan whose diet consists of pearls alone.

The pearls represent the virtues as 'Naam'. In contrast there are "Baglas" or herons. The herons are white like swans, but are opportunistic, plus having a hypocritical nature.

Even when they close their eyes becoming quiet, they are simply waiting for their prey of frogs and fishes. Guru Ji has described the scenario in these words:

ਹੰਸਾ ਹੀਰਾ ਮੋਤੀ ਚੁਗਣਾ ਬਗੁ ਡਡਾ ਭਾਲਣ ਜਾਵੈ ॥

"Hansaa heeraa motee chuganaa bag
ddaddaa bhaalan jaavai."
(SGGS, Pg. No. 960)

Translation: The swans peck at the diamonds and pearls, while the heron chases after frogs.

The approach of a "Learner for Life" is what Guru Ji has prescribed for the Sikhs. With this unique approach in life the formal education which ends upon completion of academic studies and graduating does not happen in the 'Dharamsaal' of the Guru. It is time to revive this model of a Sikh – a student for life.

As it is, with the Guru Ji as mentor, guide, and a coach, the spiritual progress of the Sikh takes place. The Sikh obtains the wealth of 'Naam' from the Guru:

ਸਤਿਗੁਰੁ ਸਿਖ ਕਉ ਨਾਮ ਧਨੁ ਦੇਇ ॥

"Satigur sikh kau naam dhan dhei."
(SGGS, Pg. No. 286)

Translation: The True Guru gives His Sikh the wealth of the Naam.

The uniqueness of Guru's education is the imparting of 'Naam', which is not imparted in any other school or institution. This 'Naam' leads to a merger with the Creator, ending cycles of reincarnations:

ਨਾਮ ਧਨਿ ਮੁਖ ਉਜਲੇ ਹੋਏ ਹਰਿ ਪਾਇਆ ਸਚੁ
ਸੋਇ ॥੧॥

"Naam dhan mukh ujale hoe har
paiaa sach soi. 1."
(SGGS, Pg. No. 600)

Translation: With the wealth of the Naam, their faces are radiant, and they attain the True Lord. ||1||

The radiance of Divine Light within took place through the teachings of the Guru:

ਆਤਮ ਰਾਮ ਪਰਗਾਸੁ ਗੁਰ ਤੇ ਹੋਵੈ ॥

"Aatam raam paragaas gur te hovai."
(SGGS, Pg. No. 123)

Translation: The Divine Light of the Supreme Soul shines forth from the Guru.

When that radiance of Divine Light is experienced then the Sikh becomes thankful to Guru:

ਐਸੇ ਗੁਰ ਕਉ ਬਲਿ ਬਲਿ ਜਾਈਐ ਆਪਿ ਮੁਕਤੁ
ਮੋਹਿ ਤਾਰੈ ॥੧॥ ਰਹਾਉ ॥

"Aise gur kao bal bal jaeai aap
mukat mohae tarai. 1. Rahao."
(SGGS, Pg. No. 1301)

Translation: I am a sacrifice, a sacrifice to such a Guru; He Himself is liberated, and He carries me across as well. ||1||Pause||

Bhupinder 'Bo' Singh is a Houston based businessman & an engineer by profession. He hails from Myanmar & was educated in India where he started his career. Bo Singh is passionate on Sikh history, motivation and spirituality and is an author of seven books. His articles have been featured in print media & web portals.

THAT WE LOSE NO MORE

Artika Aurora Bakshi

Looking into the work of Namita Jaspal

Anyone who walks through the *galis* of old cities, enters the doors of museums, and rummages through treasures passed down generations, always gets awe-struck by the beauty of all that has survived. Another thought that follows is the realisation of the neglect and the loss. Be it Lucknow, Hyderabad, Purani Dilli, or as in my case, Amritsar, the experience goes from exciting and inspiring, to disappointing and fearful. So much has been lost, and the dilapidated structures and the aged pages of manuscripts tell their stories.

A few years ago, when visiting Amritsar, during a discussion with my mother, I heard about a conservationist who was working on the frescoes in the inner sanctum of the Harmandir Sahib. As a child, Namita Jaspal was naturally drawn to art, following the footsteps of her father, who was a good artist. As she grew older, she became fascinated by science, further exploring the scientific aspects of everything that was artistic. After graduating, she joined the National Museum for a Masters in Conservation of Cultural Property.

"We had never heard of something like this. The year was 1992. My uncle had chanced upon an advert in the newspaper and shared it with me. My entire family knew how passionate I was about art and science. This course was perfect because I could use science to preserve art. There were 7-10 seats and one had to sit for an entrance exam, followed by an interview. I got selected", says Namita.







Wall Painting Conservation

"The experience of being at the National Museum was special. Our classes were conducted at the museum itself, and we learnt in the field. Meeting visitors, some of whom were experts in their fields, was a unique experience. We were surrounded by the most important objects of our country, the metal objects, the manuscripts on bark, tamrapatra, the terracotta figures, and all that we associate with the rich heritage of our country. It was like I was living my dream."

- Namita



The Chola before restoration

(Right) The chola worn by the Guru, which is now part of the memorabilia at Gurdwara Shri Chola Sahib. The fabric of the chola had, over the centuries, lost its strength and flexibility. The robe is striped and there are loosely-woven stripes that alternate with thicker ones. Most of the thin and light-coloured stripes were either torn or completely lost.

The Chola after restoration



(Left) This painting was hidden under multiple layers of varnish over the years. These layers had yellowed and hardened causing the paint layer to flake off due to brittleness. Ethical conservation procedures were followed to remove the harmful varnish layers and consolidate the paint layer. In this picture the gaps caused by already lost portions of the paint layer are being filled and in-painted.

According to Namita, given that hers was the first batch, there were some shortcomings, as is the case whenever a new course is introduced. But the hands-on experience shaped her career path.

Like everyone else, she too had questioned as to why energy and money was sometimes spent on frail objects, when a new one could be made. During her time at the National Museum she realised why conservation was more important than reproduction. "These frail objects are the direct evidence of the times long gone. The reproductions would never showcase the essence of the period. These objects are the tangible memory of human civilisation, our culture, and our heritage", she passionately reminisces.

While many of us, and Namita, would like to see more effort in our country, in the field of conservation and restoration, the reality is quite different. While we have more institutions teaching conservation and related courses, and many students enrolling for the same, the awareness levels have only increased by a small fraction. "We need to raise awareness at different levels; the general public, at the decision making level, with the authorities who are responsible for the upkeep and maintenance of our heritage, and with the younger generation in schools, who are made aware about this career path", she passionately elaborates.





Namita feels that this field requires a different educational approach too, rather than how other courses are run. The students need to be in the field, understanding the concepts of conservation, rather than in classrooms. There is no shortage of monuments, manuscripts, textiles, and objects, given the country's history. "Only by feeling the objects and understanding the material, can a conservationist decide what needs to be done", she insists. "Conservation abroad is on the field, and that's what is required in India."

Namita emphasises the importance of decision-making skills in conservationists, to decide on the methodology to be used, and the extent to which the restoration or conservation can be taken. Even when the end result may not look perfect, a conservationist knows that overworking could damage the object, and take away its essence and uniqueness. According to her, this is a skill that can only be taught by teachers who have worked in the field, and those who encourage the same from their students.

Rich in heritage and culture, Rajasthan is the hub of cultural property in India. Namita draws a comparison

between the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York and some of the museums there, which are modeled using similar layouts for objects and themed rooms, showcasing specific eras, to highlight the differences in maintenance. The museums abroad earn through visits, curated shows, and the sale of souvenirs, whereas in India, this source of revenue has not been well-explored. There is also a lack of private and governmental funding. While there is a lot to showcase, the general public is either not aware enough, or they simply do not care enough.

Namita also talks about the richness of Punjab in terms of the wall paintings and frescoes that can still be seen in the monuments that are scattered all over the state. The most well-known frescoes are the ones in Harmandir Sahib, which were done by Bhai Gyan Singh Naqqash, and restored by Namita. The Heritage Preservation Atelier Pvt. Ltd., the company started by her has done restoration of many frescoes in many of the smaller towns and cities of Punjab. What saddens her is that people are not aware about the existence of frescoes and wall paintings in India, awareness being an important aspect towards highlighting the need for restoration, preservation, and appreciation of cultural property.

"The way forward is by exposing the younger generation to heritage, as is done for moral values, environmental concerns, etc. in schools. Children should be encouraged to visit and explore historical sites. This has to be a two-pronged approach with the government and non-governmental stakeholders, like private individuals, schools, NGOs, working together in their capabilities to address this issue. There has to be accountability and follow-through to ensure this is long-term", she suggests. "With time, one is noticing that the administrators involved are also more aware than they were years back. If the incharge of an area knows the value of the heritage properties in his district, he can ensure that it is being looked after properly. This was not the case earlier, when civil contractors were given the charge, and they treated the buildings like any ordinary building project. Many projects have lost their value, because, taking one example, cement has been used instead of lime plaster. There are so many different materials, which react differently to the process, hence the conservator needs to be scientifically updated to handle such restorations. Only a conservationist with a science background is trained to do this. In the field of heritage conservation, the conservator is the main person who should build the team of architects, contractors, skilled workers, and structural engineers. Another thing we see is how old manuscripts have been preserved using cello



A book that had pages damaged at the spine /inner portion because of the brittleness due to acidity associated with aging. So, the binding was very carefully opened up using precision tools and safe techniques.

"In Punjab alone, so many structures, ramparts of forts, baradaris, bungas, caravan serais, have disappeared in front of my eyes. I have been working in Punjab since 2005-2006. We have lost a lot. We won't be able to find records or pictures of most of them. Manuscripts used to lie in warehouses, in conditions that have damaged them beyond repair. Digitisation helps keep images, but the originals have not been preserved well." - Namita

tape, and how badly they have been rebound. The paper is brittle, and such thoughtless handling reduces the life of the manuscript. The way the framing is done for photographs, canvases etc., using plywood backing, reduces the life of the object. Here, the responsibility lies with the institutions handling cultural properties, as to how they educate the caretakers, and how they work with conservationists."

"As far as the general public is concerned, by just blaming someone, we cannot achieve anything. The lack of awareness is also due to the lack of education, and poverty. If a person is satisfied with his standard of living, that's when he can think of other things. A poor man struggling to make ends meet, won't be concerned about a monument nestled in his village forest."

Namita's clients are institutions and private individuals, all over India. The Heritage Preservation Atelier not only restore the art and heritage of their clients, they also provide conservation treatments and protective display units, custom-designed for the objects that will be housed in them. She has also worked on projects which while looking into conservation of heritage properties, also work towards women's empowerment and skill development. Though the task is uphill, it's a step in the right direction.

Namita Jaspal, with inherited skills of art and aesthetics and passion for science, opted to pursue post-graduation in 'Conservation of Cultural Property' after her graduation in Science from Delhi University in 1992. Four years of intense training at the National Museum Institute provided the right foundation to start a career in Conservation. She is currently practicing conservation consultancy for heritage property including monuments and collections. Namita's expertise includes conservation and preservation technologies and procedures for conservation of varied material like wall paintings, paper, photographs, textile, ceramics, stone, metal and archaeological objects.
www.heritagepreservationatelier.com

PANJ TAKHT

The word 'Takht' or 'Takhat' literally means a throne or seat of authority. The five Takhts in Sikhism are considered the highest seats of authority and religious importance within the Sikh community.

The first Takht, called '*Akal Takht*' or the Throne of the Timeless God, was established by Guru Hargobind in 1609. It is situated opposite the Harmandir Sahib in Amritsar, Punjab. The Guru established it as he felt that political matters should not be considered within the premises of Harmandir Sahib, which is meant for the worship of God. At the Akal Takht, the Guru held his court and discussed matters of military strategy and political policy. Later the *Sarbat Khalsa* or Commonwealth took decisions on matters of peace and war and settled disputes between the various Sikh Misls or groups.

The second seat of authority is called *Takht Sri Patna Sahib*, located in Bihar. Guru Tegh Bahadur lived with his family at Sri Patna Sahib and this is the place where the tenth Guru, Guru Gobind Singh was born. Preserved at Sri Patna Sahib are the relics of Guru Gobind Singh, which include his cradle, weapons and proclamations.

Takht Sri Kesgarh Sahib is located in Anandpur Sahib, Punjab and the Takht therein owes its importance to the creation of the Khalsa by Guru Gobind Singh in 1699.

The *Khanda*, the double-edged-sword with which the Guru stirred the Amrit (baptism-water) is also held here. The *Khanda* holds significant meaning in Sikhism and is composed of several elements that represent key principles and concepts of the Sikh faith. Apart from the

Khanda, *Sri Kesgarh Sahib*, also holds has a number of weapons of the Tenth Guru. During the annual festival of Holla Mahalla, mock-battles between groups of Sikhs are held here.

The fourth seat of authority is *Takht Sri Hazur Sahib*. Situated at Nanded in Maharashtra, *Sri Hazur Sahib* holds immense significance in Sikhism as it is associated with the final days of Guru Gobind Singh, the tenth Sikh Guru. It was at Nanded where the Guru held court and it is also the site of significant events, such as the Battle of Nanded in 1701, where the Guru's soldiers repelled an attack by Mughal forces. It was at Takht Sri Hazur Sahib that Guru Gobind Singh is believed to have dictated the *Dasam Granth*. The Takht preserves the memory of these historical events and serves as a reminder of the sacrifices and contributions of Guru Gobind Singh.

The fifth seat of authority is *Takht Damdama Sahib*. This place owes its importance to the literary work of Guru Gobind Singh done during his stay in 1706. It was at *Damdama Sahib*, that the Guru declared the *Adi Granth* as the eternal Guru, conferring the Guruship to the scripture, after which no human being would hold the title of Guru. The *Adi Granth* is considered the spiritual guide and source of wisdom, providing guidance and inspiration for Sikhs in their daily lives.

These five Takhts hold great significance for Sikhs and are collectively represent the authority and unity of the Sikh community, and they hold a special place in Sikh religious and historical traditions.



Akal Takht Sahib is the highest and most prominent Takht among the Five Takhts. It serves as the central authority for the Sikh community and deals with matters of religious doctrine, social issues, and other important decisions affecting the Sikh community. (Photo: Wikipedia)

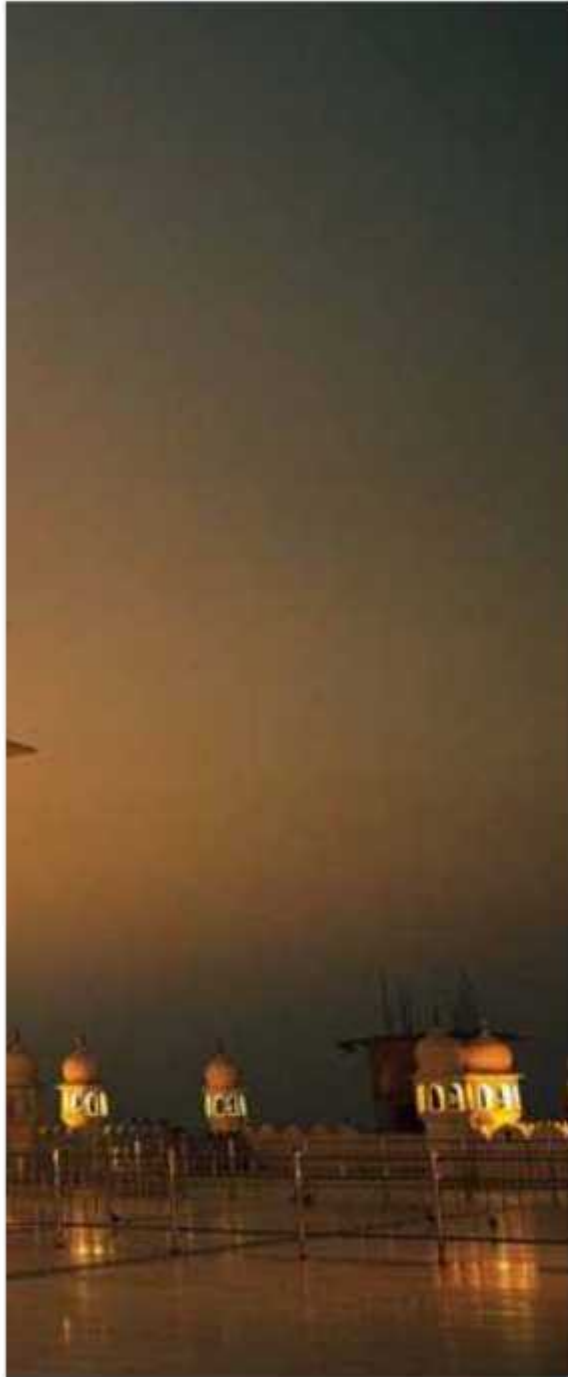




Takht Sri Damdama Sahib is associated with Guru Gobind Singh, who spent a considerable amount of time at this place. Guru Gobind Singh compiled the final edition of the Guru Granth Sahib, the Sikh holy scripture, known as the Damdama Sahib Bir, at this location in 1705.



Takht Sri Kesgarh Sahib is situated in Anandpur Sahib, Punjab, India. It holds immense historical and religious significance for Sikhs. It was at this location where Guru Gobind Singh, the tenth Sikh Guru, initiated the Khalsa, a sacred order of the Sikh community, in 1699.

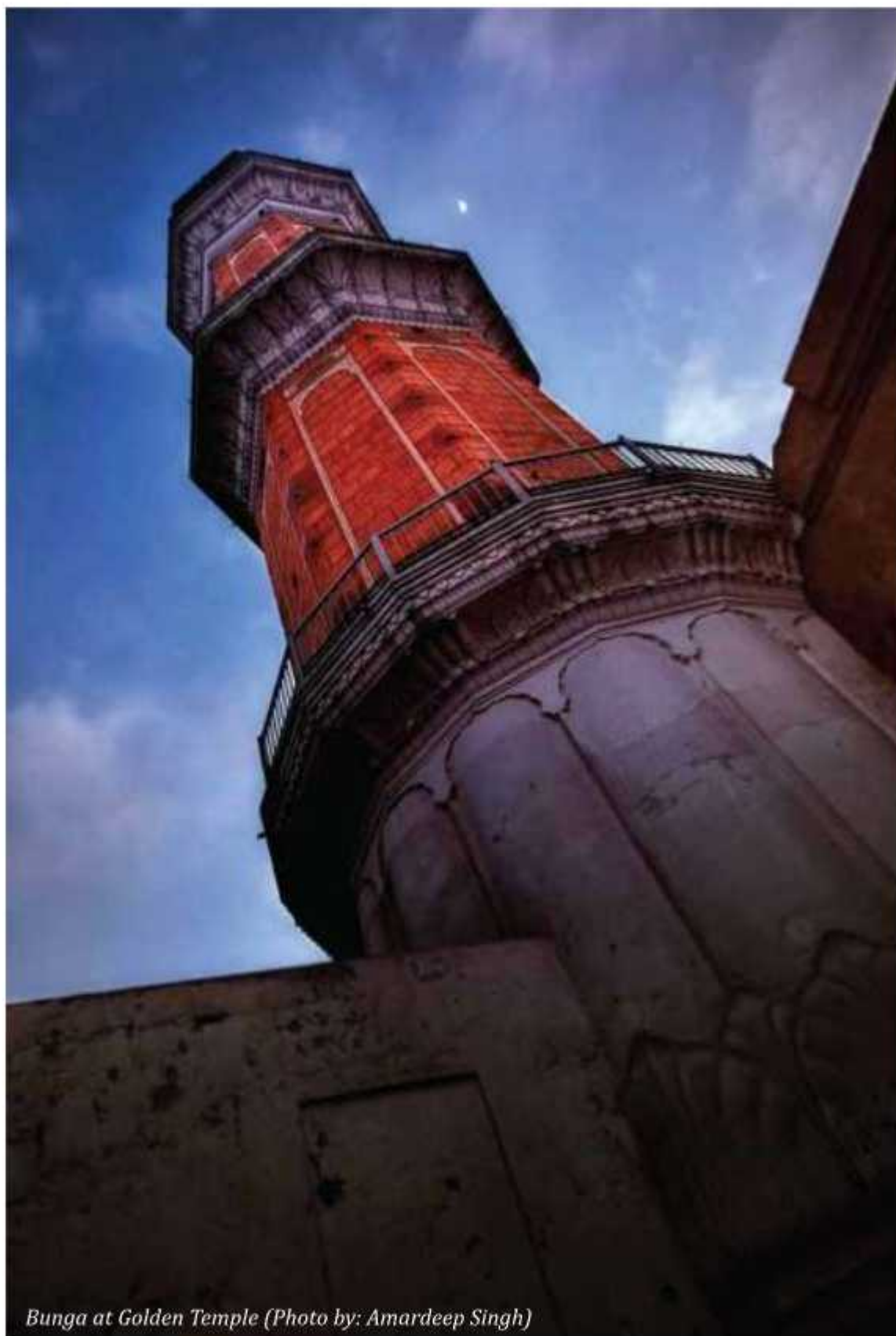


Takht Sri Hazur Sahib is located in Nanded, Maharashtra, commemorates the site where Guru Gobind Singh passed away in 1708. It is believed that Guru Gobind Singh held his final court, compiled the final version of the Guru Granth Sahib, and declared the Guru Granth Sahib as the eternal Guru at this place.





Takht Sri Patna Sahib marks the birthplace of Guru Gobind Singh. This Takht is built at the historical site where Guru Gobind Singh spent his early childhood.



Bunga at Golden Temple (Photo by: Amardeep Singh)

SIKHS AND SIKHISM IN NEPAL

Santokh Singh Bains

Guru Nanak, the founder of the Sikh faith, was born in 1469 at Talvaṇḍī village (present-day Nankana Sahib, Punjab, Pakistan). Considered a religious innovator, Guru Nanak's teachings were simple and easy to relate to. He preached that every human being is capable of attaining spiritual perfection which will ultimately lead them to God. He said that rituals and priests are not required to have direct access to God. In order to feel the presence of God, Guru Nanak asked his followers to repeat the name of God (*Nam Japna*), live honestly (*Kirat Karo*) and urged humanity to lead a spiritual life by serving others (*Vand Chhako*). It is these teachings that have laid the foundation of Sikhism.

Little is known about the life of Guru Nanak, but Sikh tradition has a much-loved set of stories or *janamsakhis* which recount various incidents from his life.

It is well documented that through a large part of his life, Guru Nanak travelled across parts of South Asia, the Himalayas and Middle East. Wherever he travelled, he spread his belief that divinity can be found within us all through prayer, humility, service, meditation, and virtuous living. He stood firmly against ritualism as well as discrimination against women and those of lower socioeconomic status. In fact, Guru Nanak insisted that women deserved the same treatment as men. The

holy scriptures of Sikhism state that women are entitled to the same rights and privileges as men, and women are allowed to lead congregations, as well as serve as spiritual leaders in the Sikh faith. Guru Nanak's followers became known as Sikhs, which means seekers of truth.

It is said that Guru Nanak travelled to Nepal during his 3rd Udasi which covered the Mansarovar region of Tibet and crossed the vast Indo-Gangetic plain from where, as per oral history, he entered the Kingdom of Nepal.

In 1515, Guru Nanak reached Nepal from Sitamarhi from where he travelled to Janakpur, which is believed to be the birthplace of Sita. He then proceeded to Birat Nagar where he visited the historic shrine at Chatra, which was managed by the Udasi saints. Today three historic Sikh shrines known as Bhedia Math, Dhunia Math and Takia Math are testament to his stay in Nepal.

As *janamsakhis* go, it is said that at Bhedia Math, Guru Nanak's message of brotherhood, love, peace and harmony brought villagers together. On one occasion, the villagers asked for Prasad, but as the Guru did not have any, he asked them to walk to the nearby Sal tree and pluck mangoes from that tree. Surprisingly, the devotees found mangoes hanging from the Sal tree's branches. The Sal tree is still standing there and bearing mangoes even now.

From Bhedia Math he travelled to Dhunia Math. It is said that during one of his sermons, the villagers were cold and shivering. Seeing the villagers suffer, Guru Nanak miraculously started a small fire to provide relief to the villagers who had gathered around him. The Sikh shrine commemorating the Guru's visit is known as Dhunia Math.

At Takia Math, it is said that while the Guru was spreading his message of peace and brotherhood, the villagers placed a pillow (Takia) behind him for support. Hence, the shrine commemorating the Guru's visit to this place came to be known as Takia Math.

These three Maths are located in close proximity and the land they stand on was donated by the Nepalese ruler of that time. These Maths are managed by the Udasi saints.

While at Kathmandu, his first place of stay was in the vicinity of the Singha Durbar, where today the offices of the Nepal Government are located. Later, when the area was cleared for the Singha Durbar, the yogis were relocated to Shobha Bhagwati, where the shrine has a huge bell with Sikh inscriptions.

Guru Nanak then travelled to an area known as Balaju where Nanak Math, presided over by a Mahant, is located. This shrine has a peepal tree under which Guru Nanak is said to have meditated with two footprints



Painting by : Arpana Caur



Gurudwara Guru Nanak Satsang, Kathmandu

carved on a stone slab to mark the exact spot. It is highly probable that Guru Nanak had visited the well-known temples located at places like Lumbini, Pokhara, Palpa and Changu. Guru had visited Thyangboche monastery, religious centre of Tibetan Buddhists.

According to Major H. S. Kohli, the leader of an Indian expedition to Mount Everest in 1964, the Head Lama had reportedly informed Major Kohli that some writings of Guru Rimpoche (the Tibetan name of Guru Nanak) were also in his personal possession. Unfortunately, the monastery was badly burnt and with it all its valuables including the manuscripts were destroyed.

From Thyangboche, Guru Nanak returned to Khumjing and then proceeded to Tibet.

The shrine at Shobha Bhagwati seems like a forgotten abode of Guru Nanak. The only way

to enter the shrine is through a crammed wooden ladder. Inside, in a tiny room, you will find a handwritten Saroop of Guru Granth Sahib, which has been neatly kept. In the courtyard of Shobha Bhagwati Math, there is an old bell which has inscriptions in Gurmukhi symbolizing the oneness of God and the oneness of humanity.

There are two other important Sikh shrines located in the premises of Pashupati Conservation Area; Bhasmeshor and Raj Rajeshwari. The shrine at Bhasmeshor commemorates Guru Nanak's visit to Pashupati Temple and also his meditation at this place. It was initially located on the long brick building opposite the present location, but was shifted to the new place after it was damaged during the earthquake in 2015. About 300 meters to the south is located the Pashupati garden; Raj Rajeshwari shrine is situated here. Raj and Rajeshwari were two Sikh princesses who were married into the Nepalese



(Left) Religious inscription written in Gurmukhi on an old bell installed at Shobha Bhagwati shrine in Kathmandu, Nepal



(Left) Handwritten Saroop of Guru Granth Sahib at Guru Nanak Math, Balaju, Kathmandu, Nepal

royal family. A few Sikhs from Punjab had come with them to Nepal. Raj and Rajeshwari arranged to get a copy of Guru Granth Sahib from Benares through a Nirmala saint who became the priest at the shrine.

It is said that Baba Gurditta, the elder son of Guru Hargobind, became the head of the Udasi sect. He sent his followers to various places (which had earlier been visited by Guru Nanak) to spread his universal message of Fatherhood of God and Brotherhood of Man. Baba Gurditta's followers also carried several Pothis (hand-written religious books) for the purpose of Dharam Parchar. It is quite likely that some of those Udasi Parcharakhs reached several places in Nepal also where Guru Nanak had once gone to spread his unique gospel.

Main stream Sikhs should feel grateful to Udasi saints because several shrines associated with

Guru Nanak's visit to Nepal are still surviving due to their continued maintenance by them.

Many years later, during the reign of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, an alliance was formed between the Sikhs and the Nepalese armies, against the British. The Sikhs had stationed 12,000 Sikh soldiers and their horses in the Himalayan country. Subsequently, many of these Sikh soldiers decided to settle down in Nepal. After the sudden demise of Maharaja Ranjit Singh in 1839 and the Anglo-Sikh wars, the Sikh kingdom disintegrated and Maharani Jind Kaur escaped to Nepal along with several of her Sikh attendants.

Jung Bahadur Rana, the Nepalese Prime Minister, welcomed her with all the dignity and respect befitting a queen. She was given political asylum and a new palace called Charburja Darbar was built for her at Thapathali in Kathmandu.

Maharani Jind Kaur lived in Nepal for 11 years. This was the period when a foundation for Sikhs was firmly laid down in Nepal. During that time, several small gurdwaras were established across the Kathmandu Valley.

When the Sikh queen finally left Nepal in 1861, many Sikhs who had accompanied her to Kathmandu, decided to settle down in various villages like Jamunaha, Sikhampur, Bankatwa, Bakauli, and Manipurwa in Nepalgunj region. These Sikhs, who have been retaining their Sikh identity and also maintaining their village gurdwaras, have been almost forgotten in the annals of the Sikh diaspora.

Besides the historical Sikh shrines which are located mostly in the Kathmandu region, there are a few non-historical gurdwaras also situated at various places in Nepal. Gurdwara Guru Nanak Satsang

located at Kopundol in Kathmandu, the capital of Nepal, is undoubtedly the most important non-historical gurdwara in the Himalayan country. Although the gurdwara is open every day for visitors and devotees, religious programs are organized on every Saturday and on Gurburbs; thereafter, free meal (Langar) is served. Besides the local Sikhs, many visitors as well as poor and homeless people also relish the vegetarian food freely served at the gurdwara.

There is a beautiful gurdwara at Krishnanagar (near the border with Uttar Pradesh in India). The Sikhs of Krishnanagar are known for their acumen in trade and enterprise. Mehar Singh, a Sikh, was the mayor of Krishnanagar for over 25 years.

Today, Nepal has a small but vibrant Sikh community, most of whom have a well-established transport business. The role of these Sikh transporters is legendary and it is often said that they are the backbone of Nepal's economy. 85-year-old Pritam Singh, who is known as the pioneer of the transportation sector in Nepal, made Nepal his home in 1958. Pritam had come to Nepal to attend a friend's sister's wedding and it was at the wedding where a friend suggested that he start a transport business in Nepal. As his transport business was growing, Pritam Singh brought eight more trucks to Nepal along with more Sikhs from Kashmir and Punjab for work relating to maintenance, painting, tyre replacements, and so on.

In due course, Pritam Singh's family expanded their business and today they own around 300 trucks. These vehicles were sometimes solicited by the Police, the Army, the Food Corporation and even by King Mahendra. "Whenever King Mahendra and his entourage wanted



Manjeev Singh Puri, India's former Ambassador to Nepal, being felicitated by the Sikh community of Sikhanpura village in Nepal

to go to Chitwan or other places connected by road, we supplied the vehicles; we only charged for the fuel," says Pritam Singh whose community of transporters was instrumental in supplying construction materials for several vital projects like the East-West Highway, the Sunauli-Pokhara Road and the Narayanghat-Butwal Road.

The Sikhs started the first public bus service in and over the past few decades. The community has also been active in the setting up of modern schools in the country. The sprouting of Punjabi restaurants serving Tandoori chicken has helped integrate the Nepalese and Sikh communities. While the Sikhs of Nepal are well established in the transportation business, today it is easy to spot Sikh engineers, doctors, police officers, teachers, educationists, pilots and even in fashion design. In fact, it was Manohar Singh, who laid the first drinking water pipes in Kathmandu.

There is also an interesting diplomatic coincidence; Sardar

Surjit Singh Majithia was the first Ambassador of India to Nepal, who established the Embassy in 1947. His arrival and departure, by aeroplane, saw the first use of the landing strip that is now the runway at Tribhuvan International Airport.

In the 1980s, the Sikhs in Nepal totaled more than a few thousand and built a grand Gurdwara in Kupondole (Kathmandu) apart from smaller Gurdwaras in Birgunj, Nepalgunj and Krishnanagar. It was further enriched by Nepalese like Sardar Gurbaksh Singh embracing Sikhism. Migration and changing business practices have all seen evolution and today the huge contribution of this community to Nepal's development is a fading memory.

In 2004, Nepal issued a commemorative coin to mark the 400th anniversary of the installation of the Guru Granth Sahib.

Thereafter, in 2019, on the historic occasion of Guru Nanak's 550th birth anniversary, Nepal Rashtira Bank issued three commemorative coins -

Sikhs in Nepalese Police Forces



DSP Shankar Singh

two in silver with the denomination of Nepali Rupees 2,500 and 1,000, and a cupronickel coin with a face value of Nepali Rupees 100. Thus, Nepal became one of the few countries which has issued legal tender featuring a Sikh connection.

Sanjay Singh a ninth generation descendant from the Sikh families who had arrived in Nepal with Maharani Jind Kaur is serving as an Inspector at Nepal's Armed Police Force. As Nepal reeled under Maoist insurgency during 1996-2006, he was posted in Dang, Rukum, Dolpa and other districts which were most affected by the dangerous conflict. Sikhs are known for their skills in navigating dangerous roads in the most difficult terrains, he was especially asked to sit behind the wheels when the roads were narrow and full of bends. He says, *"Respecting religious beliefs of Sikhism, Nepal Police places no restriction on us to wear our turbans, to keep our beards, and to wear our Karas."*



Late Kanhaiya Singh

Now he is a Deputy Superintendent of Police (DSP). The highest ranking Sikh police officer in Nepal and posted at Lamahi.

Kanhaiya Singh had joined Nepal Police in 1972 as a constable was a sharp shooter. He was, therefore, designated to the positions of highly sensitive role of drivers of higher-level officials of Nepal Police.

Achyut Krishna Kharel, who was Inspector General of Nepal Police from 1996 to 2001, was Acting DIG and Chief of Far-Western Police Division in late 1980s. Kanhaiya Singh, Assistant Sub-Inspector, was his driver at that time. *"I felt very fortunate that someone as capable and brave as Kanhaiya was my driver during my time in the Far-West, and often shared very proudly with my contemporaries that I had a Sikh officer to assist me,"* he says. On 15th September 2003, Kanhaiya Singh was returning home when a group of Maoist rebels blocked his way and shot him at point blank range. The Nepalese Government declared him a martyr.

Information relating to Guru Nanak's travels to Nepal is conspicuous by its absence in most books related to Sikhism. A few books, however, briefly mention the Guru's journey to the Himalayan kingdom during his third *Udasi* (journey). Extensive research had to be carried out on available records, documentation and discussions with those familiar with the subject. In particular research in this regard has been done by the authors of *Travels of Guru Nanak*, Dr. Surinder Singh Kohli and *Amazing Travels of Guru Nanak*, Col. Dr. Dalvinder Singh Grewal. In spite of this, Guru Nanak's travels in chronological order, the miracles attributed to the Guru etc. are still shrouded in mystery.

Similarly, the information regarding the historical Sikh shrines and the earliest Sikh settlements in Nepal have not been properly documented. In this connection, the author feels indebted to Gyani Gurbaksh Singh, a very knowledgeable Kathmandu-based Nepali Sikh missionary, for sharing his extensive knowledge based on oral history passed down the generations of Nepal-based *Udasi* Mahants. Unfortunately most aspects of such oral history is unverifiable. Hence, the author cannot be held responsible for any information which may subsequently prove to be incorrect.

I would also like to thank Prawash Gautam and Achyut Raj Bhattarai, two young Nepalese academicians, for writing a magnificent book titled *Sikh Heritage of Nepal*, which covers Sikhs and Sikhism in Nepal. The author has liberally used the valuable information contained in this profusely illustrated book.

Some eminent university such as the Punjabi University or Guru Nanak Dev University should now come forward to undertake extensive research relating to Guru Nanak's travels in Nepal and the shrines associated with him in that country. Also, there is urgent need for an in-depth exploration of the history of Sikhs and Sikhism in Nepal.

-- Author

The Amazing Sikh Missionary Gyani Gurbaksh Singh

Chet Prasad Lamsal (Gyani Gurbaksh Singh) was born in Syangja in Nepal. He was from a conservative Nepali Brahmin family. His father, Kul Prasad Lamsal, was a very poor villager and, therefore, could not afford to provide education to his young son in Nepal. So he sent the young Chet Prasad to his brother-in-law who lived in Jabalpur in Madhya Pradesh.

Here he befriended a Sikh boy named Jagjit Singh, who was the son of the local Gurdwara's Granthi. He used to join his Sikh friend in regular religious prayers and discourses which took place inside the gurdwara.

Chet Prasad Lamsal's regular attendance for Satsang and Langar ultimately led to the seed of spiritualism germinating in him.

He used to listen to Gurbani with great devotion and tried to understand the universal message of the Sikh Gurus. In due course, when he was 17 years old, he started feeling a spiritual calling within him, and eventually made up his mind to embrace Sikhism.

A few years later, Gurbaksh Singh, returned to his native village in Nepal. Within a week of arriving, he travelled to Jammu and from there he proceeded to Amritsar.

In Amritsar, he studied at Bhai Vir Singh Gurmat Vidyalaya and Shaheed Sikh Missionary College. He attended Sangeet classes and became proficient in Gurbani Kirtan. He obtained Gyani degree and for a couple of years, he also studied at Guru Nanak Dev University.

In September 1984, Gyani Gurbaksh Singh returned to Nepal and then he



vowed to dedicate his remaining life to the mission of spreading Sikhism in the Himalayan country. Due to his sustained and laudable efforts during the last several decades, about 150 Nepali youths have so far embraced Sikhism. Some of his former Nepali students had studied at Amritsar-based Bhai Vir Singh Gurmat Vidyalaya and Shaheed Sikh Missionary College. Several of his former students are presently working as Granthis in various gurdwaras of Nepal, India, Malaysia, and the USA.

Gyani Gurbaksh Singh says that Nepal-based Christian missionaries are presently working on a war footing to convert poor and illiterate Nepali villagers to Christianity. Some Muslim organisations are also active to spread Islam in Nepal. Sadly, except for a few Sikhs in Nepalgunj region and some other areas, most

Sikhs residing in Nepal are not Nepalese citizens.

There is no incentive for them to invest and increase their business now in this country. Unless the Sikhs of Nepal are given Nepalese citizenship soon, they can hardly look forward to a bright future in the Himalayan country.

It's really ironic that the Government of Nepal is treating them shabbily even though they have contributed immensely for the progress of the country over the last several decades through amazing infrastructure development.

Santokh Singh Bains is a writer and freelance journalist based in Chicago, USA. His debut book titled Sikhs, Sikhism and the World was published by Sanbun Publishers, New Delhi, in 2019.

BATTLE OF SOBRAON





The Battle of Sobraon was the last of four major battles for the British East India Company against the Sikh Khalsa armies during the First Anglo-Sikh War (1845-6). Prior to the battle of Sobraon, the two armies fought at Mudki, Ferozeshah, Baddowal and Aliwal. The East India Company won the first two major battles of the war through a combination of luck, the steadfastness of British and Bengal units and deliberate treachery by Tej Singh and Lal Singh, the commanders of the Sikh Army. The battle of Baddowal gave the Khalsa armies the upper hand; however, the battle outcome remained indecisive.

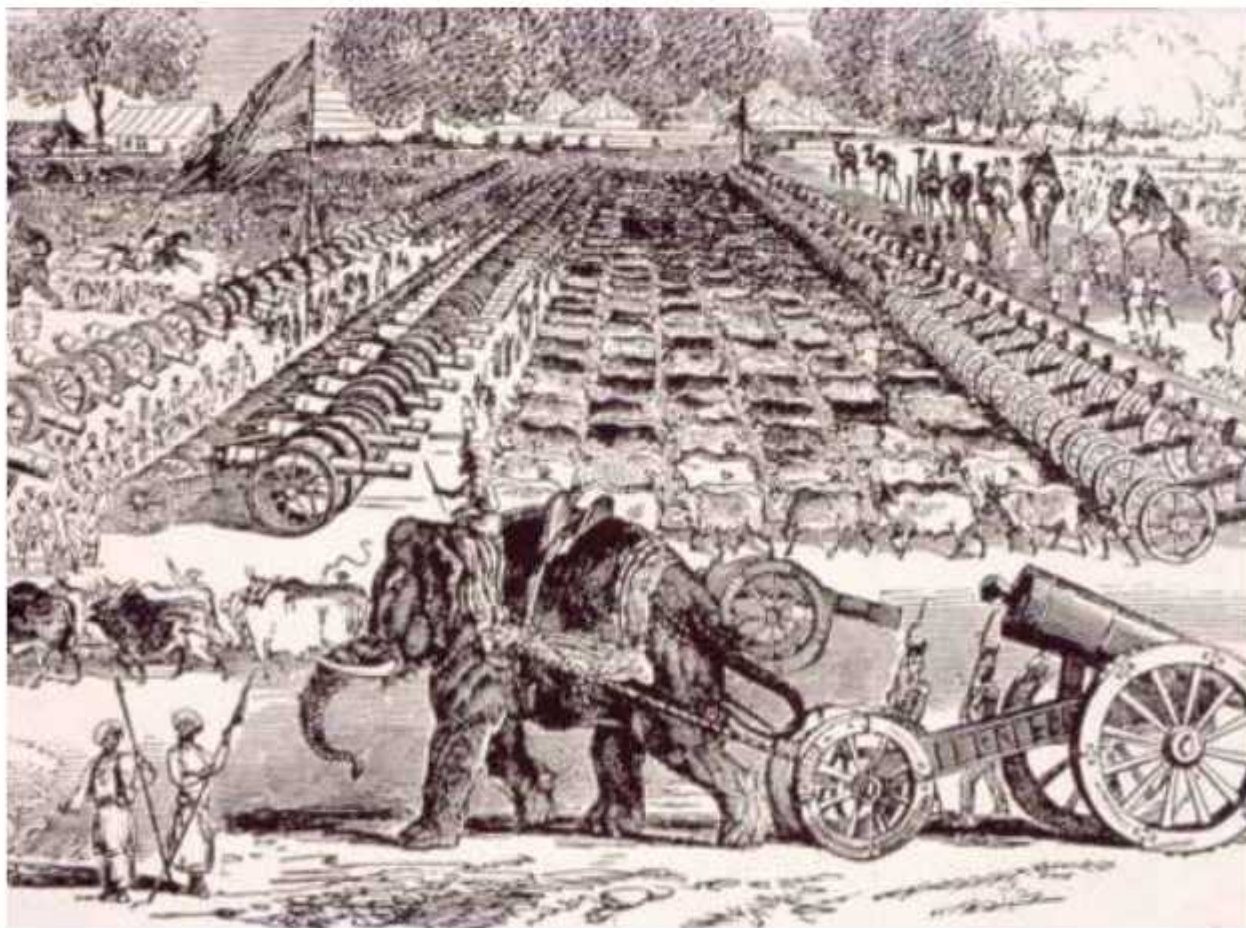
The final and decisive battle of the first Anglo-Sikh war fought on 10 February, 1846 between the British and Sikh forces on the eastern bank of the river Sutlej. The Battle of Sobraon ended the first Anglo-Sikh war and the once formidable Sikh empire was forced to sign the Treaty of Lahore. Jammu & Kashmir was taken away and parts of the Sikh Empire came under direct rule of the company.

Battle lines at Sobraon

The Khalsa had been reinforced from districts west of Lahore, and now moved in strength into a bridgehead across the Sutlej at Sobraon, entrenching and fortifying their encampment. Any wavering after their earlier defeats was dispelled by the presence of the respected veteran leader, Sham Singh Attariwala. Unfortunately for the Khalsa, Tej Singh and Lal Singh retained the overall direction of the Sikh armies. Also, their position at Sobraon was linked to the west Punjabi bank of the river by a single vulnerable pontoon bridge. Three days' continuous rain before the battle had swollen the river and threatened to carry away this bridge.

“The Sikh artillery, with whom we contended, were picked men, both for valour and size... We lost lots of men before we got to the enemy’s principal battery, for we were pushed, as it were, into the lion’s mouth; when we did reach it, the gunners resorted to their tulwars and we our bayonets, then came the tug of war with clashing steel in earnest... The ground in a few minutes was sprinkled with the blood of hundreds of brave men.”

Lieutenant JW Baldwin recalling the Battle of Sobraon, 1846



An impress display of Sikh guns, before the battle of Sobraon

Apart from the formidable artillery, which both sides possessed, the cavalry of the English forces carried their lance, sword and carbine for all. The infantry was armed with the Brown Bess musket and bayonet. The Sikh soldiers carried a mix of muskets, spears and swords.

With the arrival of reinforcements from the Bombay Presidency, the much-needed heavy artillery and two battalions of Gurkhas the Nasiri Battalion (later 1st Gurkhas) and the Sirmoor Battalion (later 2nd Gurkhas) – the East India Company was feeling confident enough to take on the Khalsa armies.

Heavy fog delayed the start of the battle. However, once the fog lifted, both sides opened up their heavy guns. The artillery duel lasted for a couple of hours but remained largely ineffective as the British guns were placed too far away from the Khalsa army.

General Gough was likely not too displeased at the lack of progress of the artillery since he always preferred to engage his infantry with fixed bayonets as soon as possible in a battle.

Gough split his force into three, with the two groups in the centre pretending to attack on the right, to distract the Sikhs, while the intended attack was being carried out on the left, the weakest part of the Sikh defences. The strategy did not work since the Sikhs focused their counterattack where it was really needed and ignored the trap being set for them. However, the persistent waves of infantry did achieve their objective as they eventually overwhelmed the Khalsa defensive positions.

This progress came at an extremely high cost for the soldiers of the East India Company, as summarised by an eyewitness dragoon, John Pearman:

Oh what a sight to sit on your horse, to look at those brave fellows as they tried several times to get into the enemy's camp, and at last they did, but oh, what a loss of human life. God only knows who will have to answer for it.
(Military historian R. Holmes, 10)

The same attack, seen from the Sikh side, is described by a gunner, Hookum Singh:

Nearer and nearer they came, as steadily as if they were on their own parade ground, and in perfect silence ... At last the order came, 'Fire', and our whole battery as if from one gun fired into the advancing mass. The smoke was so great that for a moment I could not see the effect of our fire ... what was my astonishment, when the smoke cleared away, to see them all still advancing in perfect silence, but their numbers reduced to about one half ... but on they came, in that awful silence. (Military historian R. Holmes, 11)



Map of the Battle of Sobraon on 10th February 1846 during the First Sikh War: map by John Fawkes

Gough then ordered the two groups conducting the diversionary attacks to attack the enemy in reality, even if this was at the strongest points of the Sikh defences. Even though the right wing of the Sikh forces had only cavalry and no heavy weapons, they managed to hold ground and repulse the attack. One of the attack groups faced a defensive wall, and needed scale ladders to cross over. With a withdrawal through heavy enemy fire not an option, the British entrenched themselves in the riverbank as best they could. Fortunately for the British, the Sikh cannons had by now sunk into the soft ground and the gunners could not move the cannons or lower their angle of fire to hit the enemy. Reinforced by more waves of infantry arriving, the British and sepoy units fought a vicious hand-to-hand battle with the Sikh defenders.

The military historian R. Holmes gives the following description of the Sikh defences at Sobraon:

... they hold a strong position facing southwards. It is shaped like a long, flattish letter U, a mile and a half wide along its southern side, with an open end to the river, and a pontoon bridge behind it. A Spanish officer in the service of the Sikhs has designed formidable defences, consisting of two concentric lines of earth ramparts, twelve feet high in places, with arrowhead bastions jutting out in front of the embankments and a broad ditch in front of them. On

the Sikh right the ground is too sandy for the construction of high ramparts, and on those lower earthworks - too unstable to bear the weight of proper artillery - the Sikhs have placed a line of 200 zumbooruks, light swivel guns usually fired from a camel's saddle.

The battle saw vigorous cavalry actions, with HM 3rd King's Own Light Dragoons and HM 16th Queen's Royal Lancers particularly distinguishing themselves. The British light cavalry wore embroidered dark blue jackets and dark blue overall trousers, except the 16th who bore the sobriquet 'the Scarlet Lancers' for their red jackets. The headgear of the two regiments of light dragoons was a shako with a white cover; the headgear of the lancers the traditional Polish tschapka. HM regiments of foot wore red coats and blue trousers with shakos and white covers.

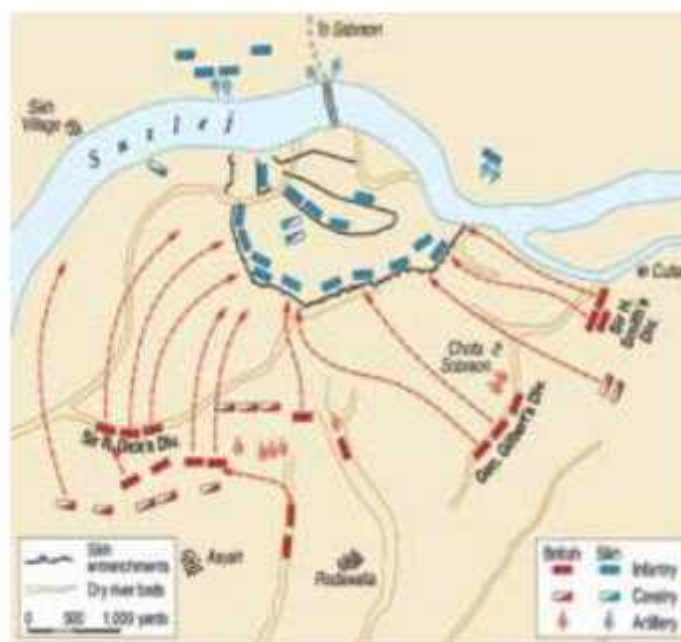
The Bengal and Bombay light cavalry regiments wore pale blue uniforms. The infantry of the presidency armies wore red coats and peak-less black shakos.

The Gurkha units here performed particularly well with their kukri long knives. The British cavalry, including dragoons, followed up the infantry and caused the Sikh defenders to disperse in small groups, even if some stayed to fight where they stood with slashing swords.

The British, Gurkhas and Bengal regiments renewed their attacks along the entire front of the entrenchment, and broke through at several points. On the vulnerable Sikh right, engineers blew a breach in the fortifications and British cavalry and horse artillery pushed through it to engage the Sikhs in the centre of their position.

Tej Singh had left the battlefield early. It is alleged in many Sikh accounts that he deliberately weakened the pontoon bridge, casting loose the boat at its centre, or that he ordered his own artillery on the west bank to fire on the bridge on the pretext of preventing an English pursuit. However, as per English accounts, the bridge simply broke under the weight of the soldiers trying to retreat across it, having been weakened by the swollen river.

Whichever account is correct, the bridge broke, trapping nearly 20,000 of the Sikh Khalsa Army on the east bank. None of the trapped Sikh soldiers attempted to surrender and the Khalsa soldiers led by Sham Singh, fought to the death. British horse artillery lined the bank of the river and continued to fire into the soldiers in the water. The first



The map showing some 20,000 Sikhs lined the crescent-shaped defenses at Sobraon, but more than half the rest of the army was across the Sutlej River, out of easy support range (image courtesy: warfarehistorynetwork.com).

British units began to cross the river in the evening and on 13 February, 1846 Gough's army was close to Lahore. Although detachments of the Khalsa remained intact in outlying frontier districts of the Punjab, they could not be concentrated quickly enough to defend Lahore.

Aftermath

The Battle at Sobraon ended the war as the British army crossed the Sutlej river and marched into the Punjab. The central durbar of the Punjab nominated Gulab Singh, the effective ruler of Jammu, to negotiate terms for surrender.

By the Treaty of Lahore, the Sikhs ceded the valuable agricultural lands of the Doab (Jullundur Doab) to the East India Company, and allowed a British Resident at Lahore with subordinates in other principal cities. These Residents and Agents would indirectly govern the Punjab, through Sikh Sardars. In addition, the Sikhs were to pay an indemnity of 1.2 million pounds. Since they could not readily find this sum, Gulab Singh was allowed to acquire Kashmir from the Punjab by paying 750,000 pounds to the East India Company.

“Those overgrown brutes of artillery men... fought with unusual courage, many of their lives being bought at the price of ours, i.e. when some of our men plunged their bayonets into the Sikhs, they held them fast by the sockets with their left hands, and cut our men’s heads off with their massive tulwars, with deep regret I saw several of my comrades thus killed.”

Lieutenant JW Baldwin recalling the Battle of Sobraon, 1846



An artist's depiction of the final hours of the battle of Sobraon, wherein the bridge over the Sutlej river is collapsing under the weight of the retreating Khalsa Army.

ROLE AND STATUS OF WOMEN IN SIKHISM THROUGH GURU NANAK'S PERSPECTIVE

Aasif Rashid Wani

Introduction:

From the modern to post-modern period, women's issues have been a main aspect in every debate. The feministic movement started from the west and spread throughout the world like a fire. The rights of women were deprived in the male-dominated system which compelled them to start a movement against the discrimination faced by women in society. It is extremely unfortunate that human beings are discriminated on the basis of sex. It is not written anywhere that men have more power and prestige than women. Man and woman are two wheels of the same vehicle. One wheel cannot run without the other. In our societies there is a social difference between man and woman and women are made to feel inferior while men feel pride in their masculinity. In this regard the famous critic Simone de Beauvoir remarked that "One is not born, but rather becomes woman" (*The Second Sex* 32).

In the contemporary era, people are talking about equality and justice but it is not implemented anywhere in our societies. Women have same rights as men and there should be no discrimination on the basis of color, creed, or sex.

It is generally said that the state of development of a society can be judged from the status a woman occupies in it. A woman performs a number of roles in the family, community and the wider social system. Her status in the society is determined by her composite status depending upon her various positions and roles. To an extent, it also depends upon her consciousness of her own status. In the final analysis, the status is "the conjunction of positions a woman occupies as a worker, student, wife, mother, the

power and prestige attached to these positions and the rights and duties she is expected to exercise" [*Status of Women and Family Planning, quoted in United Nations, Population of India (New York, ESCAP Population Publication, Country Monography Series No. 10, 1982), p. 359*].

The status of a woman can best be measured by the extent of control that she has over her own life, derived from access to knowledge, economic resources and political power and the degree of autonomy enjoyed by her in the process of decision making and choice at crucial points in her life.

Women in Indian society generally occupy a low status. They have been discriminated against in all walks of life, accentuating social, economic and cultural inequalities. The sex-based discrimination deprives them of exercise and enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms in all spheres of life. In India, the religious factor has been of utmost importance in determining the status of women since it exerts a powerful influence on the thought, culture and behaviour of people.

The Role and Status of Women in the Sikh Society:

"Women and men, all by God are created. All this is God's play. Says Nanak, all thy creation is good, Holy" (Guru Granth Sahib, p. 304). Sikhism made a radical departure from Hinduism by demolishing the unequal barriers that the Hindu society had erected between man and man, and between man and woman. The Sikh Gurus laid down the foundations of a healthy, egalitarian and progressive

social order. They advocated the principles of universal equality and brotherhood as the only true basis of social relations. The Sikh concept of equality transcended the narrow considerations of caste, creed, sex and colour. The Sikh Gurus held a woman equal to a man in every field of life. They *pleaded* for equal rights and privileges for her, both in religious and socio-political fields. Sikhism does not debar woman from attaining salvation. She can realize the highest religious goal while remaining a woman. There is no need for her to first take birth as a man to attain *mukti*. A woman is not barred from reading the Scripture. She can act as a priest, conduct the service, and lead a prayer in the Gurdwara.

Guru Amar Das even assigned to women the responsibility of supervising the community in certain sectors. They were invested with the office of preachership and

missionary work. Mata Sahib Kaur, wife of Guru Gobind Singh, participated in the preparation of amrit by pouring sugar crystals in it which was then administered to the Five Beloved Ones at the time of the formation of Khalsa by Guru Gobind Singh. Similarly, women were invested with equal rights in the social and political fields. Mata Kheevi was held in high esteem for her dedication to social work. Mata Gujri, Mata Sahib Kaur, Mai Bhago, Mai Sada Kaur, Maharani Jind Kaur and Maharani Sahib Kaur participated in political and war affairs of the Sikhs. Some of them assumed the role of a fighter for dharamyudh and fought against enemy forces.

The Sikh history records with appreciation the heroic deeds performed by these brave Sikh women. It was the impact of the egalitarian Sikh teaching that these women could come to the fore and distinguish themselves.



Artist : Arpana Caur. Collection and image courtesy: Dr. Parvinder Khanuja, USA

First Female Sikh Judge of the United States



Indian-origin Manpreet Monica Singh became the first female Sikh judge in the US, marking a historic day in Houston, Texas. She took the oath of office as a judge in Texas' Harris County Civil Court. Monica was born in Houston, Texas, in the United States. Her father was an immigrant and moved to the US in the 1970s as an architect. Ms. Singh attended the University of Texas at Austin and the South Texas College of Law. She has been practicing law for around 20 years and has handled over 100 cases. It is reported that Ms. Singh is involved in numerous civil rights organizations at a local, state, and national level. The state's first South Asian judge Ravi Sandill, presided over the oath ceremony. He said, "It's a really big moment for the Sikh community." Later he added, "When they see someone of color, someone a little different, they know that possibility is available to them. Manpreet is not only an ambassador for Sikhs, but she's an ambassador for all women of colour." She was runner up for Houston Young Lawyers Association Most Outstanding Attorney in 2010. Monica has been felicitated with the South Asian Bar Association Distinguished Member Award in 2017 and the Texas Diversity Champion Award from the State Bar of Texas in 2018.

In addition to practicing law for 20 years and having tried over 100 cases, Singh is involved in numerous civil rights organizations at a local, state, and national level. She is on the Board of Directors of the ACLU of Texas, the Texas Lyceum, and the Sikh Coalition (also serving as Trustee). She is also a Chapter Representative for the exclusive American Board of Trial Advocates and ongoing lecturer for the Texas Bar CLE classes.

The transformation the Sikh Gurus brought in the status of women was truly revolutionary. The concept of equality of woman with man not only gave woman an identity of her own but tended to free her from all kinds of fetters to which she was bound in the Hindu society. Condemned to a life of misery and degradation and deprived of all social privileges and rights, she had hitherto developed a slavish mentality. This coupled with social restraints had totally killed her initiative and restricted her mobility.

She had grown into a listless individual. It was in this setting that Guru Nanak, the founder of the Sikh faith, raised his voice for justice to women and provided the scriptural basis for equality which was not to be found in the scriptures of other India-born religions. He pleaded the cause of women and strove for their liberation in the fifteenth century whereas women's emancipation movement in Europe started much later, in the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries. In an age when the inferiority of women was taken for granted and female infanticide and the customs of purdah and sati were commonly practiced, the Guru spoke out against them in a voice of reason and sanity. As the Sikh faith grew, his protest grew louder and it demolished one by one all centuries-old disabilities against woman. In an oft-quoted sermon the Guru tries to show the folly of treating woman with disrespect:

**From the woman is our birth;
In the woman's womb are we shaped
To the woman are we engaged
To the woman are we wedded.
The woman, yea, is our friend,
And from woman is the family.
If one woman dies, we seek another;
Through the woman are the bonds of the world,
O' why call woman evil who giveth birth to kings
From the woman is the woman;
Without the woman there is none;
Nanak, without the woman is the
One True Lord Alone (AG, p. 473).**

The Guru insisted that woman is the source of man's physical existence and his entire social life. The Sikh Gurus denounced all those practices and restrictions which tended to reduce a woman to a position of inferiority. They gave them more freedom in the affairs of the society. The false notions that women were unclean were removed. Women were no longer considered a source of sin. They came to be respected as equally good

members of the society. In medieval India, the practice of sati (immolation of a widow on the funeral pyre of her husband) was common. The Sikh Gurus condemned it long before any notice of it was taken later by the British rulers. Guru Amar Das carried out a vigorous campaign for the abolition of this inhuman and barbarous practice. He observed:

**A Sati is not she, who burneth herself
On the pyre of her spouse.
Nanak: a Sati is she, who dieth with
The sheer shock of separation.
Yea, the Sati is one who liveth contented
And embellisheth herself with good conduct:
And cherisheth her Lord ever and calleth
On Him each morn.**

**The women burn themselves on the pyres
Of their lords,
But if they love their spouses well,
they suffer the pangs of separation even otherwise,**

**He further said:
She who loveth not her spouse,
Why burneth she herself in fire?
For, be he alive or dead.**

She owneth him not (Ag, p. 787).

The Guru denounced Sati as an infliction of unforgivable cruelty on women and strove hard for the emancipation of women from this forced brutal social practice. He also sought amelioration of the position of women by deprecating the custom of *purdah* (veil) and by encouraging widow remarriage. No woman could come to the congregation in *purdah*. Guru Amar Das also established twenty-two Manjis covering several parts of India for the growth of Sikh religion and organization. He entrusted four of these to women. The Sixth Guru, Guru Hargobind called woman "the conscience of man" without whom moral living was impossible. The girls were also encouraged to receive education.

Child marriage was discouraged and the practice of female infanticide banned. The latter was considered so important that it was subsequently made a part of the instructions given to the Sikhs at the time of baptism. The oath requires that Sikhs will not practice female infanticide or have any association at all with those who practice it, will not take alcohol, tobacco and other drugs, and will not marry their daughters for monetary gain. Guru Gobind Singh, the tenth Guru, firmly endorsed the

Harpreet Chandi reaches South Pole



A British Sikh Army soldier and physical therapist just broke the previous record for the longest female arctic solo, unsupported, and unassisted. Captain Harpreet Chandi, also known as Polar Preet, traversed 1,397 kilometres of Antarctica in minus 50-degree cold to become the first woman of Indian descent to break the record for the longest solo unassisted walk to the South Pole. Chandi has always been one to go against the grain, pushing herself out of her comfort zone to do things most people wouldn't. When she was 19, she came across an advertisement for the British Army reserves in her hometown of Derby, and immediately decided to enlist, despite some people in her family not being too happy about it. "I was doing something that was different from what was expected of me, and I hadn't asked permission," she says. "It took a while, but after doing the degree, getting onto physio and joining the army reserves, I just started doing whatever I wanted."

In tandem with her army training, Chandi began running half marathons followed by full ones and realised she enjoyed long, endurance events. "I would do a field exercise with the army, and then I would want to do more outside the army as well," she recalls.

principle of human equality in all walks of life. A Sikh cannot be called a Sikh if he discriminates between a high and a low or between a man and a woman.

Sikhism has thus been a potent influence in the emancipation of Indian womanhood. According to the basic tenets of Sikh religion, a woman has full freedom for worship, education and vocation. She may work in a field or a factory or go to a battlefield as a soldier. There are no obstacles in her way. Furthermore not only are there no prejudices in Sikhism against women engaging in productive work, it is made obligatory for all individuals, both men and women, to engage in gainful and productive activity and towards society.

In Sikhism, a woman is not considered an evil influence who leads man astray. Nor is she regarded as an obstacle in the realization of the spiritual ideals. Sikhism is a householder's religion for man and woman alike. The Sikh Gurus honored the institution of marriage and strongly denounced asceticism. They castigated those yogis who left their houses and lived on the generosity of the common people. The yogis took pride in being celibates but inwardly many craved sexual indulgence.

Said Guru Nanak, "In his hands the begging bowl and he wears a patched coat like a mendicant's but within him is immense craving. And though he abandons his own wife, he is attached to another's, lured by sex-desire" (AG, p. 1013).

The Sikh Gurus condemned the hypocrisy that characterized yogis. In their view, there is nothing unclean about the normal sex life. All the Sikh Gurus were married men, except the eighth Sikh Guru who died very young. They also led the regular life of a householder and regarded sexual desire as a natural phenomenon.

In Sikhism, spiritual freedom is to be secured not by the unnatural suppression of human desires but by their judicious organization. In other words, Sikhism is for temperate gratification of bodily desires. It deprecates animality in man and approves the institution of marriage as the practical and natural artifice for taming and controlling biological instincts.

In Sikhism, man and woman are regarded as complements to each other; one is incomplete without the other. Woman is considered ardhangni, that is the other half of man. The basis of man-woman relationship is true love, nothing



Women played an important role during the farmer's protest

else. Marriage is considered essential but marriage is not regarded as a contract subject to dissolution at will. It is an unbreakable spiritual union. The basis of marriage is not simply a physical union, but an everlasting true love.

Guru Amar Das remarked: "Bride and groom are not they who pose as one whole; bride and groom are they who are two bodies with one soul" (AG, p. 788). Marriage aims at the fusion of two souls into one. It is a means by which the two souls attain spiritual growth. Marriage is thus a loving comradeship between a man and a woman who seek to live creatively in partnership to gain the four objects of life: dharma, artha, kama and moksha. Its main purpose is the enrichment of the personality of husband and wife in a way that each may supplement the life of the other and both may together achieve completeness. Marriage is also a means by which a person gains self-fulfillment. It becomes workable only on the basis of mutual trust, understanding and fidelity.

Sikhism upholds monogamous ideal of marriage. Giving his views on chastity, Guru Gobind Singh said, "As I grew up, my Guru instructed me thus: O son, as long as you live, keep up thy vow (of chastity). Let not thought of another woman cross even thy dreams. And let the wedded spouse be the exclusive objective of thy ever-increasing love." Sikhs are required by their religion to be loyal to their spouses. In Sikhism, even celibacy has been redefined in terms of chastity. According to Bhai Gurdas, a celibate is one who is married to one wife only and treats all other women as sisters and daughters. Sikhism condemns adultery in unequivocal terms. All the Sikhs who accept baptism are forbidden to (i) smoke tobacco or take liquor, (ii) eat meat killed by ritual slaughter, (iii) cut hair, and (iv) commit adultery. It is obligatory for Sikhs to desist from the evil of adultery. No one is spared, not even the king. Sikhism directs its followers to be sincere to their wives, and look at all other women as if they were their mothers and sisters.

Concluding Remarks:

To sum, Sikhism fully recognizes the useful role played by woman. She is not an evil or a seductress, but the mother of mankind. Guru Nanak's was the first voice raised against discrimination perpetuated by society on women. Sikhism endeavored to create elements of a fresh and vigorous life by giving due recognition to the constructive and important role played by women in the society. So far as the scriptural value system of the Sikhs is concerned, a woman is accorded equal religious, social, economic and

A Social Worker: Prakash Kaur



Born in 1919, Prakash Kaur is a social worker from Jalandhar, Punjab and is doing social service towards abandoned girl children in Punjab. She has been running "Unique Home", (also called Bibi Prakash Kaur Unique Home) a centre for orphans, "unwanted" and "unclaimed" girls on the Nakodar Road, for the past 28 years. Prakash Kaur started with eight abandoned girl children in 1993 and now she has been mother to almost 100 abandoned girls, of which 30 girls raised by her are married. The other 70 are studying in private schools and colleges. Some of them are doing MBBS and BTech, some are pursuing LLB, psychology and other professional and vocational courses. Meanwhile, in one of the news portals she revealed that she herself was abandoned on the streets by her biological parents over 60 years ago. She was brought up at Nari Niketan in the city. As the girls lovingly call her mother, she takes them for excursions to hill stations. Known to provide them with the best dresses, she takes them to top-end shopping malls. She even celebrated their birthdays together every year on 24 April. "They are my own children," the lady says. "They are never made to feel like abandoned children."

Her work has been appreciated and recognized in India and abroad including by the likes of Nita Ambani, who on her visit to Jalandhar, decorated Bibi Prakash Kaur with the "Real Hero Award."

In addition, Canadian Defence Minister Harjit Singh Sajjan also visited the Unique Home in 2017 and appreciated the work being done there.

political rights. She has full freedom to worship and read scriptures or work in fields and factories or participate in legislatures. No field is barred to her.

Sikhism encourages education of girls which will enable them to adopt rational modes of thought and use their faculties to the maximum advantage of society. Since the Sikh scriptural value system accords reasonable equality to women in all walks of life, it does not allow any waste of precious human resources. It paves way for full utilization of woman power potential, thereby aiding the process of economic growth. However, when the operative value system of the Sikhs is scanned, there are so many deviations. In spite of the exhortations by the Sikh Gurus, women remain less than equal to men in Sikh society. When confronted with the stark realities of life there emerges a different picture. Sikhs are a part and parcel of the Indian society which is comprised of more than four-fifths of Hindus-their exact proportion during the four censuses beginning 1951 being 84.9 per cent, 83.5 per cent, 82.7 percent and 82.6 percent respectively. As against this, Sikhs constitute only a small segment of the total population of the country, representing 1.74 percent in 1951 and 1.79 percent, 1.89 percent and 2 percent in the three subsequent Censuses.

Sikhs are governed by the Hindu Personal Law. Furthermore, there is close social interaction between Hindus and Sikhs. As a consequence, Sikh women too have come to acquire certain disabilities which traditionally characterized Hindu society. To this category belong such prejudices as preference for a male child. Female infanticide too was not an unknown evil among Sikhs, particularly among some sections of Jat Sikhs. The dowry system is still prevalent among the Sikhs, both in India and abroad. However, instances of self-immolation of widows on the funeral pyres of their husbands have been more or less non-existent among them. The same holds for bride burning cases. But the practice of Polygamy - a transplant from the Hindu society-survived all scriptural exhortations to the contrary. If a Sikh couple did not have a male, or any, offspring, the husband was free to marry another woman without inviting any social disapproval.

On the other hand, if the husband had any infirmity, this did not raise any eyebrows. Social conscience easily accepts double standards - one for men and another for

women. Male chauvinism was a dominant feature of the Hindu society in the past and exists even now, though its intensity has somewhat diminished. It enveloped Sikh society too, though in a rather subdued form since it did not have the sanction of religion. Socially, a Sikh woman has never been on an equal footing with man. There is always a gap between the doctrine and the reality. This shows up in the operative part of the Sikh value system also. The right of Sikh women to equality with men was foreclosed by the Hindu society out of which she grew and it has been a long and arduous process for the forces of religion to give her this right. She is still a lesser person - subject to the dictates of the male members of her family on all crucial matters - though her lot is comparatively better than that of women belonging to other major Indian religions. It needs to be added here that many Sikh women see a silver lining in the social reform campaign launched in recent years. In Punjab against the dowry system, ostentatious celebration of marriages, and screening of films showing nudity and improperly clad female bodies, notwithstanding the objectionable means being employed to implement it. Sex determination tests are also being given to a go-by as a part of the movement which encompasses elimination of many other harmful activities such as smoking and taking alcohol.

Dr Gurnam Kaur writes,

"All human beings are equal from birth. There are only two classes of human beings (man or woman) viz., manmukh and gurmukh. Those who follow the path of the Guru, obey the will of God, the divine ordinance are called gurmukhs, and those who follow the path of their own mind, act according to their ego running away from the Guru, the Shabad (the Word), are manmukhs (egoists)".

Dr. Aasif Rashid Wani is a resident of a small village named Buchroo in Kulgam district of Kashmir. He has studied English Literature in M.A. and M.Phil from Vikram University, Ujjain (MP). He has been awarded his Ph.D. in 2020 from Sanchi University of Buddhist-Indic Studies, Madhya Pradesh. Currently, he is working as a guest lecturer in Government Degree College, Damhal Hanjipora, Kulgam, Jammu & Kashmir. E-mail: editor@pijssl@gmail.com.

Accolades for Nishaan Magazine



(*3rd Position in its category)

**Nishaan Magazine printed by Colourbar Communications
bagged the Appreciation Certificate*
for its outstanding printing at National Awards for Excellence in Printing 2023**

We do wonders, with Inks and papers

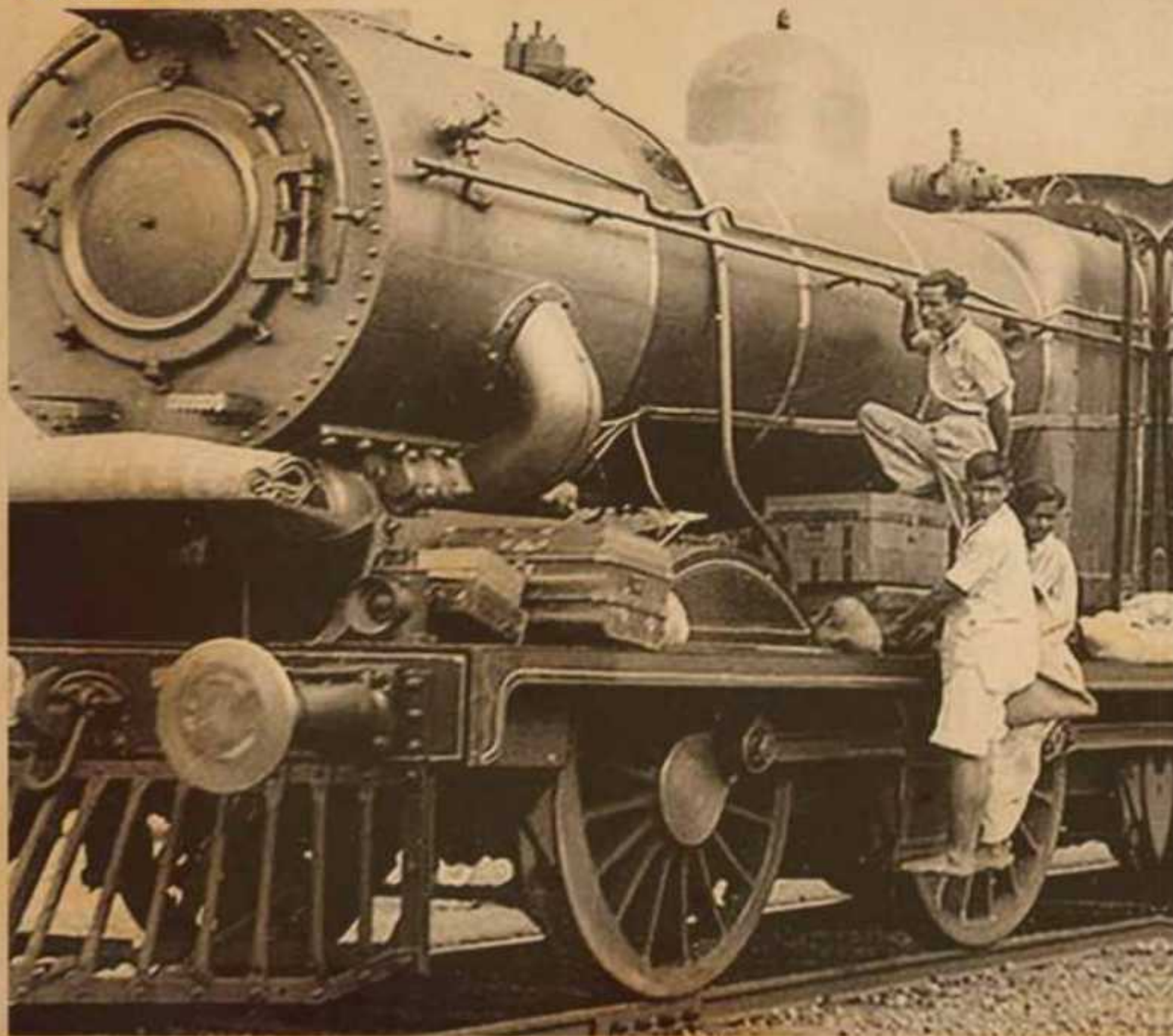


44, Community Centre, Upper Ground Floor
Naraina Industrial Area, Phase -1,
New Delhi - 110028 (INDIA) (Above PNB Bank)
M. : +91 9811218951
E. : colourbarcommunications@gmail.com

PESHAWAR EXPRESS

From the Nishaan's Collection

Krishan Chander



When I left Peshawar, I heaved a sigh of relief. All my bogies were occupied, mainly by Hindus. They came from Peshawar itself and from Mardan, Kohat and Char Sadda, from Khyber and Landi Kotal, Bannu and Naushehra. There were strict security measures at the railway station: the army personnel appeared quite fastidious. Every compartment had two fully armed Baluchi soldiers to ensure their safety. The soldiers with their peacock "turrahs" at the back of their turbans gazed at the well-preserved women folk of the evacuees and made rude comments.

The passengers in the train were shedding tears or blood in the heart of their hearts. They were leaving the land of their birth, the land that had made them hardy. They had drunk deep at its salubrious springs. And today they had become strangers to it, it had shut its doors on them.

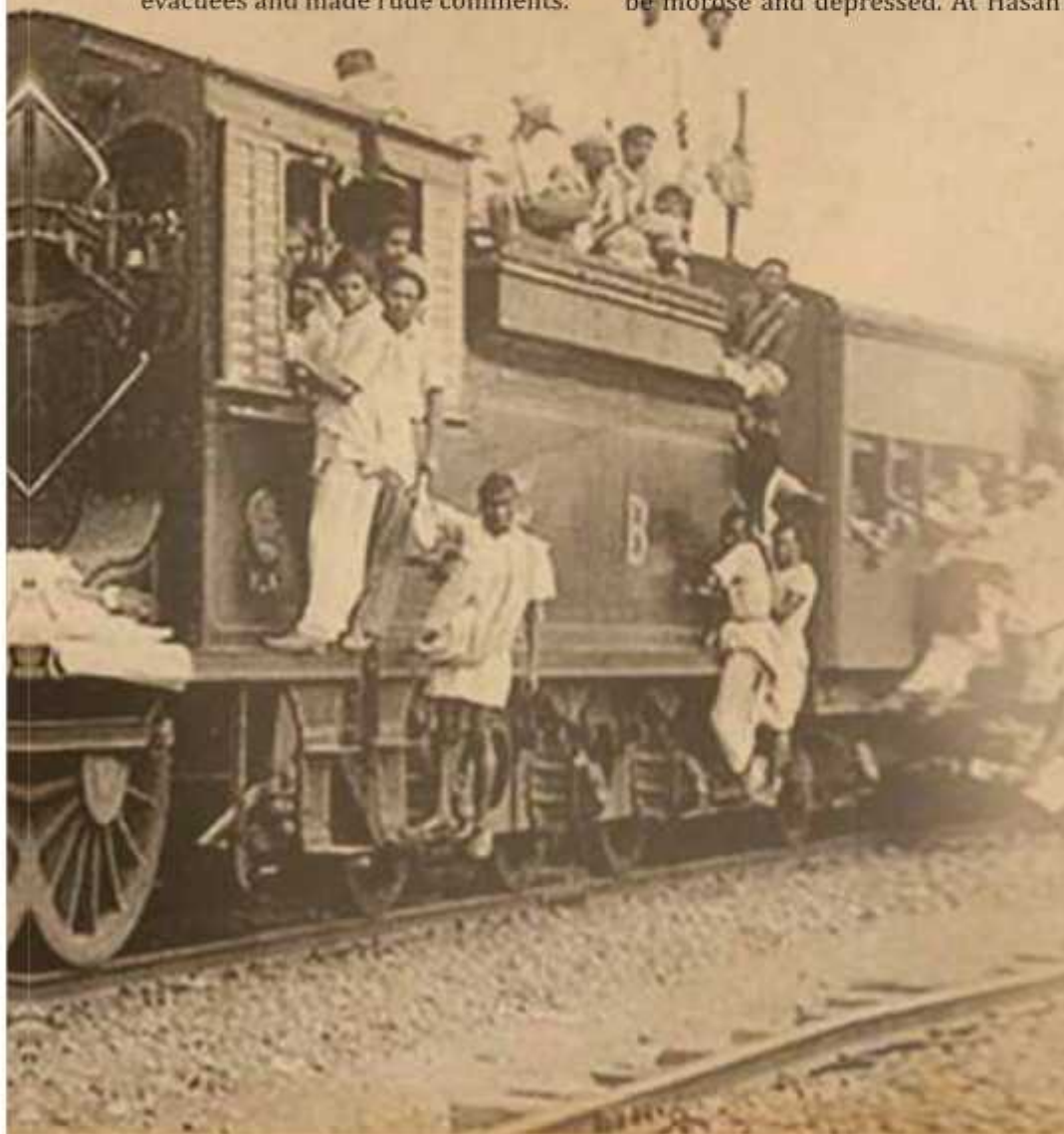
They were proceeding to an unknown country. When they thought of its parched plains and its scorching sun their hearts sank. But they must go to save themselves, to protect the honour of their wives and daughters. I reached Hasan Abdal. The passengers continued to be morose and depressed. At Hasan

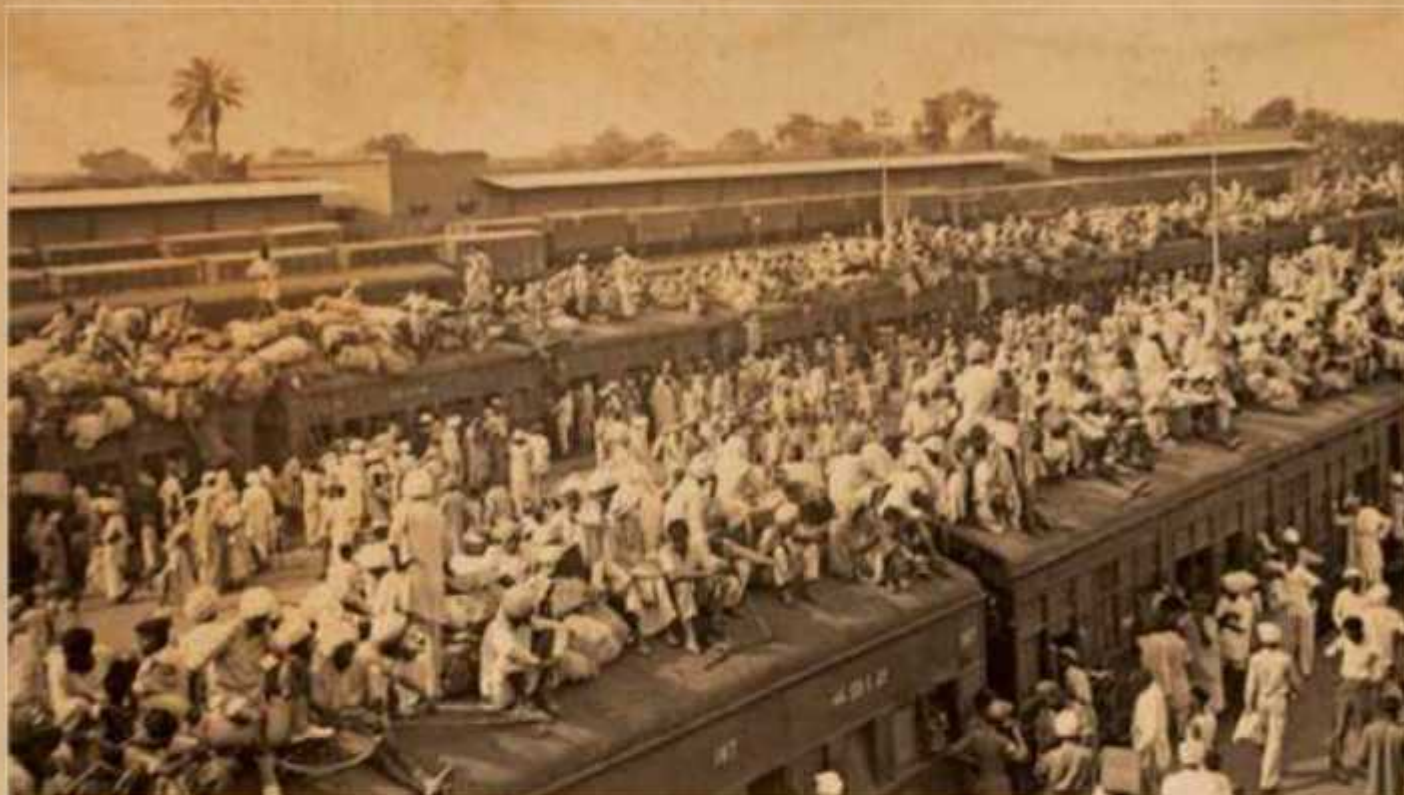
Abdal — also known as Panja Sahib — they were joined by Sikhs with their swords. It appeared they had been decimated with their own weapons. Rather than relieving they only added to the gloom. The moment they entered, they started exchanging notes with the existing passengers. They told their tales of misery to fellow-passengers and won their sympathy. The Baluchi soldiers guarding the compartments with loaded guns heard it too and felt merely amused.

At Taxila railway station, the halt was unusually long. I could not understand the reason. Maybe they were waiting for the non-Muslim evacuees to arrive from the surrounding villages. When the train guard asked the station master again and again, the latter replied in desperation: "The train won't go any further." Another hour passed waiting in uncertainty. Suddenly there was a noise and the beating of drums was heard in the air.

I thought it must be the non-Muslim evacuees anxious to escape Pakistan. The passengers craned their necks out of the windows to see them approach. As they came close, there was firing of guns. The passengers quickly pulled themselves in. They were indeed Hindus being brought by Muslims from the nearby villages. But they were now mere corpses of "kafirs" on the backs of their Muslim neighbours. Their crime? They had tried to flee their villages!

The Muslims nonchalantly handed over the dead bodies to the Baluchi soldiers for safe conveyance to India. The Baluchis took their charge dutifully and the corpses were evenly distributed to the various compartments: 15 corpses to every compartment. Having done the job, the Muslims fired a volley of guns





in the air and signalled the station master to let me proceed. I had hardly moved when I was stopped again. It occurred to the leader of the mob that with 200 Hindus lost to their villages they would be left desolate. Moreover, they would incur economic losses, losing so many hands. He must have 200 passengers detrained to replace them. Accordingly, 200 passengers, not one more nor one less, were detrained and handed over to the leader by the Baluchi soldiers.

The "kafirs" stood still, fear-stricken. They couldn't move. They were lifted physically and made to stand in a row. They were like living corpses with their frozen faces and stony looks swimming in the air. The Baluchis this time gave the lead. Fifteen people were brought down at the first firing.

It was Taxila. Then another 20 fell. It was Asia's biggest university where

thousands of students studied and benefited from it. Fifty more were gunned down. The Taxila museum has the most wonderful specimens of sculpture reflecting the glory of this ancient land. Yet another fifty were slaughtered now.

In the background are the ruins of the palaces of Sirkap and an extensive sports stadium in a town sprawling for miles and miles. Thirty more joined the dead. Kanishka ruled over this land and taught people to live in peace and amity. Another twenty-five were shot dead. It was here that the Buddha's call for compassion echoed and re-echoed and his followers carried his message far and near. The remainder were finished. It was at Taxila that the Muslim flag of brotherhood and love was hoisted for the first time on the soil of India.

There was death hovering in every compartment. The living corpses sat round the dead bodies. The Baluchi

soldiers saw all this and smiled. I moved on hooting and whistling and arrived at Rawalpindi station.

No one entrained here except 15 burqa-clad women escorted by two armed young men. However, a lot of fire arms, including machine guns and revolvers were loaded in the luggage van.

I was made to stop between Gujar Khan and Jhelum. The Muslim men escorting the burqa-clad ladies stepped down from the train. Just then one of the women tore open her veil and began shouting: "We are Hindus and Sikhs. We are being kidnapped." The other women joined in the cry and pleaded for help, but none was forthcoming. The Muslim escort just laughed and pulled them out and drove them away.

A Hindu boy from the Frontier jumped out of the train and tried to escape. He was instantly gunned

down by the Baluchi soldiers. Some 15 Hindus made a vain attempt to run away while the train was stationary. They were surrounded by armed Muslim goondas and killed. The kidnapped girls were prodded with rifles and forced into a jungle.

When I reached Lala Musa the dead bodies had started putrefying. The foul stink was becoming oppressive. At this the Baluchi soldiers would order a passenger to pick up a corpse and take it to the door of the compartment. They then would push the passenger along with the dead body from the running train. Before long all the corpses were disposed off and along with it an equal number of passengers. There was now room in the train for the remaining passengers to stretch themselves a little.

After Lala Musa I arrived at Wazirabad Junction. Wazirabad town is known for manufacturing knives and daggers. It was here that Hindus and Muslims celebrated the festival of Baisakhi every year and feasted each other. The platform was literally littered with dead bodies. Maybe they had assembled there to participate in the Baisakhi celebrations. It had turned out to be a festival of corpses. Thick smoke continued to spiral from the town towards the sky. Then a band was heard being played near the railway station. It was followed by a cheering crowd. A little later the procession entered the railway platform. It was led by folk dancers. They were followed by a host of naked women, old and young, married and unmarried, mothers and daughters, virgins and those pregnant. They were all Hindus and Sikhs. The men following and jeering

at them were Muslims. Evidently, this is how they had celebrated Baisakhi this year. The women had bruises on their naked bodies. With hair falling loosely on their shoulders, they walked straight as if they had wrapped themselves in thousands of folds. The anguish in their eyes reminded one of Draupadi.

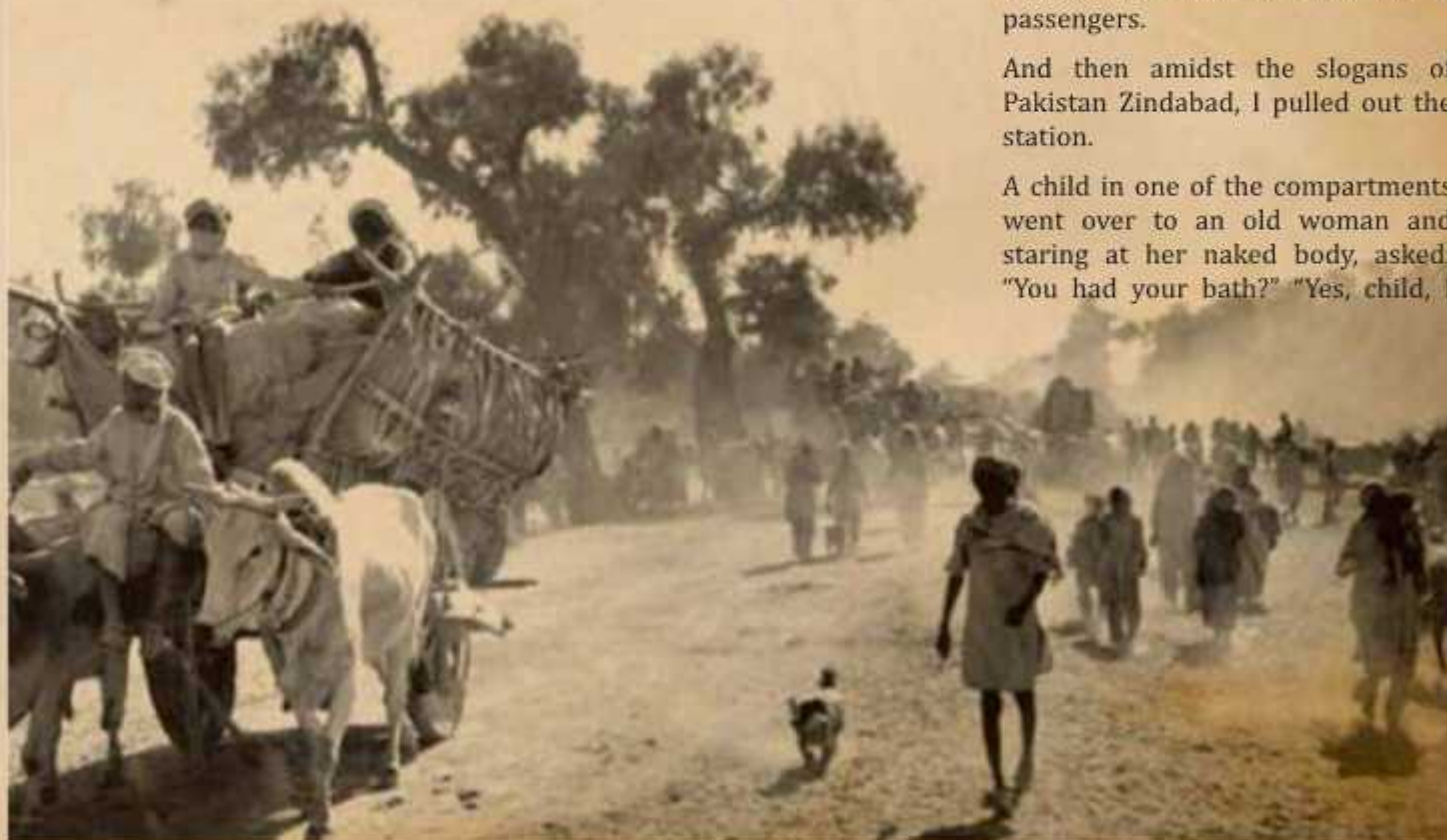
The procession came close to the compartments. The passengers started putting down the shutters of their windows. The women folk began to cover their faces with their duppatas.

The Baluchi soldiers forbade the passengers from bringing down the shutters — it was getting stuffy in the compartments.

But no one would listen to them. So they begin firing their rifles. Nevertheless, all the shutters were put down though some of the evacuees lost their lives. The naked women were forced to sit with the passengers.

And then amidst the slogans of Pakistan Zindabad, I pulled out the station.

A child in one of the compartments went over to an old woman and staring at her naked body, asked: "You had your bath?" "Yes, child, I



was given a bath today by the sons of my motherland." And tears gushed into her eyes. In the meanwhile two naked young girls jumped out of the running train. I did not stop: whistling and hooting I reached Lahore.

I was diverted to Platform 1. There was another train stationed at Platform 2. It had arrived from Amritsar with Muslim refugees. A little while later, a band of Muslim mujahids started searching my compartments. They collected all the jewellery, cash and other valuables they could find with the evacuees. Then they picked out 400 of them and made them stand on the platform. They were to be slaughtered because the train that had just steamed in from Amritsar had arrived minus 400 Muslim refugees. And no less than 50 women had also been kidnapped. It was therefore decided to detrain 50 Hindu women so that the balance in the population of both India and Pakistan could be maintained.

I was now allowed to leave the station. Every bit of my body was stinking. I felt unclean all over. I felt as if I had been thrown out of hell and despatched straight to Punjab. When I reached Attari the whole atmosphere changed. The Baluchi guards had already been replaced at Mughalpura by Dogra and Sikh soldiers. At Attari there were so many dead bodies of Muslim evacuees that the Hindu refugees now felt exhilarated. I was now entering Independent India. Where else could one find such air of freedom? As I reached Amritsar, my ears were splitting with the slogans shouted by the Sikhs and the Hindus. Here, too, there were piles of corpses, but of Muslim evacuees.

A little while later four persons looking like Brahmins entered a compartment. They sported a proper choti, each one of them. And they

wore their dhotis in the typical caste Hindu fashion. They said they were going to Haridwar.

At Amritsar a number of Sikhs fanned out into the compartments in search of skikar. One of them got a bit suspicious and asked one of the four Brahmins where he was going. "To Haridwar on pilgrimage." But the Sikh asked again: "Is it Haridwar or Pakistan you are going to?" "Allah forbid," blurted the man. The Sikh laughed and then pounced on him with his axe. The Sikh's companions overpowered the other three "Brahmins".

Before entering Jullundur there was a Pathan village. I was stopped here again and everyone in the train, the refugees and the local jats, came out and attacked the village. The Pathan put up a brave resistance but to no avail. Men and children were killed, and it was now the turn of their women folk. They were assembled in the open maidan outside the village. Here they harvested their crop. Here they assembled on festival days and made merry, sang and danced. Here 50 Pathan beauties found themselves in the clutches of 500 ruffians.

Reaching Ludhiana, the refugees and their escorts traced out Muslim localities and began looting and massacring. They returned to the train about four hours later, duly laden with booty. This was repeated several times before I reached Ambala. At every wayside station they must slaughter as many Muslims as they could lay their hands on and relieve them of their few possessions.

At Ambala a Muslim Deputy Commissioner and his family entered and occupied a first class compartment. After midnight when the train left Ambala it was stopped at a distance of about 10 miles from the city. Sikhs and Hindus broke into the Deputy Commissioner's

compartment and massacred the entire family save his charming young daughter. They carried the girl and her jewellery box to a near-by jungle. She was so captivating that they did not know what to do with her. The girl pleaded: "Why must you kill me? You may convert me to Hinduism. One of you can even marry me. What good will it do you to kill me?" "She is right," said one. Another stepped forward and, stabbing the girl in the stomach, remarked: "What is this sentimental nonsense? We have work to do; let us go back to the train".

I moved on. People were drinking and shouting the slogan "Long live Mahatma Gandhi". And then, finally, I arrived at Bombay. I have since been given a thorough bath and parked in a shed. Occasionally, I am reminded of the harrowing time I have had, and I tremble all over. I would now like to get out and take a journey to Punjab only when there are rich crops and its people are singing the songs of love and good-neighbourliness.

I am made of wood and steel. There is no life in me. And yet rather than witnessing blood-shed and be burdened with dead bodies and the load of hatred, I want to carry grain to the famine-stricken areas. I want to visit coal mines, steel mills and fertilizer factories. And transport in my compartments happy and carefree peasants, women with their eyes longing for their menfolk, children with smiles on their faces, people who would salute the brave new world where there would be no Hindu and no Muslim. They would be all peasants and workers. Just human beings.

Translated from the original in Urdu by KS Duggal.

(Published in The Sunday Tribune, January 9, 1983)

Impeccable Accuracy

Industry-Leading Turnaround Time

MATRIMONIAL BACKGROUND INVESTIGATIONS

Cost-Effective Pricing

PROBE SERVICES PVT. LTD.
(Private Investigators)

What we Investigate:

- Subject's positive identification, Family background, Financial status of the family
- Sexual behaviour, Medical Status, Psychological condition
- Character & Affairs, Drink/Drug Abuse
- Neighbour reference, Club, Group, Association Membership
- Social media investigation, Criminal record check
- Employment background investigation Due diligence investigation

Probe Services Pvt. Ltd.

Flat No. 3,4,5,15 & 19

Padma Tower-II,

22, Rajendra Place,

New Delhi - 110008

Email: jagdev@jamesbond007.co.in

Mobile: 7500070007

whatsapp: 7500070007

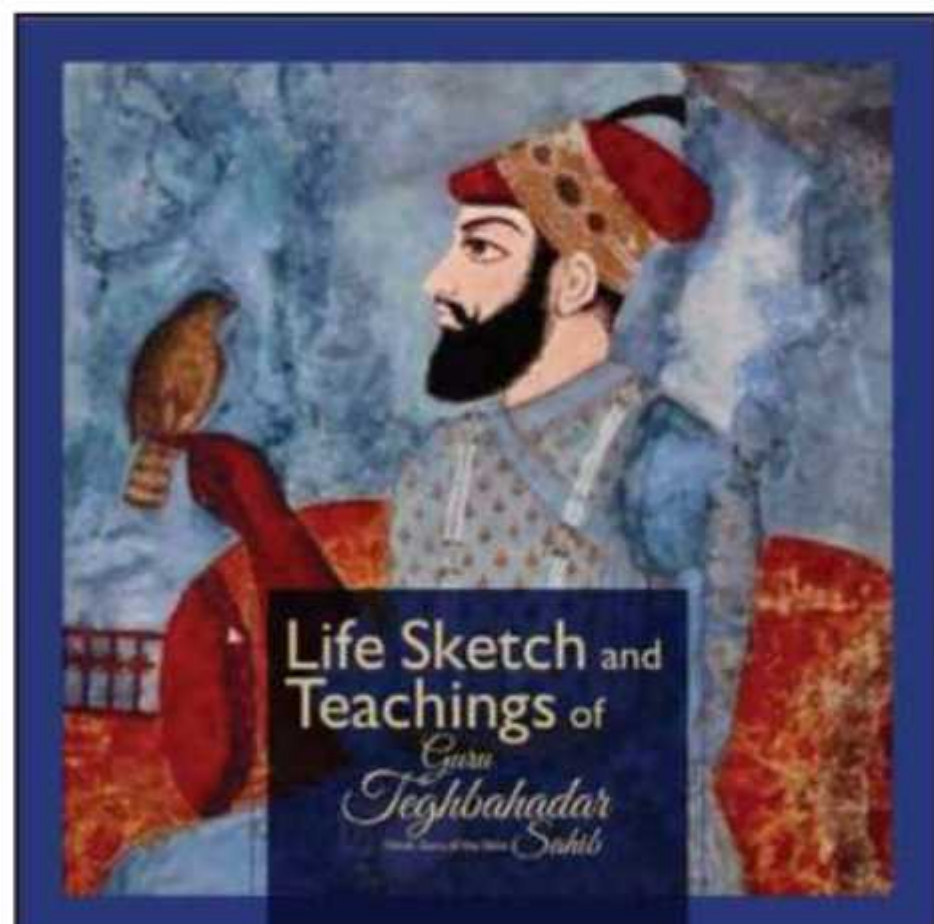
<https://www.pre-matrimonialinvestigations.com>



SPEAKING TO YOUNG MINDS

Book Reviews

Instilling the love of the written word, and inspiring children to know more about the land of Punjab, Sikhism, and the stories that originate from them, are some books that everyone, young and old, must read.



Life Sketch and Teachings of Guru Teghbahadar Sahib, published by The Nanakshahi Trust, and authored by Ishmeet Kaur Chaudhry and Jaswant Singh, commemorates the 400th birth anniversary of the ninth guru of the Sikhs. Indian history remembers him as the epitome of liberty, justice, and equality,

for standing up against Mughal oppression.

As the authors state, "His teachings are more relevant today, in the multi-dimensional societies of the modern world, as they advocate freedom of beliefs and the practice of unity in diversity".

The book is illuminated with hi-res images of the murals at some of the historic gurdwaras connected with the guru, paintings from the period, and documented photographs of his writings and weapons. His life story is documented in an easy-to-read manner, with emphasis on his writings, translations of which have been painstakingly sourced from reliable sources.

The purpose of this book is to simplify existing text, in order to hold the attention of the young readers. The story of how Tyagmal became Teghbahadar is one that inspires, especially in today's world, where it is very important to lead by example. Through their publication, the authors highlight the exemplary life of the ninth guru, who will always be revered as "Srisht Ki Chadar" (a shelter or cover for the whole world).

**The book is available on Amazon.
(Reviewed by Artika Aurora Bakshi)**

Dr. Ishmeet Kaur is an Assistant Professor at the Centre for English Studies, Central University of Gujarat, Gandhinagar, India.

Dr. Jaswant Singh is Director, Gurbani Research, at the Sikh Research Institute, USA.



My Little Sikh Handbook Series is a set of four books conceptualised for children who have a basic reading ability in English. The series caters to a global readership depicting the Sikh History ingeniously in a very lucid and coherent style. The series uses illustrations appealing to the sensibilities of children who cannot ignore the pictures.

Though the series deals with two centuries of the Sikh history beginning with Guru Nanak Dev ji to Guru Gobind Singh ji and the mighty Sikh empire lead by Maharaja Ranjit Singh, a participative method of self-learning has been employed by the author to get across to children that doesn't exhaust the tiny minds.

The activities in the books, quiz questions, join the dots, colour the picture, word finding games and a personal space to take personal notes makes the learning exercise full of fun. The author Artika Aurora Bakshi, herself a passionate teacher and an avid reader seems to have exercised her learnings and experience with children to get the content across to them with extraordinary care and precision. Interestingly, in a world where games, OTT and videos have replaced reading as a habit, these books are extremely useful in triggering the curious minds of children towards reading. Once introduced to children, the children are automatically attracted towards the books due to the various activities included in the book. The books can be a fun-time activity to be done individually, or in groups, with siblings, friends and of course parents.

The author has conceptualised the content very selectively and has reproduced the material creatively not just by intriguing interest in activities regarding artifacts like the

Kohinoor diamond or the generals of the Khalsa army or through an acrostic poem Nishaan Sahib, but also by getting them interested in simran and meditation. Mostly books impart knowledge, or are creative expressions, it is rare when books lead you towards spirituality. The author seems to be extremely concerned about inculcating the learnings of Sikh faith in children not just by introducing the Sikh tenets to them but by leading them to practice meditation through remembrance of the Nam of Ik Oankar. In one of the activities, children are expected to colour a star every day after Simran that is the recitation of the Nam of Ik Oankar. Simran is at the core of Sikh faith, the method that leads human beings to merge with the almighty Ik Oankar.

This effort by the author is sincere in her attempt to explain and pass on the wide expanse of the Sikh faith to the new generation in order to build their potential so that they can be the responsible citizens who grow up with the sensibilities of a saint-soldier as envisioned by the Sikh Gurus.

This series of books is highly recommended for workshops and the Gurmat camps. At the same time, these books will appeal to non-Sikhs who are curious to learn about the Sikh faith. The books are easily available on Amazon.

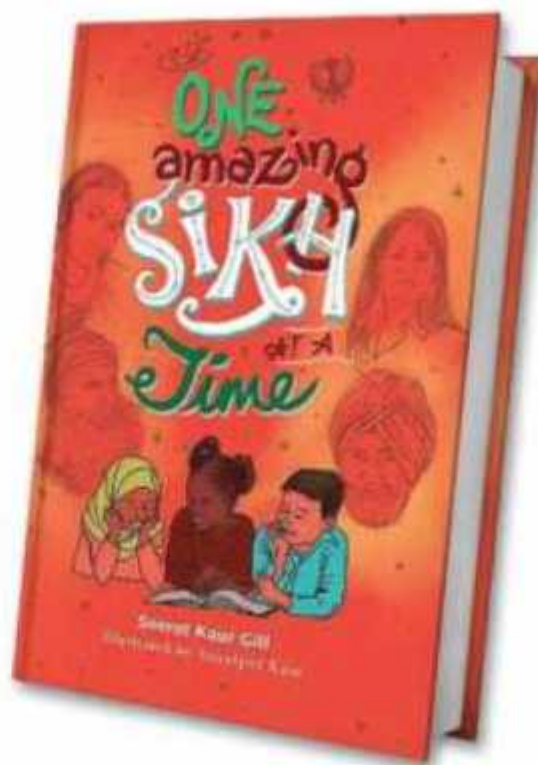
(Reviewed by Dr. Ishmeet Kaur)

Artika Aurora Bakshi is a writer and editor. She is currently working on her fifth children's book.

Some months back, my car broke down on the highway. Unable to call anyone due to a weak network, I was wondering what to do and hoping for a miracle. A car drove past and halted ahead. An old Sardarji got off and walked up to me and asked what the matter was. Hesitatingly, I told him that my car had a flat tyre. He immediately asked for the spare tyre and changed it. I felt embarrassed troubling the old gent, but he just patted my shoulder, asked me to be safe, and drove away. My visits to the Bangla Sahib Gurdwara and the Golden Temple had already shown me the dedication, courteousness, and respect with which Sikhs serve others. Not to mention the umpteen langaars, which I see on the road every other day, distributing food to the needy.

Without trying to compare religions, I feel the Sikh community exemplifies not only courage and sacrifice, as many instances from pages of history have told us, but also humility and helpfulness. There are so many out there whose tales we don't know of - not even those who are 'famous'. At a time like this, comes along a such-books-happen-only-once *One Amazing Sikh at a Time* by Seerat Kaur Gill. When the youth - Sikhs and others - are craving to find their heroes, this book puts forth 51 stories of Sikh sportsmen, artists, scientists, writers and more.

Through colourful illustrations which will delight the adult and capture the attention of the young readers, the book tells tales of fights fought and won - on the battlefield and outside of it. The language remains simple - the simplicity, in fact, adds to the very essence of the book. It helps one to understand and, hence, delivers the desired message succinctly and effectively.



'Is the book just about some famous Sikh heroes?' - One might ask. To toddlers who hear these tales from their parents and grandparents, it might be. However, there is an altogether different level to it as well. As you read, it helps you to accept that you can be different and yet you can be perfect; you can have a different thinking process and yet you are important. Just like Harnaam Kaur who embraced her bearded face and is, now, regarded as a motivational speaker. The book helps you to embrace whatever it is that sets you apart from the rest. It makes you feel special. These tales of heroism and honesty, indeed, will inspire and empower.

The book, also, makes one curious to know more. I knew about Manmohan Singh, Diljeet Dosanjh, Gurdas Maan, and a few more. But, do I know everything about them? No. Did I know about all who have made it to the book? No. After reading the book, did I want to find out more about

them? Yes. I recall spending quite a few hours trying to get to know more about Jaswant Singh Khaira, who died while trying to find out about the illegal killings in Punjab, and Narinder Singh Kapany and his research on fiber optics. The human mind is an inquiring entity - if it can be adequately excited, it will want to know more. Kudos to the author for making that happen.

Overall, it makes for a pleasurable read as bedtime tales or even when one is low and is looking for encouragement to pick up the pieces to start all over again. Read this book for its vibrancy and personality. *The book is available on Amazon.*
(Reviewed by Aditi Ray)

Seerat Kaur Gill is a researcher with a keen interest in the area of higher education and management.

Anantjeet Kaur is an independent illustrator and graphic designer from Delhi.

HIGHLIGHT *YOUR* STORY!

The Nishaan invites Sikhs in New Jersey to
showcase their community's work,
thoughts, and goals through a
New Jersey Special Issue!

Write your articles on:

- The history of Sikhs in New Jersey
- Renowned Sikh personalities of New Jersey
- Cultural events or practices of Sikhs, unique to New Jersey
- Other issues linked to Sikhism in New Jersey



**Contribute \$120 per year to make your
Special Issue a success!**

To know more about Nishaan Nagaara visit
<https://nishaannagaara.com/>

Contact: achintk@gmail.com

Karamjit Singh, Vice-President, Sri Hemkunt Foundation Inc., New York

Interview of S. Karamjit Singh by Bhupinder 'Bo' Singh

Sri Hemkunt Foundation was founded in 1980 in New York. It was established by 11 dedicated visionaries who observed that the Sikh youth living in the Western countries lacked knowledge regarding the high ideals of their religion and were therefore losing their Sikh identity.

In an effort to improve the situation, the Foundation created an environment where children could learn the spiritual, moral, and religious teachings of Sikhism. Since then, the promotion of learning Punjabi, Kirtan, Gurbani, Philosophy, History and Sikh culture has been the cornerstone of the Foundation. The USA foundation is not in any way associated with the Gurudwara Sri Hemkunt Sahib in India.

What are the objectives and purpose of the Foundation?

S. Shamsher Singh (1924 - 2011) established the not-for-profit organization in 1980 in New York for the purpose of connecting the children growing up in the western hemisphere with Sikhi. The objective of the organization was to help children be proud of being a Sikh and also help them explain it to others who knew nothing about Sikhi.

The program also included developing children's public speaking skills. These skills are vital for children to excel in any profession they choose in life.

Tell us about the Hemkunt Foundation and its activities.

The program started with teaching children about the lives of Sikh Gurus, Sikh history and Sikh philosophy.

The objective of the organization was to help children be proud of being a Sikh and also help them explain it to others who knew nothing about Sikhi.

Children are divided into five age-groups, viz, 6-8, 9-11, 12-14, 15-17 and 18-25. Age-appropriate books/topics are assigned to each group. Participants present answers to the specific questions in a specified time from the podium. A set of three judges evaluate the speech for both the contents and presentation. Every

participant is recognized with an appreciation award to encourage them. Winners are awarded additional prizes.

In 2007 we added another segment to our annual program where children are encouraged to recite Shabads in the same Raag as recorded in Sri Guru Granth Sahib. Children also use string instruments (Rabab, Saranda, Taus etc.) used by Guru jees or that were used during their period.

In 2015 a third annual program was added. It is called Panthic Digital Voice. Children are trained to tell their story via digital medium. They are given a specific topic every year e.g., *Vand Chhako*, *Kirat Karo*, *My Sikh Role Model*, *Sikh Identity*, *Chardi Kala* etc. Children can use experiences from school, playground, home, shopping etc. and tell a story. Children are thus exposed to journalism helping them to aim for anchor positions of major networks. Only a Sikh can tell the story about Sikhs with the right perspective.

How is the foundation pursuing its mission? What are the resources it has developed?

The foundation's program is a three-tier activity. The first tier is the Gurudwara level. 30 participants are

required to recognize a Gurudwara as a unit, called a "Center". The person coordinating the program is called a "Center Convener". There are 75 gurdwaras spread over the USA, UK and Kenya participating in the Foundation's program. A group of 3 or more Gurdwaras constitute the second tier called a "Zone". The person coordinating a Zone's activity is called a "Zonal Convener". The first and second position holders in each age-group participate in the Zonal Symposium.

First position winners at the Zonal Symposium participate in the third and the final tier symposium. We call it an "International Symposium". Participants from various States of the USA (New York, New Jersey, Florida, Michigan, California, Texas etc.), UK (London) and Kenya gather together at the specified venue (rotated every year) for the grand finale of the Symposium.

All activities at Center, Zonal and International level are performed by dedicated selfless Sewadars. It includes conveners, judges, time keepers and many more to conduct the program.

The Foundation has not made an appeal for funds or held a fundraising event in the last four decades. The Foundation's administrative and overhead expenses during all these years have been zero. All work is performed by dedicated volunteers as Sewa. The 13 Board Members contribute annually to fund the prizes awarded to winners and participants at the international event.

Why has the Foundation developed their own books, when they started out using the commercially available books?

In 1980 we started with Bhai Vir Singh's books. The books were primarily in Punjabi. For some



Children receiving certificates after Keertan Darbaar



Question and answers session after Symposium and Keertan Darbar

books English translation were available. The children growing up in the western hemisphere could not connect with the social context in Bhai Vir Singh's books. We switched to books written and published in India by other authors. Parents commented that these books present Guru jees' life with miraculous powers instead of presenting the teachings based on logic and reasoning. The sewadars of the Foundation undertook the project of writing books for Groups 1, 2, and 3 based on parents/participants comments over the years. These children are very young. They are generally helped by parents and grandparents to prepare the speech. Books written by the Foundation portray the Gurus' teachings in a rational and logical manner. Permission from the Foundation

is not required to use the books in Sunday Schools or by anyone else.

What about the books and readings for Group 4?

Children for group 4 are quite matured. Generally they read books themselves and prepare their own speech. Plenty of books are available for this group written by various authors.

What is your role with the foundation and since when have you been associated with it?

My older son participated in the symposium in 1986. I was impressed with the mission of the organization. I started volunteering in its activities. In 1990 I became a Board Member. Presently, there are 13 Board members. In 1995, I was given the responsibility of



Sardar Karamjit Singh

International Coordinator. In 2011, upon the demise of S. Shamsher Singh, I was honored to assume his role as General Secretary. I served in that role up to 2020. Currently, I am serving as the Vice-President of the organization.

Can you share with us any success story that can be considered as truly inspiring?

Over the last 43 years, participants have excelled in various professions. We are proud to say that they have retained their Sikhi Swaroop. Gurbir Singh Grewal (Director of the SEC's Division of Enforcement, formerly Attorney General, New Jersey), Kamal Singh Kalsi (Lt. Colonel in the US Army), Ravinder Singh Bhalla (Mayor, New Jersey) are just a few examples. Some have moved on to serve in other Sikh organizations e.g., Sikh Coalition.

Any memorable incidents from the competitions that you can share with our readers?

In 2005 the international program was held at New York. We had invited Navdeep Singh Bains, who served as Minister of Innovation, Science, and Industry in Canada. He

was very young, in his 30s, a Member of Parliament, Canada and a visibly recognizable Sikh. During his keynote speech he narrated his personal experience with the Foundation. The book was on the Life of Guru Nanak. He prepared his speech in Punjabi for an extra prize. He remembered the entire speech by heart and was confident of his preparation. When he came to the podium and started to address the audience, he blanked out upon seeing so many people in front of him. He simply said, "Guru Nanak ji was a good person" and left the podium. Since then, he has developed public speaking skills and can address the parliament with full confidence.

How do you think that the Foundation is succeeding in its mission?

Examples provided under earlier questions are proof that the Foundation is succeeding in its mission. Moreover, children of the parents who participated decades ago are participating now. Parents are convinced of the benefits of the Foundation's program.

Any new ideas and projects that the Foundation is looking at for the future?

We have written books for age-groups 1, 2 and 3. One book for group 5 was co-authored by S. Bhupinder Singh, Houston, USA, and S. Paramjit Singh, Virginia, USA, and me. These are available in English and Punjabi on our website for free. We are working on getting the illustrations prepared from young artists so that the children can better connect with them. We plan to have printed books available through Amazon at a very reasonable cost. We are also planning to have books available on Kindle.

Any message for our readers?

Over the last four decades the program has been continuously improved based on comments/suggestions from parents, participants, judges, and volunteers. All of the information to run the program is available on our website.

Presently nearly 2500 children participate in the program every year. The list of Zones (Foundation's basic unit) is also available on our website. Anyone can volunteer to establish a new Zone to serve children in their area. We are always available to help enthusiastic Sewadars undertake this responsibility.

The maximum Sikh population is in India. So what about an India Zone or may be multiple zones there?

We would love to extend the program to children in India. Immigration issues hold us back. Every year the international event is hosted in a different zone (city). Every time it is held in USA/UK, children in India would require a tourist visa. Parents and grandparents of young children generally accompany them to the international event. Visa requirements would complicate the entire program.

However, we encourage dedicated volunteers to start this program in their country. We are ready to guide and help them in every manner possible. If needed, we are willing to visit them and provide guidance in person. (S. Karamjit Singh, New York, USA) can be contacted for further information at email address: karamjit@hemkunt2.org.

The next annual event is in 2023. The Int'l Symposium, Int'l Keertan Darbaar and Panthic Digital Voice program will be held in New York from 28 to 31 July, 2023.



SRI HEMKUNT FOUNDATION, INC

New York, USA



The Charitable Tax Exempt Organisation

SRI HEMKUNT FOUNDATION'S MISSION:

- To encourage, promote and disseminate the teachings of the Sikh Gurus, and their gospel of universal brotherhood, peace and tolerance.
- To impart spiritual, moral and religious teachings in a scientific manner.
- To encourage the participation of children, youth and adults in social and religious activities, including learning Keertan, Gurbani, philosophy of Sikh Religion, Sikh history, Fine Arts and Culture.
- To promote learning the Punjabi language in Gurmukhi script and studying the spiritual teachings of the Guru Granth Sahib Ji.
- To establish institutions such as schools, libraries, art galleries and to partner with institutions that share the values of the Foundation.
- To organize camps, conferences, study tours, lectures and seminars in various parts of the world for achieving the above mentioned purposes.



SRI HEMKUNT FOUNDATION INC.

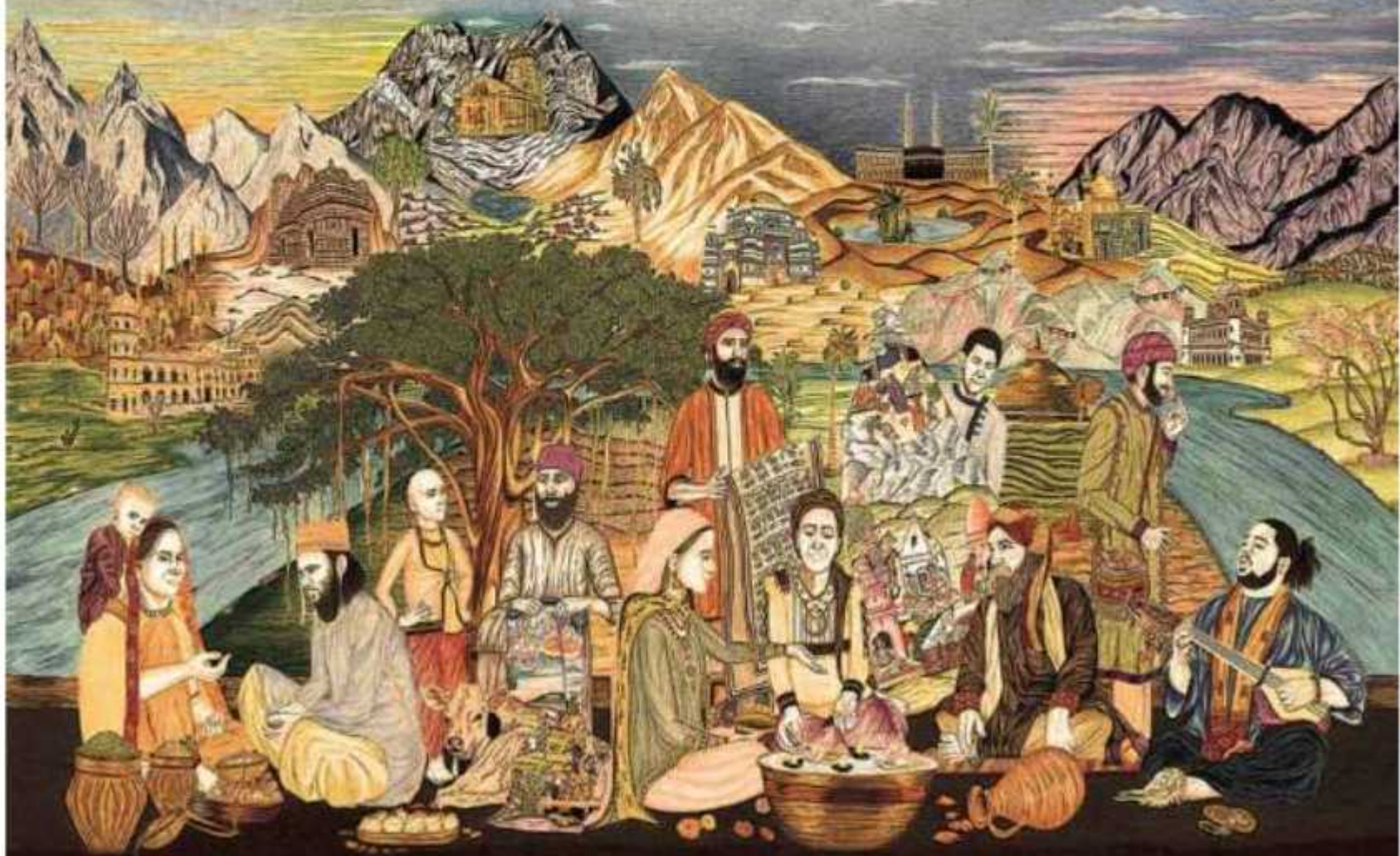
107 Lipton Lane, Williston Park, NY 11596

Phone: 516-782-3257 • E-mail: hemkunt@hemkunt2.org • www.hemkunt2.org

प्रेरणा का सफ़र
24 कड़ियों की दस्तावेज़ी फ़िल्म

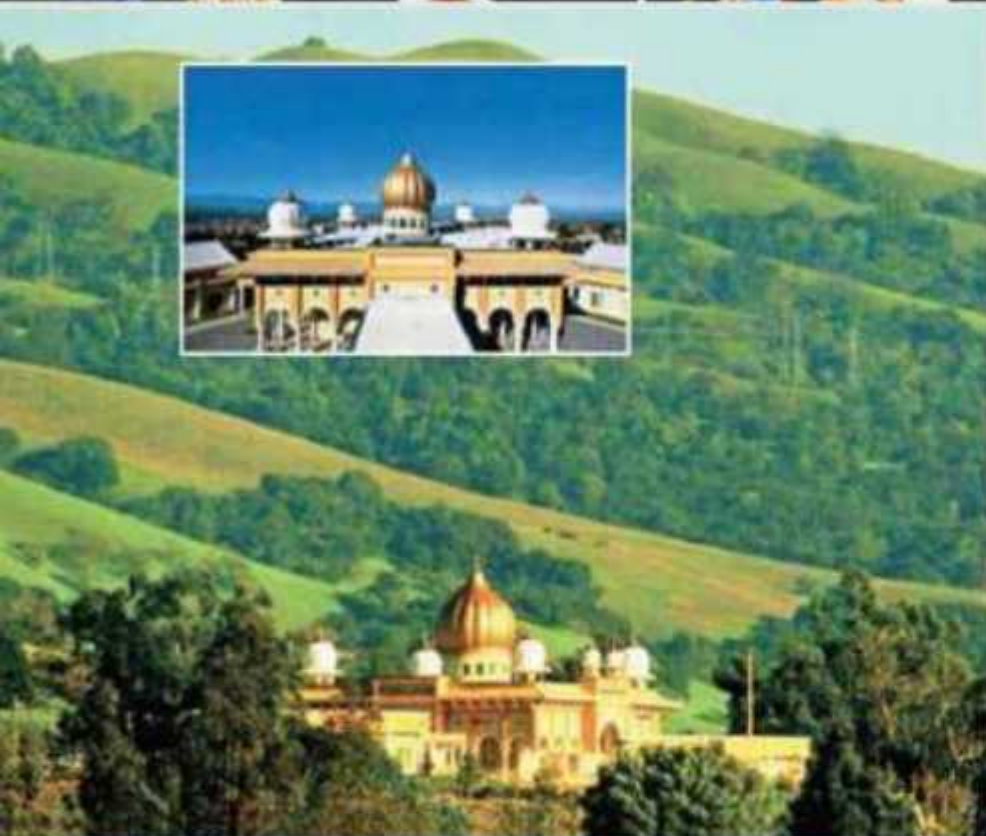
रूपक

गुरु नानक के कदमों की रूहानी छाप



कड़ियाँ देखने के लिए TheGuruNanak.com

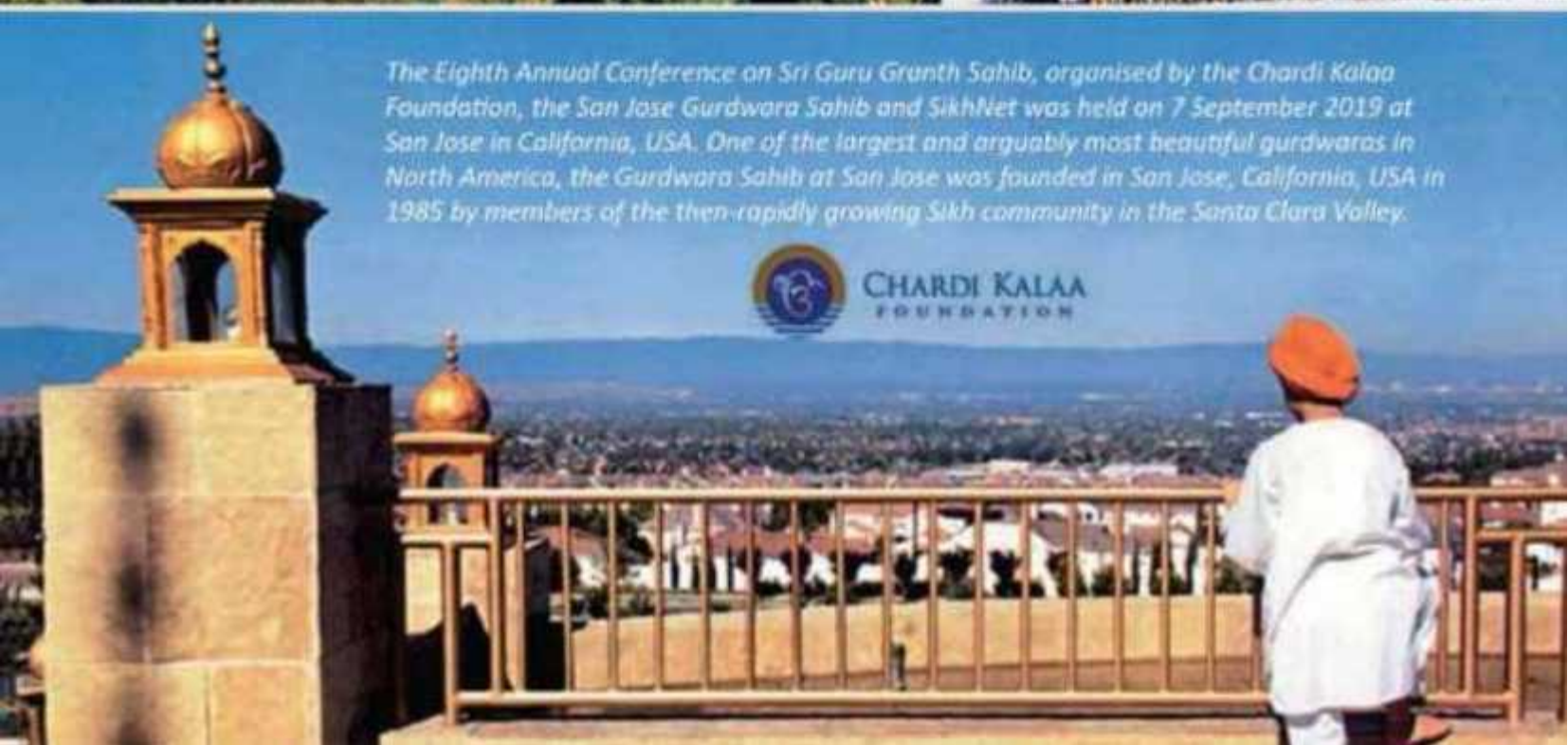
निर्माता  LOST HERITAGE और  SIKHlens

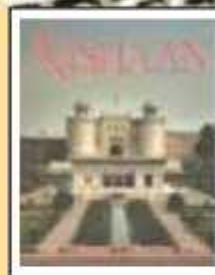
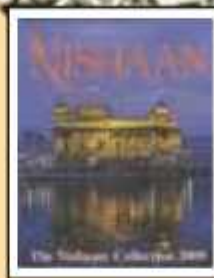
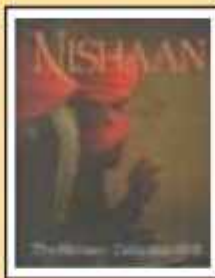
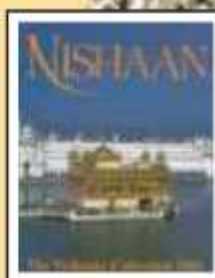
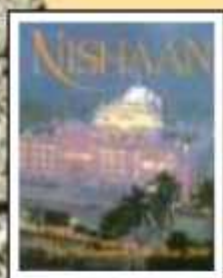


The Eighth Annual Conference on Sri Guru Granth Sahib, organised by the Chardi Kalaa Foundation, the San Jose Gurdwara Sahib and SikhNet was held on 7 September 2019 at San Jose in California, USA. One of the largest and arguably most beautiful gurdwaras in North America, the Gurdwara Sahib at San Jose was founded in San Jose, California, USA in 1985 by members of the then-rapidly growing Sikh community in the Santa Clara Valley.

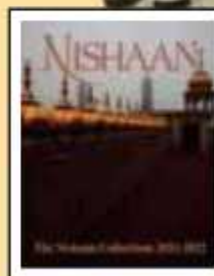
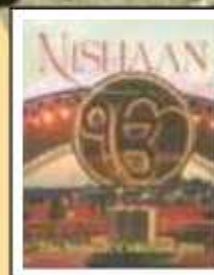
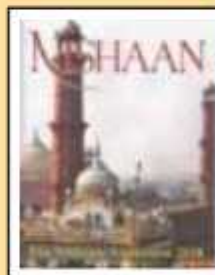


CHARDI KALAA
FOUNDATION





The **Nishaan Collections** for 2000 to 2022 are now available in bound volumes, also including the Premiere Issue of the Journal released in April 1999 at the Tercentenary of the birth of Khalsa. **The Nishaan**, published half yearly, is considered a collector's item, to be read and kept with pride and faith. Published by **The Nagaara Trust**, New Delhi, India.



Limited copies available from:

The Distribution Department

Nishaan Nagaara D-43, Sujana Singh Park, New Delhi-110003, India

Tel: +91-11-24617234 Fax: +91-11-24628615

Email: nishaan.nagaara@gmail.com, website: nishaannagaara.com