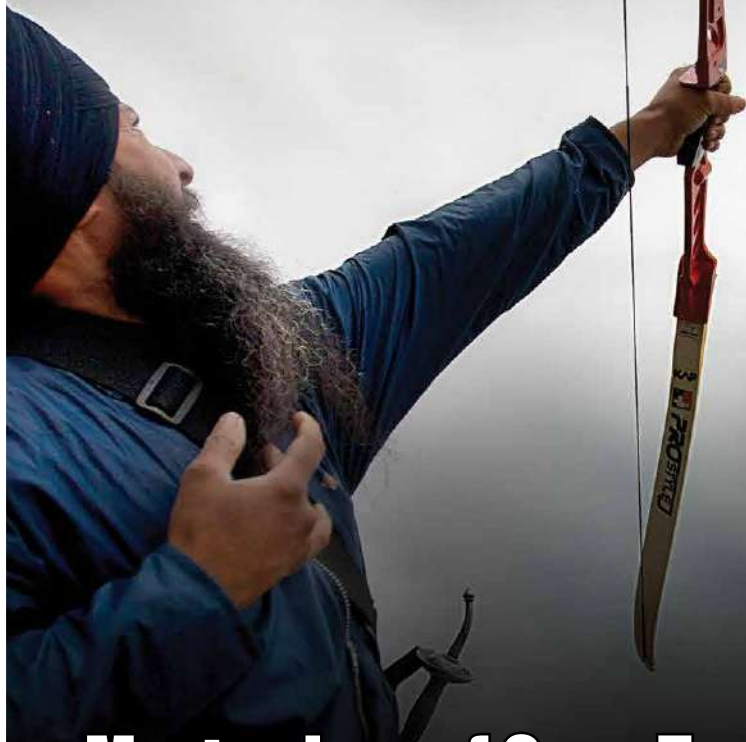


ISSUE II / 2025

# NISHAAN

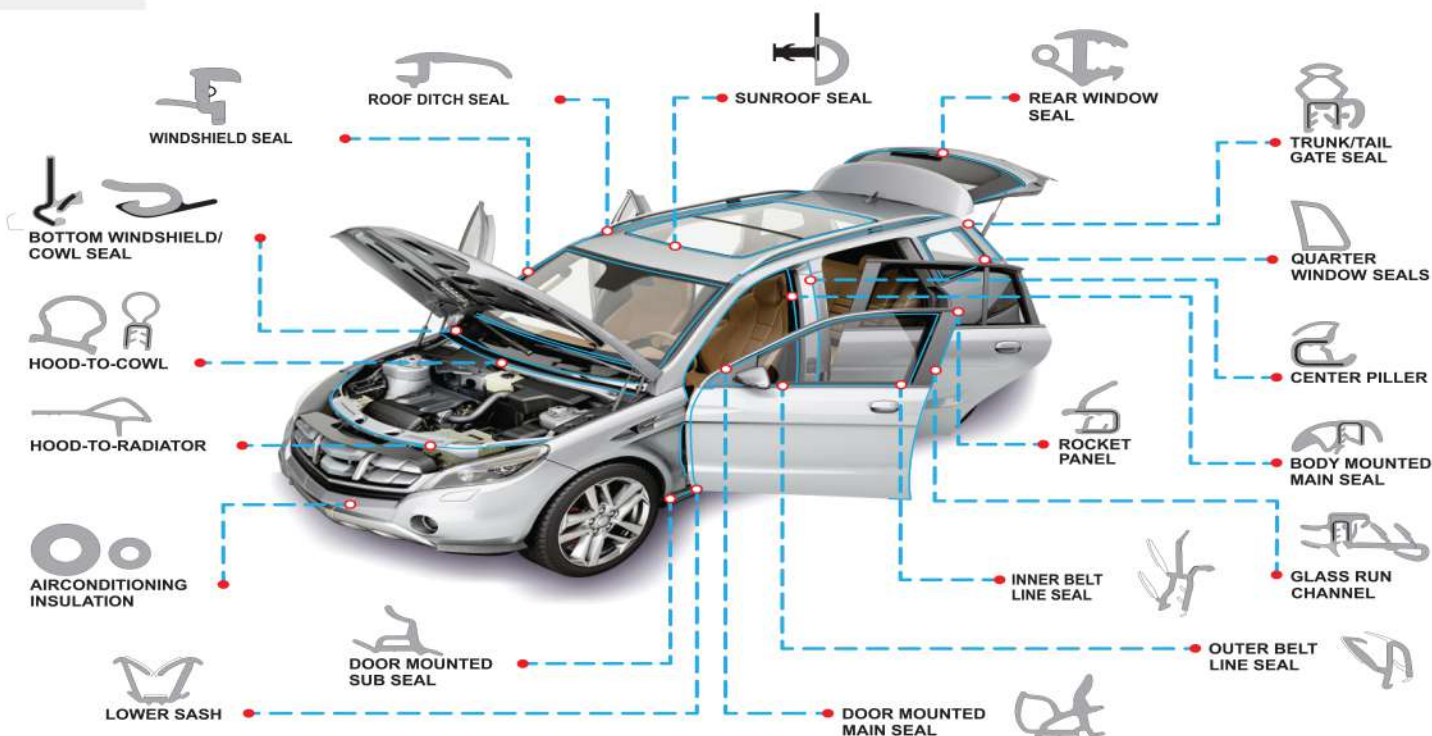
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Young Nihangs practicing the martial tradition  
Photo courtesy: Amardeep Singh

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# EDITORIAL

## Reshaping Ivory Towers into Towers of Learning: A Lay Perspective

Sikhi has been around for over half a millennium and, like people of many other faiths, Sikhs, too, are people of the book. It seems self-evident then that the intellectual process cannot be divorced from the pursuit of Sikhi.

In our existence in a global village, the needs of an ongoing dialogue with our non-Sikh neighbours mandates elaboration of Sikh history and tradition, such that its teachings and practices are comfortably related when juxtaposed with the traditions and teachings of those whose belief does not necessarily derive from Sikhi.

Sikhs have been stepping out of Punjab into the New World for over 150 years and now there may be as many as a million in North America alone. This gives added impetus to Sikh studies and related activities.

Ergo, over the past two decades, Sikhs in the diaspora have established more than six chairs of Sikh studies at North American universities. Surely, the scholars who hold these appointments are deeply involved with coverage and analysis of successes and failures. Briefly stated, the primary mandate of these academic programs is to explore Sikh existence in all its aspects; scriptural, religious, historical and even contemporary.

In this process, I often feel as the lone layman in a bevy of academic heavyweights of Sikh Studies. Naturally, my first reaction is one of unease, even alarm. But on further reflection, I see that such opinion and interpretation of Sikh studies programs as I may offer need not be uninformed or out of place.

Why?

Because Sikhi remains, in the final analysis, a way of life to be lived and celebrated on a daily basis. Sikhs are not relics of history to be installed, even with reverence, in museums; Sikhi is a living tradition. In its study belong scholarly voices that explore Sikh history, scripture, doctrine, dogma, and teachings, just as surely as do voices – even non-scholarly ones – of those who live and breathe the path of Sikhi.

Today, our lives present us many dilemmas ranging from interfaith issues that often weigh heavily on us, delicate questions of bioethics such as birth control, abortion and cloning of organs or organisms, to crucial matters on the morality of violence and war. The aftermath of 9/11 continues to demand our attention.

Who but our scholars in Sikh studies programs should help us navigate our way through the maze of often mind-boggling complexities that occupy us. I look to these scholars in Sikh studies, not to provide us cut-and-dried answers as in a catechism or an easy swallowed pill, but to work with us in an ongoing conversation.

The Sikhs are a living community. Our scholars and our community need to work with each other, not at cross-purposes. Working against each other without a sympathetic understanding of the other is not good for either and will end up destroying both. The blame game as has often been played is not productive.

When I look at the horrendous record of 1947 and 1984 and, on a lesser scale, our post-9/11 reality, I see that to establish a Research & Documentation Center is a measure of moving forward. To understand the impact of such events we need to acknowledge them and face them. And then we can carry forward with us the lessons learned.

I.J. SINGH



# Chardi Kalaa Always!

## Harmanpreet Kaur: The Pride of Punjab



Harmanpreet Kaur, the dynamic captain of the Indian Women's Cricket Team, is one of the most inspiring figures in world cricket. Born on March 8, 1989, in Moga, Punjab, she made her international debut in 2009 and soon became known for her powerful batting and fearless leadership. Her historic 171\* against Australia in the 2017 World Cup semifinal remains one of the greatest innings in women's cricket history. Under her captaincy, India achieved remarkable success, including winning the 2025 ICC Women's World Cup, a moment that brought immense pride to the nation. Known for her aggressive style and sharp cricketing mind, Harmanpreet has led by example, motivating young girls across India to pursue cricket. Her journey from a small town to global fame symbolizes determination, discipline, and passion for the game, making her a true icon of Indian sports.

## Arvinder Singh Bahal: First Sikh in Space

Arvinder "Arvi" Singh Bahal, an 80-year-old real estate investor originally from Agra and now a naturalized U.S. citizen, has always lived a life defined by adventure. Having visited every one of the 196 countries and all seven continents, Arvi's explorations have taken him from flying over Mount Everest to skydiving at the Pyramids of Giza. A licensed private pilot and helicopter flyer, he's no stranger to pushing limits.

On August 3, 2025, Arvi added a new chapter to his extraordinary journey by boarding Blue Origin's NS-34 mission. The 11-minute suborbital flight launched from West Texas and took him beyond the Kármán line, the internationally recognized boundary of space. Along with five other travellers, Arvi experienced the unique thrill of weightlessness, floating freely as the Earth's curvature unfolded beneath them in breath-taking clarity.

For Arvi, this wasn't just a flight; it was the culmination of decades spent exploring our world and beyond. The rocket's powerful ascent, the silence and awe of space, and the gentle return to Earth combined into an unforgettable experience, one he says perfectly crowned his lifetime of adventure.

Joining him on this historic trip were tech entrepreneur Justin Sun, Turkish businessman Gokhan Erdem, meteorologist Deborah Martorell from Puerto Rico, British teacher Lionel Pitchford, and venture capitalist JD Russell. Together, they shared a moment few have witnessed, riding Blue Origin's reusable rocket on its 14th human mission and 34th overall.



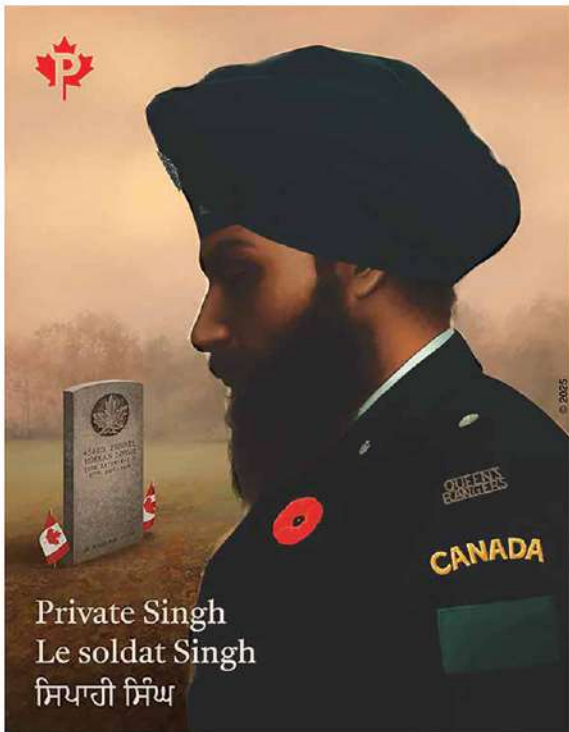


## A Salute to Sikh Warriors: Canada Post Introduces 'Private Singh' Stamp

The "Private Singh" stamp is a commemorative Canadian stamp issued in 2025 to honor the service of Sikh soldiers, particularly highlighting the story of Private Buckam Singh. Private Singh was one of the first Sikh soldiers to serve in the Canadian Army in World War I, despite facing racial barriers. He was wounded twice in battle and died in 1919 from war-related illnesses, and his forgotten story was revived decades later when a historian discovered one of his medals. The stamp's design features a modern Sikh soldier saluting Buckam Singh's grave, representing the sacrifices of Sikh soldiers in Canada's military history.

Private Buckam Singh was the youngest of the group, joining in 1915 and fighting with the 20th Canadian Infantry Battalion. He was wounded twice and eventually died in 1919 from injuries and illnesses sustained during the war.

The stamp features an illustration of a modern Sikh Canadian soldier saluting at Buckam Singh's grave. The background of the stamp shows a stylized image of Private Singh's weathered headstone and the cancellation postmark from Kitchener, Ontario.



## Sunmeet Singh Gill: First Turbaned Sikh to Compete at Mr. Olympia 2025



Sunmeet Singh Gill, hailing from Sirsa in Haryana, made history as the first-ever turbaned Sikh to qualify for the prestigious Mr. Olympia competition held in Las Vegas in October 2025. Known affectionately as the "Turbanator," Gill has spent over a decade transforming his physique and honing his discipline. His breakthrough came earlier in 2025 when he won the Classic Physique division, a victory that earned him his spot at Olympia.

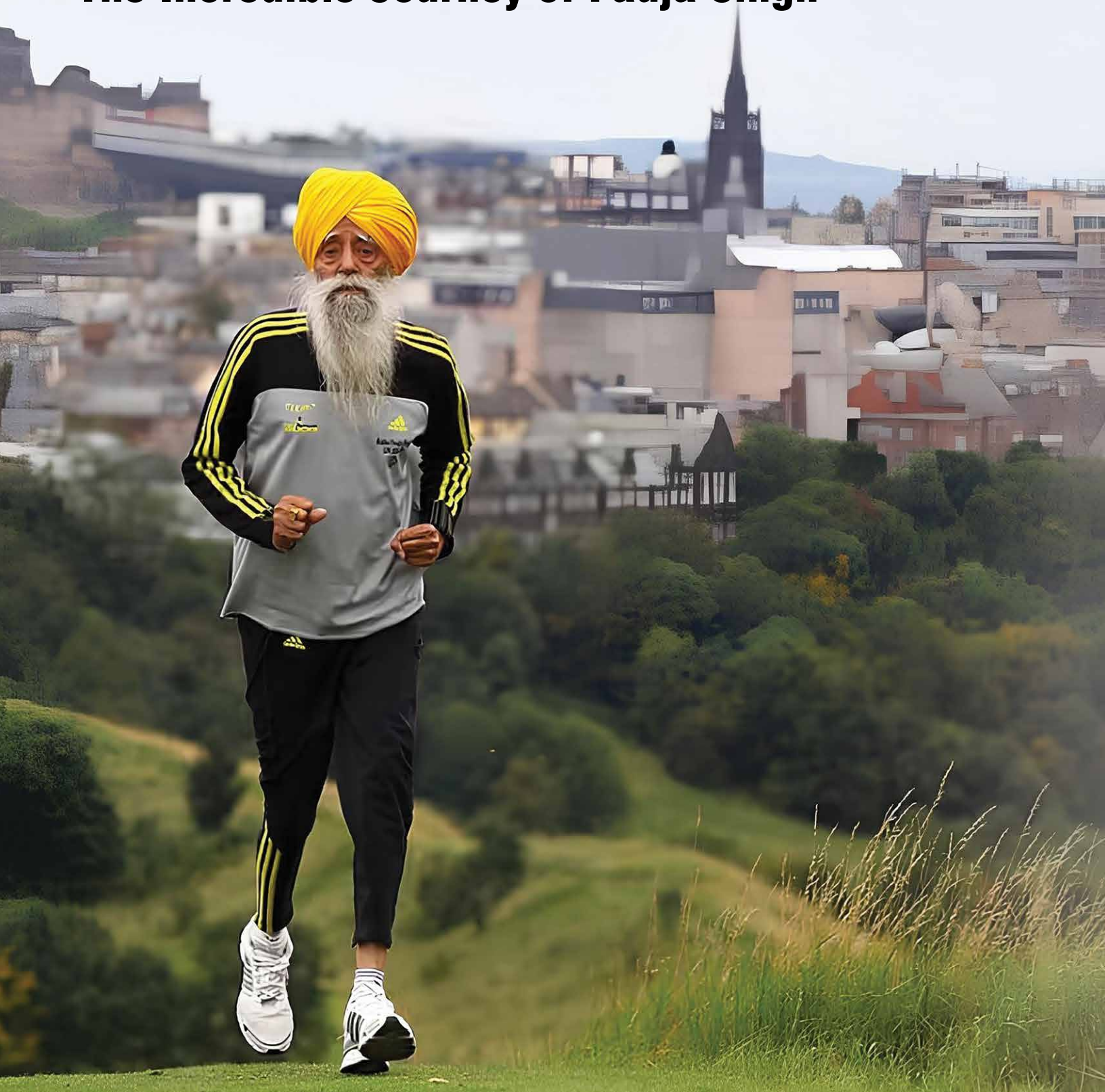
More than just a personal achievement, Gill's success carries immense cultural significance. Throughout his journey, he proudly maintained his turban, challenging stereotypes and raising representation for Sikhs on the global bodybuilding stage. Communities around the world celebrated this milestone, with one report declaring, "History has been made as Sunmeet, first Sikh bodybuilder to qualify for Mr. Olympia."


At the 2025 Mr. Olympia competition, Sunmeet Singh Gill competed fiercely in the Classic Physique category, demonstrating not only his athletic prowess but also the spirit and pride of his community. While he did not place among the top finalists, his participation alone marked a powerful cultural milestone—breaking new ground and inspiring countless others.



# Running Through Time

## The Incredible Journey of Fauja Singh





Fauja Singh was born on April 1, 1911, in Bias Pind, a small village near Jullundur, Punjab. He lived there with his wife until 1992, when he moved to London to live with his son after his wife passed away. A native Punjabi speaker who couldn't read or write, Fauja faced profound personal loss with the death of his son Kuldip. Searching for a new purpose in life, he embraced running at the age of 89. Remarkably, when he first showed up for training at Redbridge-Essex, he was dressed in a three-piece suit, marking the beginning of an extraordinary journey that would lead him to compete in international marathons.

The coach had to rework everything, including his dress! Singh then ran his first race, the London Marathon in 2000. The five-foot-eight, 115-pounds endurance sport wonder attributed his physical fitness and longevity to abstaining from smoking or alcohol and to following a simple vegetarian diet. "My diet is simple phulka, dal, green vegetables, yoghurt and milk. I do not touch parathas, pakoras, rice or any other fried food. I take lots of water and tea with ginger".

Fauja Singh has always carried a smile beneath his silver beard, a reflection of the inspiring positivity that seemed to define him. "I go to bed early, saying the name of my rabbah, so that negative thoughts don't cross my mind," he explained. "The first 20 miles aren't difficult. It's the last six miles where I run while talking to God." Since he started running at the age of eighty nine, when most people have retired, Fauja Singh, showed no sign of slowing down. He competed in most global marathons and at the ripe age of a hundred, he became the world's oldest marathon runner.

His secret to handling a daily 10-mile training routine? Plenty of ginger curry and lots and lots of tea. "I'm not educated in any formal sense," he says. "To me, the key is staying happy, doing charity, keeping healthy, and staying positive. If someone tells me to stop running, I just ignore them—they're almost always much younger than I am."

The secret to a long and healthy life is to be stress-free. If there's something you can't change then why worry about it? Be grateful for everything you have, stay away from people who are negative, stay smiling—and keep running." Despite being born on 1 April 1911, Mr Singh insists his age is no April Fool's joke. He is indeed 100 years old and still as fit as they come. He developed his love for running

whilst working as a farmer in Punjab. With the help of his coach, Harminder Singh, he soon started challenging other pensioners to races and had run five marathons in London, one in Toronto and one in New York. Fauja Singh holds the world record for the men's over-90 category after completing the 2003 Toronto marathon in five hours and 40 minutes.

His last long-distance competitive appearance was in the 2013 Hong Kong Marathon 10 km event, at age 101, finishing in 1 hour 32 minutes and 28 seconds. Singh participated as a special guest for the 2nd Annual Chardikala Run in Malaysia which was given a theme '101 and running' in his honour. He continued to attend such events after his retirement, attending a 5K Chardikala run in 2014.

On 13 November 2003, Singh was awarded the Ellis Island Medal of Honor by the National Ethnic Coalition, a U.S. group that advocates ethnic pride and tolerance.

In 2011, he was awarded the "Pride of India" title by a UK-based organisation for his achievements. In 2012, he was a torch bearer carrying the Olympic flame at the 2012 Summer Olympics. Singh was awarded the British Empire Medal (BEM) in the 2015 New Year Honours for services to sport and charity.

From a frail boy in rural Punjab to a centenarian marathoner celebrated worldwide, Fauja Singh's life defied age and expectation. Through discipline, faith, and quiet humility, he showed that even at 100+, physical greatness is attainable—and that fitness and kindness can carve a legacy far beyond finish lines. His life remains an enduring reminder: it's never too late to begin, and every step can inspire. Fauja Singh passed away tragically on 15 July 2025, after being hit by a speeding SUV whilst crossing a road at his native village of Beas Pind in Punjab.

He was cremated with full state honours in Beas, attended by dignitaries including the Punjab Governor Gulab Chand Kataria and Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann. The government announced plans to rename the local school in his honour and erect statues celebrating his legacy. His running club, Sikhs in the City, pledged to honor his memory in upcoming events, ensuring his story continues to inspire future generations.



# Homage to Martyrdom of Guru Tegh Bahadur Ji

On the occasion of the 350th anniversary of martyrdom of Guru Tegh Bahadur Ji, let us remember the great sacrifice as well look in his own *bani*, about his views on death. He has summed the fate of the dead body in two short and crisp lines as under:

**ਘਰ ਕੀ ਨਾਰਿ ਬਹੁਤੁ ਹਿਤੁ ਜਾ ਸਿਉ ਸਦਾ  
ਰਹਤ ਸੰਗ ਲਾਗੀ ॥ ਜਬ ਹੀ ਹੋਸ ਤਜੀ ਇਹ  
ਕਾਇਆ ਪ੍ਰੇਤ ਪ੍ਰੇਤ ਕਰਿ ਭਾਗੀ ॥੨॥**

*“Ghar kee naar bahut hit jaa siau  
sadhaa rahat sang laagee. Jub hee  
hans taje ieh kaaiiaa pret pret kar  
bhaagee.2. (SGGS, Pg. No. 634)*

Translation: Your wife, whom you love so much, and who remained ever attached to you, runs away crying, “Ghost! Ghost!”, as soon as the swan-soul leaves this body.

This is an authentic and universal stark reality of ephemeral nature of life. In an instant even the most intimate relationships end, and the dead body is cremated or buried as per the family traditions.

No one likes to keep the dead body or be near it. In fact, in western societies the law requires that one has to keep the body in a funeral home, before the last rites. Even the closest and intimate human relationships are essentially for those living alone. Guru Ji even noticed this aspect of how quickly the body is disposed of in these words:

**ਤਨ ਤੇ ਪ੍ਰਾਨ ਹੋਤ ਜਬ ਨਿਆਰੇ ਟੇਰਤ ਪ੍ਰੇਤਿ  
ਪੁਕਾਰਿ ॥ ਆਧ ਘਰੀ ਕੇਉ ਨਹਿ ਰਾਖੈ ਘਰ ਤੇ  
ਦੇਤ ਨਿਕਾਰਿ ॥੧॥**

*“Tun te praan hott jab niaare Terat  
pret pukaar. Aadh gharee kouoo neh  
raakhai ghar te dhet nikaar.”  
(SGGS, Pg. No. 536)*

Translation: When the soul is separated from the body, then they will cry out, calling you a ghost. No one will let you stay, for even a while; they drive you out of the house.

We see here that even the closest relation is ended while the body is called a ghost and driven out. But in the case of Guru Tegh Bahadur Ji, we see a new reality unveiled. Guru Ji did not die a normal death, even his dead body defied the normal fate. Guru Tegh Bahadur Ji sacrificed his life for the protection of Hindu faith in Delhi, during the reign of Aurangzeb.

Under strict orders of forced conversions by the ruler Aurangzeb, Hindus were forced to relinquish their faith in order to get relief from Jazia Tax and to save their lives. The poorer and lower caste Hindus had reconciled with the easier option by accepting the conversion. Now, the thrust was on converting the higher caste Hindus—Brahmins, which will accelerate the conversion process due to the cascading effect. Alarmed *Brahmins* of Kashmir held their conclave and decided to seek help of Guru Tegh Bahadur Ji in Anandpur. Their delegation of five hundred under the leadership of Kirpa Ram came to Anandpur and narrated their plight to Guru Ji.

Guru Ji after deliberations and input from his young son Gobind Rai of 9 suggested to Kirpa Ram a message for the ruler. The message was that the Emperor Aurangzeb should stop mass persecution, and if Guru Tegh Bahadur Ji converted to Islam then they all would follow suit. On hearing the message Aurangzeb was elated and issued orders for Guru Ji's arrest and to be brought to Delhi.

In the meantime, Guru Ji came to know of the royal edict, and started his preparations for Delhi, without waiting for the formal summons to be delivered. Guru Ji was accompanied by five beloved Sikhs and was arrested near Ropar while heading towards Delhi. He was initially interned at Bassi Pathana in Sirhind for about three months and then transferred to Delhi on 04 November, 1675.

Bewildered, Aurangzeb asked Guru Ji, why he was offering himself for Hindus, whose idol worship and caste system was not practiced and preached by founding Sikh Guru Nanak Dev or the subsequent Gurus? Guru Ji replied that Hindus are being treated as inferior in your reign, which is not fair. Guru Ji condemned use of force for conversion to Islam, adding that everyone should have freedom to practice their belief and faith. Guru Ji was then asked to show some miracles, which he firmly refused.

Finally, he was told in clear terms that another option to not accepting Islam was to be prepared for death. First Guru Ji's companions Bhai Mati Das, Bhai Sati Das, Bhai Dayala were tortured and killed by sawing in half, boiling in a cauldron and wrapping in cotton and being put on fire respectively. However, all three stayed calm and steadfast in their faith, by willingly embracing death.

Aurangzeb was hoping that seeing the persecution of his close associates should waiver Guru Ji's determination, because of his concern for their welfare, and also concern of his own fate. However, when Guru Ji's determination did not waiver, Guru Ji was beheaded on 11 November, 1675

by Jalaludin at Chandni Chowk on the orders of his chief. The sacrifice touched the hearts of masses. People burst into loud shrieks, lamenting, with tears dropping from their eyes. Today, a memorial Sis Ganj Gurudwara stands there in that place honoring that unique and supreme sacrifice.

The ruler and his coterie had planned that the next day the body would be cut to pieces and hung on the various gates of Delhi, as a message of deterrence for the residents. However, suddenly large dark clouds enveloped the sky unleashing a severe dust storm, as if nature was also expressing solidarity with the grieving masses. Unprepared for the sudden storm everyone started running for their own safety seeking shelter.

Bhai Jaita Ji picked up Guru Ji's head, wrapped it in an old shawl that he had, and hurried away towards Anandpur Sahib. There, he presented it reverently to Guru Gobind Rai (later Singh) Ji, who calmly received the head without an emotional outburst of tears of pain and sadness. Guru Ji was very impressed by the devotion and courage that Bhai Jaita Ji displayed through this daring act.

Guru Ji hugged Bhai Jaita Ji and affectionately declared; "O Rangreta, you are Guru's son." Mata Gujar Ji, wife of Guru Teg Bahadur Ji came forward and bowed before her husband's severed head and prayed to Almighty to give her strength and courage in carrying out her duties with the same exemplary determination as displayed by her husband. Guru Gobind Singh Ji summed up the feat in these words:

**“ਤਿਲਕ ਜੰਝੂ ਰਾਖਾ ਪੁਤ੍ਰ ਤਾ ਕਾ ॥ ਕੀਨੇ  
ਬਡੇ ਕਲੂ ਮਹਿ ਸਾਕਾ ॥ ਸਾਧਨ ਹੇਤਿ ਇਤੀ  
ਜਿਨਿ ਕਰੀ ॥ ਸੀਸੁ ਦੀਆ ਪਰੁ ਸੀ ਨ ਉਚਰੀ  
॥੧੩॥”**

*“Tilak janjoo raakhaa prabh taa  
kaa. Keeno baddo kaloo meh saakaa.  
Saadhan het itee jin karee. Sees  
dheaaa par see na aucharee.13.”*

(Dasam Granth, Pg. No. 54)

Translation: He protected (with his life) the forehead mark and sacred thread (of the Hindus), which marked an unparalleled heroic event in the Dark Age. For the sake of saints, he laid down his head without a groan.

These words do perfectly paint and convey a true assessment of the momentous task undertaken by Guru Ji for rights of the Hindus to practice their beliefs freely. We cannot find another instance or a parallel, where someone lays down their lives for the protection of another's faith. But we can find quite a few examples, when someone laid down his own life for the protection of his belief and faith.

Guru Gobind Rai arranged the cremation rites of the severed head in the compound of their residence. There stands a magnificent Gurudwara commemorating this unparalleled feat, where thousands visit daily and bow their heads.

In the meantime, the body was picked up by Bhai Lakhi Shah, who happened to be in the vicinity unloading lime from his carts at the Red Fort for royal forces. He quietly lifted the body despite the raging storm on his bullock cart and moved it to Raisina, his home.

Driving the cart with the body into his house, set the house on fire to cremate the body while creating an impression of accidental fire. Here, we can see a devotee and man of faith, bringing a dead body inside his house, contrary to normal traditions when everyone normally takes the body out. While the people are afraid to visit the cremation grounds in the darkness of the night, yet this place has become a place of reverence and is visited by thousands day and night.

Today, we have befitting memorials at Chandi Chowk, Rakab Ganj, Raisina in Delhi, where the martyrdom actually took place and the body was cremated. There is also a memorial Gurudwara Sis Ganj, Anandpur Sahib where the head was cremated.

Also, there is another memorial called Gurudwara Sheesh Ganj, Taraori, in Karnal district, commemorating the stay of Bhai Jaita there, for a night's rest on his journey to Anandpur. Recently a new memorial, called Guru Tegh Bahadur Memorial park on the G.T. Road towards Karnal has been built in honor of the indomitable spirit of Guru Ji and his three companions.

We have seen how these numerous memorials commemorate the indomitable spirit of Guru Ji's supreme sacrifice. Now, let us visit the burial site of the ruler who perpetuated this gory act. The tomb of Aurangzeb is in Aurangabad, the city named after him. There is no canopy over the tomb and hardly any visitors come to honor him. In contrast, the indomitable spirit and supreme sacrifice of Guru Tegh Bahadur Ji is strongly etched in the memory of the masses who make daily pilgrimages there.

It continues to inspire people today and will continue to do in the time to come. The universal truths that Guru Ji expounded about the fate of the dead body, does not apply to his body, as Guru Ji was one with the Creator plus his sacrifice did to protect freedom of Hindus to practice their faith. Guru Gobind Singh Ji has said the following about the Supreme Sacrifice:

**ਤੇਗ ਬਹਾਦਰ ਕੇ ਚਲਤ ਭਯੋ ਜਗਤ ਕੇ  
ਸੇਕ॥ ਹੈ ਹੈ ਹੈ ਸਭ ਜਗ ਭਯੋ ਜੈ ਜੈ ਜੈ  
ਸੁਰਲੇਕਿ॥੧੬॥**

(Dasam Granth, Pg. No. 54)

Translation: At Tegh Bahadur's departure, the whole world was plunged in grief. But the celestial realms echoed with his glory.

*Bhupinder “Bo” Singh, a Houston-based businessman and engineer originally from Myanmar and educated in India. He is passionate about Sikh history and spirituality and has authored seven books.*



# A Tribute to Guru Tegh Bahadur's Supreme Sacrifice

Photo Story : Malkiat Singh



**G**uru Tegh Bahadur, the ninth Sikh Guru, is celebrated as a symbol of courage, selflessness, and unwavering moral strength. Born in 1621, he was the youngest son of Guru Hargobind, the sixth Sikh Guru. From an early age, he showed a profound inclination toward meditation, devotion, and service to humanity. In 1664, he became the ninth Guru of the Sikhs, dedicating his life to spreading the message of peace, equality, and religious freedom.

During his time, the Mughal emperor Aurangzeb implemented strict policies of religious persecution, particularly targeting *Hindus* and forcing them to convert to Islam. The *Kashmiri*

*Brahmins*, facing imprisonment and the threat of forced conversion, approached Guru Tegh Bahadur for protection. True to his principles, the Guru decided to stand up for their right to practice their faith freely, demonstrating that defending human dignity and freedom of conscience was a sacred duty, even at the cost of his life.

In 1675, Guru Tegh Bahadur, accompanied by his devoted disciples Bhai Mati Das, Bhai Sati Das, and Bhai Dayal Das, presented himself to the Mughal authorities in Delhi. Despite enduring severe torture, he refused to abandon his beliefs or accept conversion. His disciples faced

brutal executions—Bhai Mati Das was sawed alive, Bhai Sati Das was burned, and Bhai Dayal Das was boiled. Ultimately, on November 24, 1675, Guru Tegh Bahadur was publicly beheaded near Chandni Chowk, Delhi.

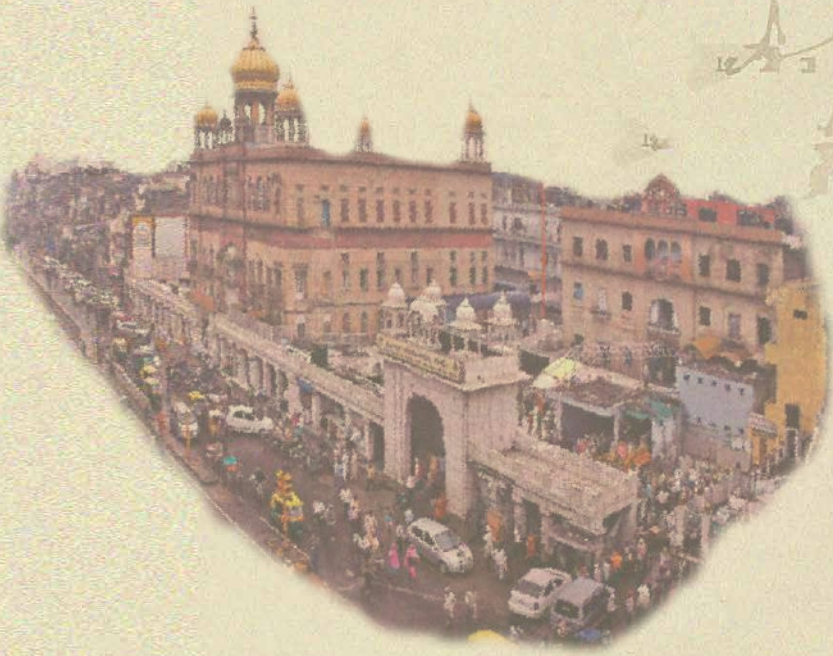
His martyrdom became a defining moment in history, securing the right to religious freedom for all. Gurdwara Sis Ganj Sahib now marks the site of his sacrifice, honouring his courage, faith, and selfless devotion. Guru Tegh Bahadur's legacy continues to inspire generations to uphold truth, justice, and human dignity in the face of oppression.







GURU TEGH BAHADUR  
MEMORIAL



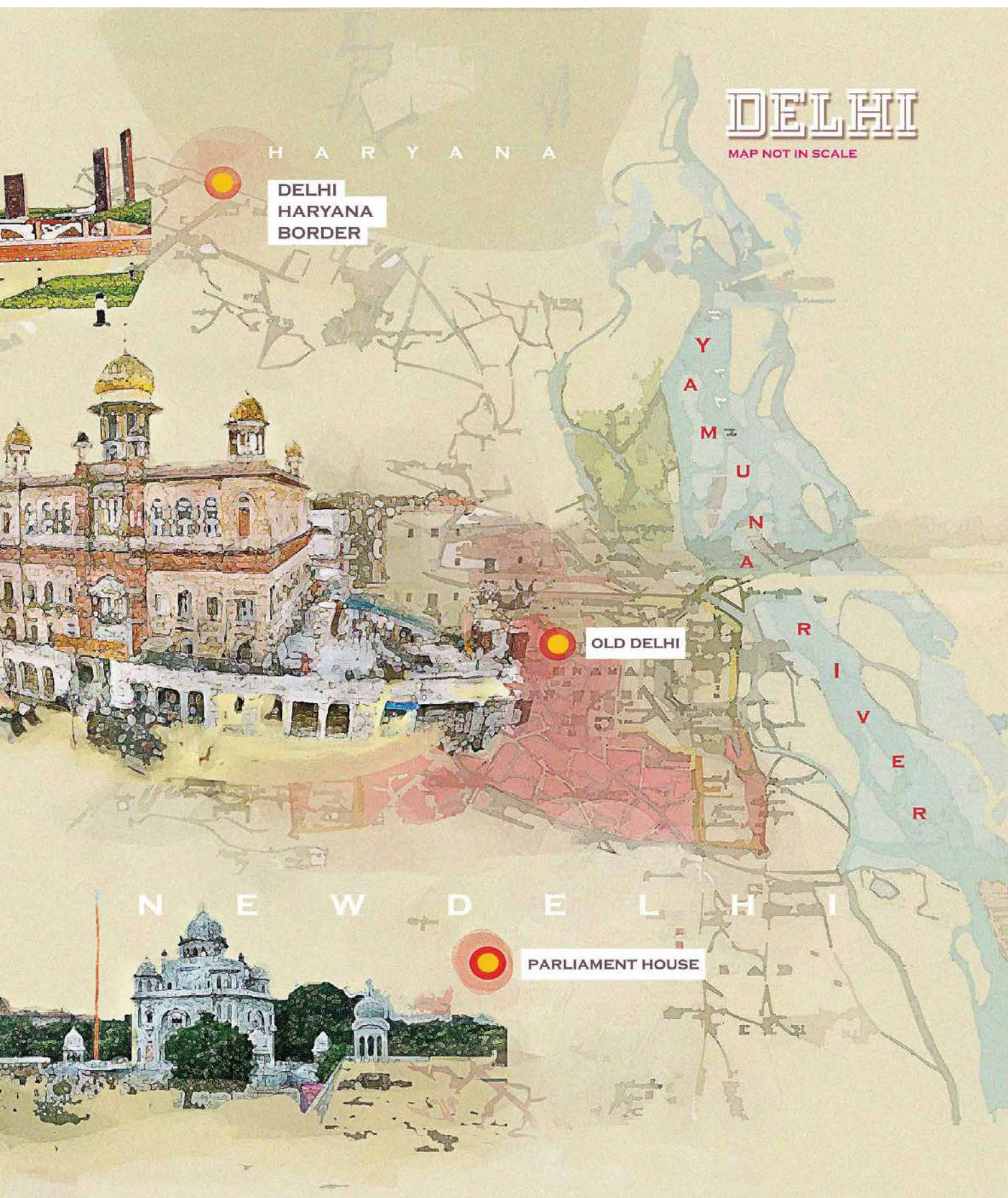
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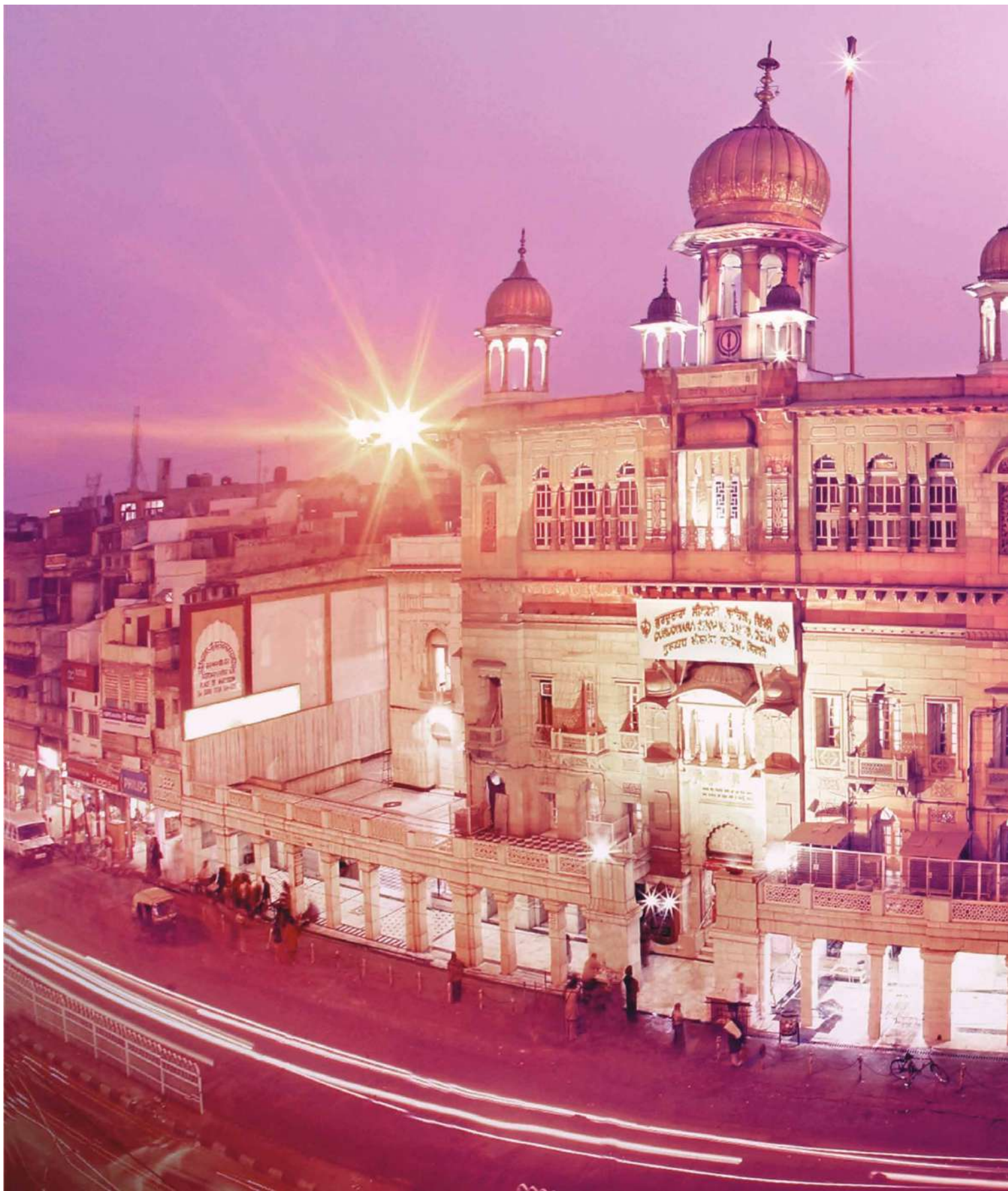
GURDWARA  
RAKAB GANJ SAHIB

*Guru Tegh Bahadur was the youngest of the five sons of Guru Hargobind. He was born in Amritsar on 1 April 1621. The name Tegh Bahadur ('Mighty of the Sword') was given to him by Guru Hargobind after he had displayed great valour in a battle with the Mughals.*



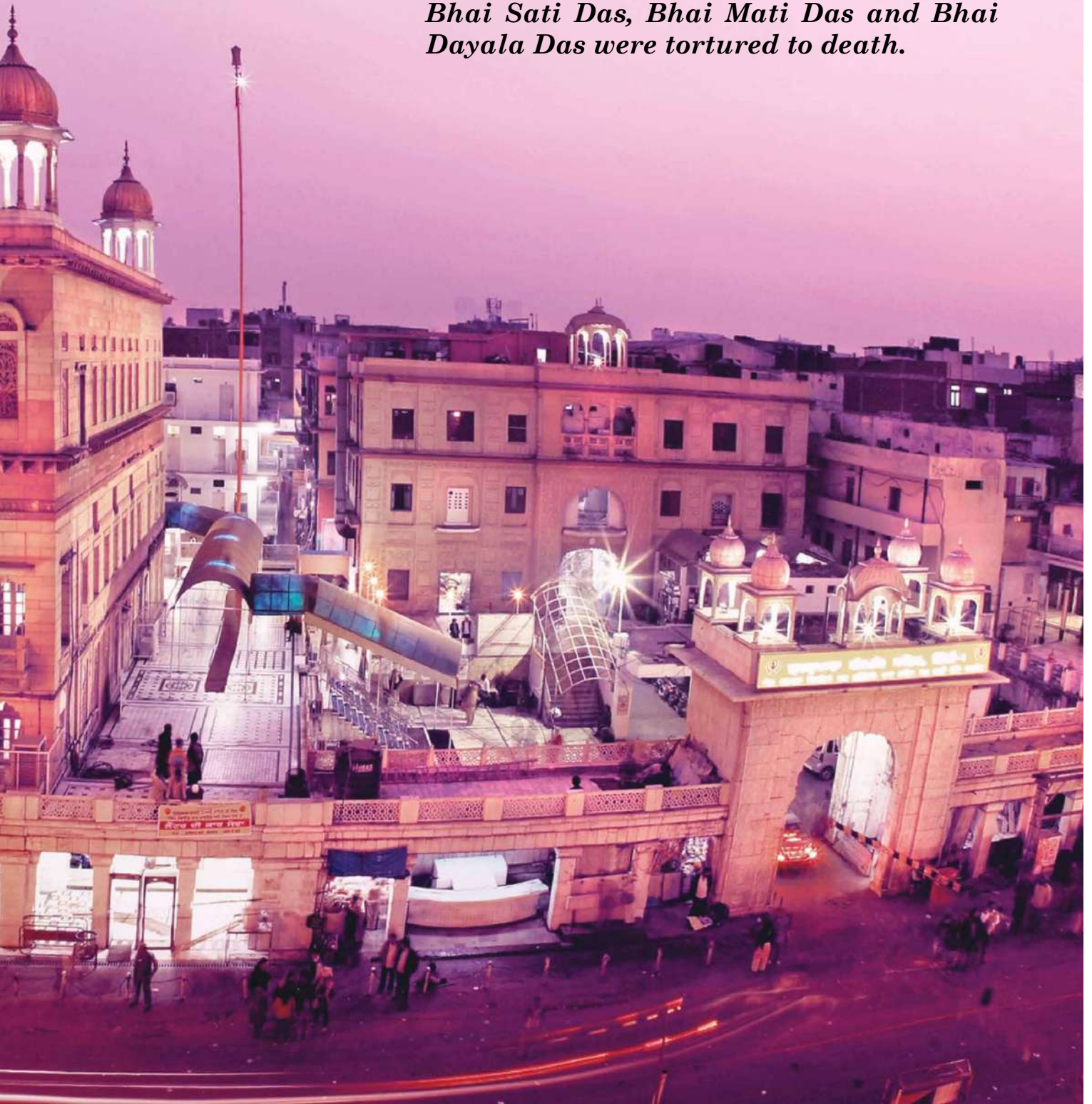






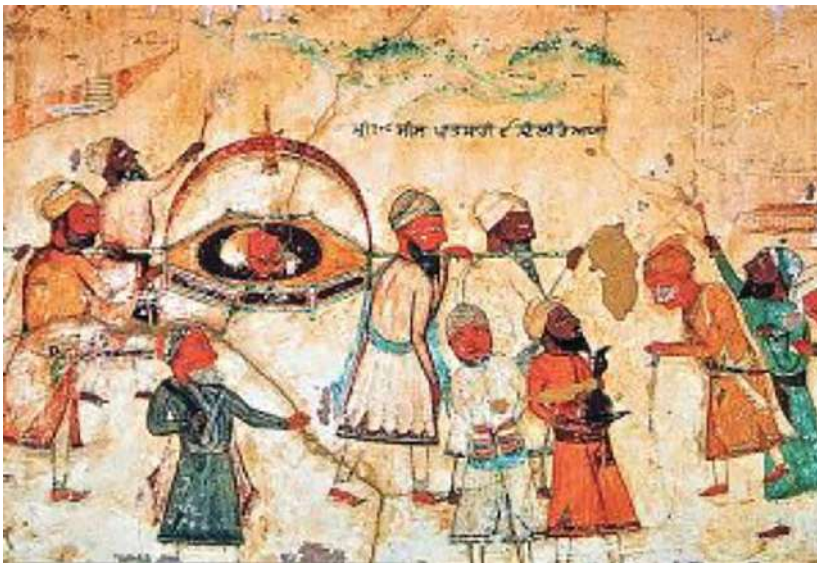


*Gurdwara Sis Ganj Sahib at Chandni Chowk, Delhi. Mark the place where the Guru was beheaded and his companions Bhai Sati Das, Bhai Mati Das and Bhai Dayala Das were tortured to death.*





Guru Tegh Bahadur was a great exponent of poetry and peace, music, meditation, charity and human freedom. He was on his missionary tour in Bengal and Assam when he heard that Aurangzeb had issued orders to persecute the *Brahmins*, custodians of the *Hindu* faith. In those days, the emperor had imprisoned hundreds of *Brahmins* with the intent to forcibly convert them to *Islam*, for if they did so, most *Hindus* would follow. After *Shivaji* and the *Rajputs* had expressed their helplessness under the leadership of *Pundit Kirpa Ram* of Kashmir, five hundred *Brahmins* went to Guru Tegh Bahadur at Anandpur to seek his protection and help. Immensely moved by their woeful flight, the compassionate Guru said, “go and tell Aurangzeb that if he succeeded in converting Guru Tegh Bahadur. All *Brahmins* and their *Hindu* followers would accept *Islam* as their religion, but if he failed to do so, he must stop the persecution of *Brahmins*.



**Wall painting: Depicting Guru Tegh Bahadur's severed head ('Sis') being brought to Anandpur in a palanquin.**





*During the evening ceremony ('Sukhasan') a sewadar carries  
Guru Granth Sahib to resting place ('Manji Sahib').  
(Gurdwara Sis Ganj Sahib, Delhi).*







According to contemporary writers, Aurangzeb reached Delhi sometime in mid-1675. Guru Tegh Bahadur went to Agra where he courted arrest and was then brought to Delhi. Aurangzeb failed to convince Guru Tegh Bahadur that idolaters should be physically eliminated by the ruling political power. Although Guru Tegh Bahadur himself preached against idolatry and *Brahmanism*, he refused to accept that forcible conversion in any form was legally, morally or spiritually justified. He considered forcible conversion as against basic moral values which superior religions preach. Guru Tegh Bahadur also refused to perform any 'miracles' to save his own life because any display of occult powers was considered unworthy of true saints and the prophets of God.

*Painting of Guru Tegh Bahadur  
As preserved inside the Gurdwara at  
the exact place where he was martyred.  
(Gurdwara Sis Ganj Sahib, Delhi).*



*Trunk of the historic banyan tree under  
which Guru Tegh Bahadur was executed.  
(Gurdwara Sis Ganj Sahib, Delhi).*



Aurangzeb first ordered that Guru Tegh Bahadur's close apostles and companions in prison be tortured to death: Bhai Dayal Das was thrown into a boiling cauldron, Bhai Mati Das was sawn across from head to loins and Bhai Sati Das was burnt alive at the stake. The scene of the heroic martyrdom of his disciples did not disrupt Guru Tegh Bahadur's tranquility. Finally, the Guru was beheaded under a tree in the presence of a huge crowd of his followers on the fateful Thursday of 11 November 1675 ad. The tree trunk is still preserved in Sis Ganj Sahib Gurdwara since then and around the place of the Guru's martyrdom, emerged the temple, known as Gurdwara Sis Ganj Sahib. A suitable memorial commemorating the martyrdom of Bhai Mati Das and his companions has also been built in Chandni Chowk.



*Baoli Sahib: The historic well where Guru Tegh Bahadur took his final bath just before his execution. Note symbolic offering of amrit by a sewadar to the girl child. (Gurdwara Sis Ganj Sahib, Delhi).*





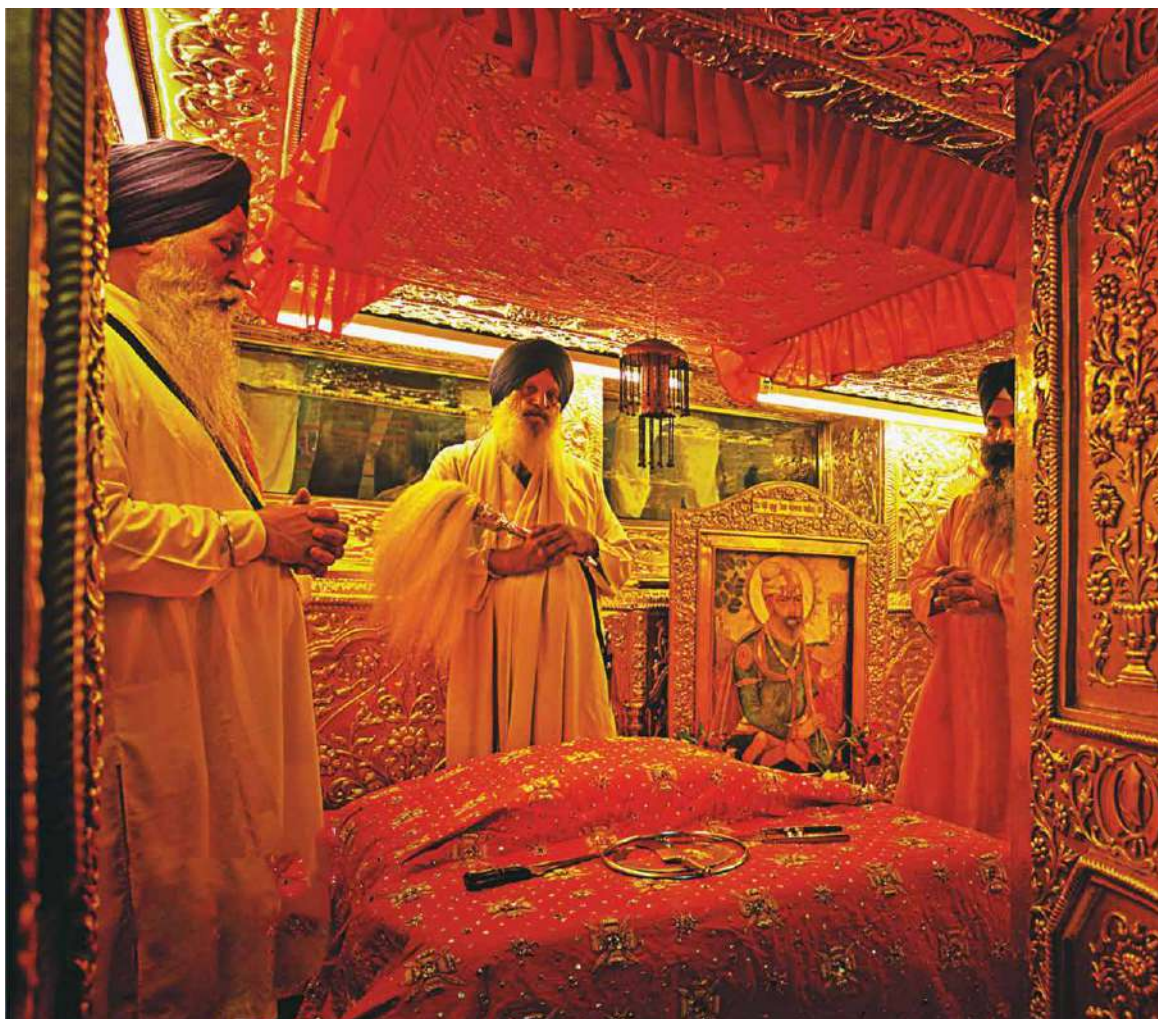
*Bhai Mati Das Chowk: In Chandni Chowk today, is where Bhai Mati Das, Bhai Sati Das and Bhai Dayal Das were brutally executed along with their companions. This is also where Banda Bahadur's followers were martyred four decades later. Fatefully, the Mughal empire would disintegrate soon thereafter. Chandni Chowk with the Red Fort in the background [Delhi].*

*Right: The place where Guru Tegh Bahadur's body was cremated. (Gurdwara Rakab Ganj Sahib, Delhi).*





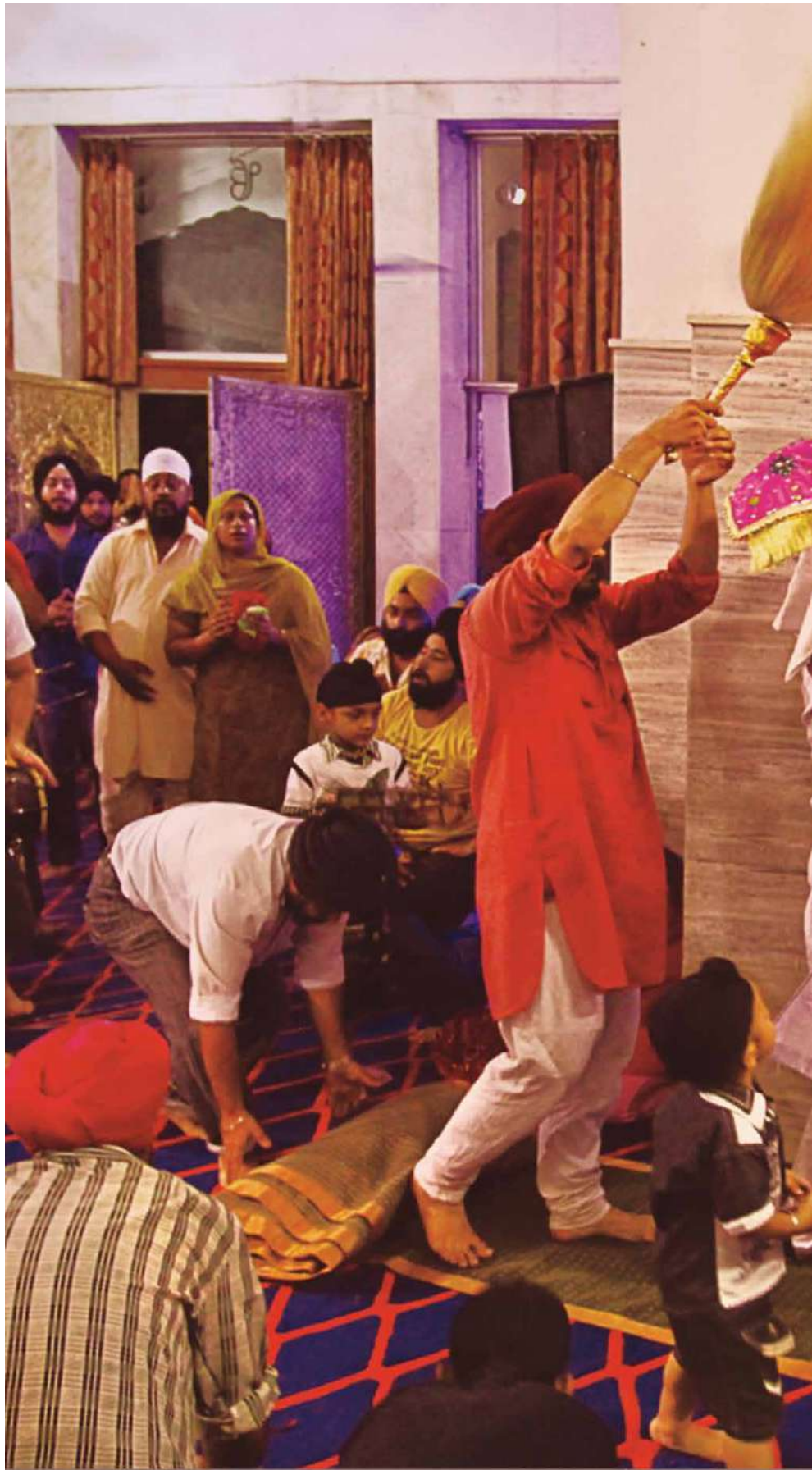
*Inside view of the place where Guru Tegh Bahadur was martyred. (Gurdwara Sis Ganj Sahib, Delhi).*



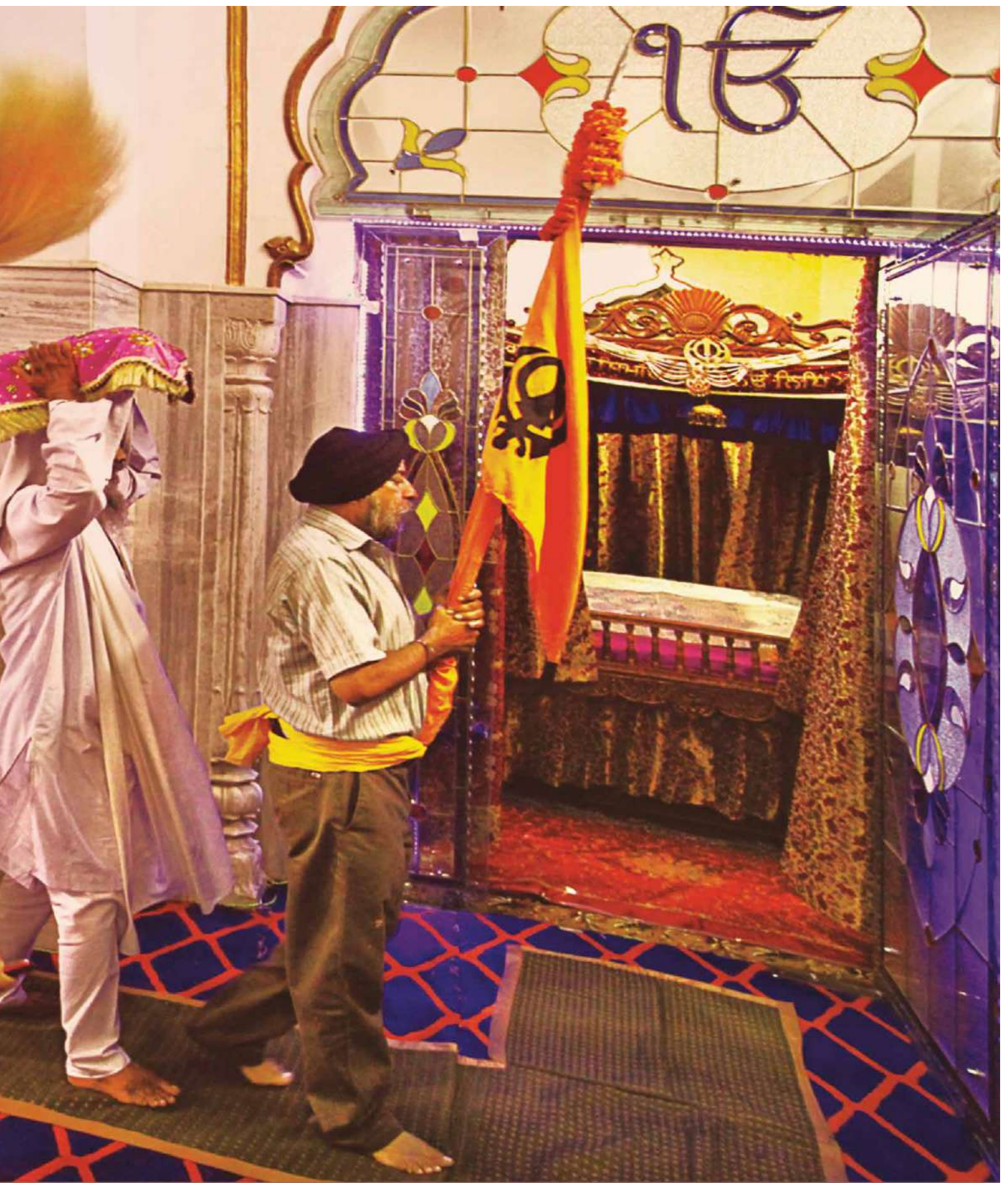


When Guru Tegh Bahadur was beheaded in Chandni Chowk, the lamenting and wailing crowd surged forward to have a closer look at the martyred prophet. Bhai Jaita rushed out of the crowd like a flash of lightning and with a clean sweep picked up Guru Ji's severed head and immediately disappeared into the grief stricken crowd. The clouds darkened and a storm began to rage. Lakhi Shah, a Sikh devotee and government contractor arrived with a convoy of horses and bullocks driven by his eight sons through the heart of Chandni Chowk in darkness. They carried Guru Tegh Bahadur's body to their residence, which was a hut where Gurdwara Rakab Ganj Sahib now exists. They reverently placed the Guru's body on a pile of sandalwood and set fire to their hut. After cremation, they collected the ashes in an urn and buried it at the exact spot where the body was cremated. Guru Tegh Bahadur's head was carried by *Bhai Jaita* to Anandpur, where Guru Gobind Singh cremated it near the place where Guru Ji used to meditate. This place is known as Sis Ganj of Anandpur.

***Sewadar carrying Guru Granth Sahib to Manji Sahib (Resting Place). (Gurdwara Rakab Ganj Sahib, Delhi).***









Guru Tegh Bahadur Memorial, dedicated in 2011 to Guru Tegh Bahadur who is also known as '*hind ki chadar*' meaning protector of *hindus* and this is most symbolic of the times, then and now. An initiative of the Delhi Government, this memorial is tribute to the ninth Sikh Guru, Tegh Bahadur and is spread over 10 acres alongside the Grand Trunk Road as it enters Delhi at the Haryana border. The Guru's holy teachings have been inscribed on ten rock stands with beautiful lighting whose colours change every minute. The centre of attraction is the tallest pylon of steel in the middle and visible from a distance owing to its excellent illumination. Base of the monument is shaped like the petals of a flower with three c-arches representing the three followers of Guru Tegh Bahadur embedded in the surrounding landscaped garden and also inscribed with the Guru's teachings.







*Guru Tegh Bahadur Memorial, GT Road, Delhi-Haryana Border.*



# Guru Arjan Sahib Ji: From Scripture to Statecraft and Martyrdom

June is the month of Asaarh (ਅਸ਼ਾੜ) in the Indian calendar – a stretch of time when the northern plains of India feel like one large oven. The sun beats down relentlessly, day after day, scorching the land into a vast, arid, brown expanse. Rudyard Kipling, who lived there, aptly described the delirious effects of the Indian summer when he remarked, “Only mad dogs and Englishmen go out in the midday sun.”

Imagine being strapped to a pole in the open sun for hours on end in such conditions. Imagine being denied water. Imagine being forced to sit on a sizzling griddle. Imagine having hot sand being poured over your head. Imagine the blistered body being dunked in the cold waters of the river Ravi.

Imagine this brutality persisting for days. Such was the circumstance leading to Guru Arjan Sahib Ji's martyrdom in Lahore by *yasa o siyasat* (ਯਾਸਾ ਓ ਸਿਯਾਸਤ) in June 1606. The term literally means capital punishment and pertains to the cruel code – derived evidently from the tradition of Genghis Khan – of ensuring that the killing of princes and the spiritually exalted did not spill any blood. He had been charged with sedition. Yet, Sikhs will venture out on this hot day in June, as they have done for hundreds of years, not to mourn, or protest, but to commemorate Guru Arjan's martyrdom. Setting up roadside stalls in neighbourhoods across India and the world, serving *kacchi lassi* – a drink made with a mix of milk, water, sugar and rose water, cooled with ice – Sikhs will practice the Guru's injunction, “I have no

enemy, and none is a stranger to me” by offering this refreshing drink to every passersby: Sikh, Hindu, Muslim, Christian, the young, the old – anyone. Guru Arjan Sahib Ji's death, like that of Jesus and Socrates, is one of those shaping moments in human history that become a cultural and religious icon, forever impressed in the collective psyche and imagination of a people. The image of Guru Arjan absorbed in deep meditation as he sits on a burning griddle adorns Sikh homes everywhere – in pictures, calendars and other artifacts.

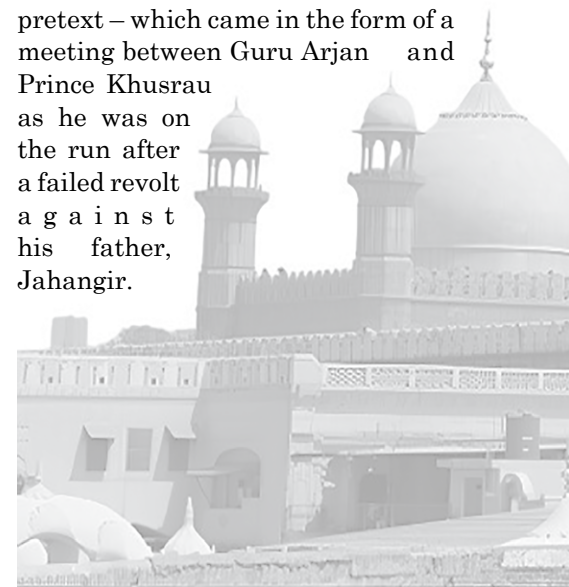
These images are a constant reminder of how to face death – with dignity and calm detachment. The Guru, after all, had options and could have avoided this fate. Why, then, did he choose to embrace death instead?

Sikh teachings emphasize the practice of “dying” while alive, to go beyond our conditioned way of apprehending Reality – which posits a time bound, physical existence that appears solid, concrete and permanent. The Guru teaches us the death is not the dreadful event that we perceive it to be. It is part of the creative and generative process that makes life itself possible. Death can be a moment pregnant with immense potential, if only we grasp it as the doorway to our Eternal home. “Sweet is thy Will,” Guru Arjan whispered as he was dragged to the river Ravi (ਰਾਵੀ), where he eventually died. By choosing death he practiced the fundamental lesson of Sikh teachings – obedience to Hukam – the Will of God. For Sikhs, the meaning and purpose of life is to be

found in Hukam or direct obedience to that divine Wisdom whose writ rules the universe.

## Background

Of the circumstances and motives leading to Guru Arjan's martyrdom, one thing can be said without reservation: the Guru's charismatic persona and the universal appeal of Sikh teachings had attracted a large influx of Hindus and Muslims, making the political establishment and the orthodoxy of the day nervous. They feared that the Guru intended to create a State within a State – imperium in imperio. In his diaries, the *Tuzuk-i-Jahangiri*, Jahangir is quite explicit about seeking a way to neutralize Guru Arjan's growing popularity and influence. He writes in his diaries, “So many simple-minded Hindus, and even foolish Muslims, are fascinated by his teachings. I had long thought that either this false traffic must end, or he must be brought into the fold of Islam.” Jahangir was looking for a pretext – which came in the form of a meeting between Guru Arjan and Prince Khusrau as he was on the run after a failed revolt against his father, Jahangir.





The meeting between the fleeing Prince and Guru Arjan was seen as the Guru's political endorsement of the Prince and was used as the pretext to punish him on treason charges.

### **Guru Arjan Sahib Ji: Biographical Sketch**

Guru Arjan Sahib Ji was born on April 15, 1563, in Goindval to Bibi Bhani and Bhai Jetha (later Guru Ram Das), the first Guru born into a Sikh household. From an early age, he was immersed in the spiritual teachings of his grandfather, Guru Amar Das Ji.

Guru Arjan Sahib Ji was a gifted poet, scholar, and musician who mastered Sanskrit, Persian, and several local dialects. His early exposure to Scripture and music laid the foundation for his later accomplishments.

When his father assumed Guruship

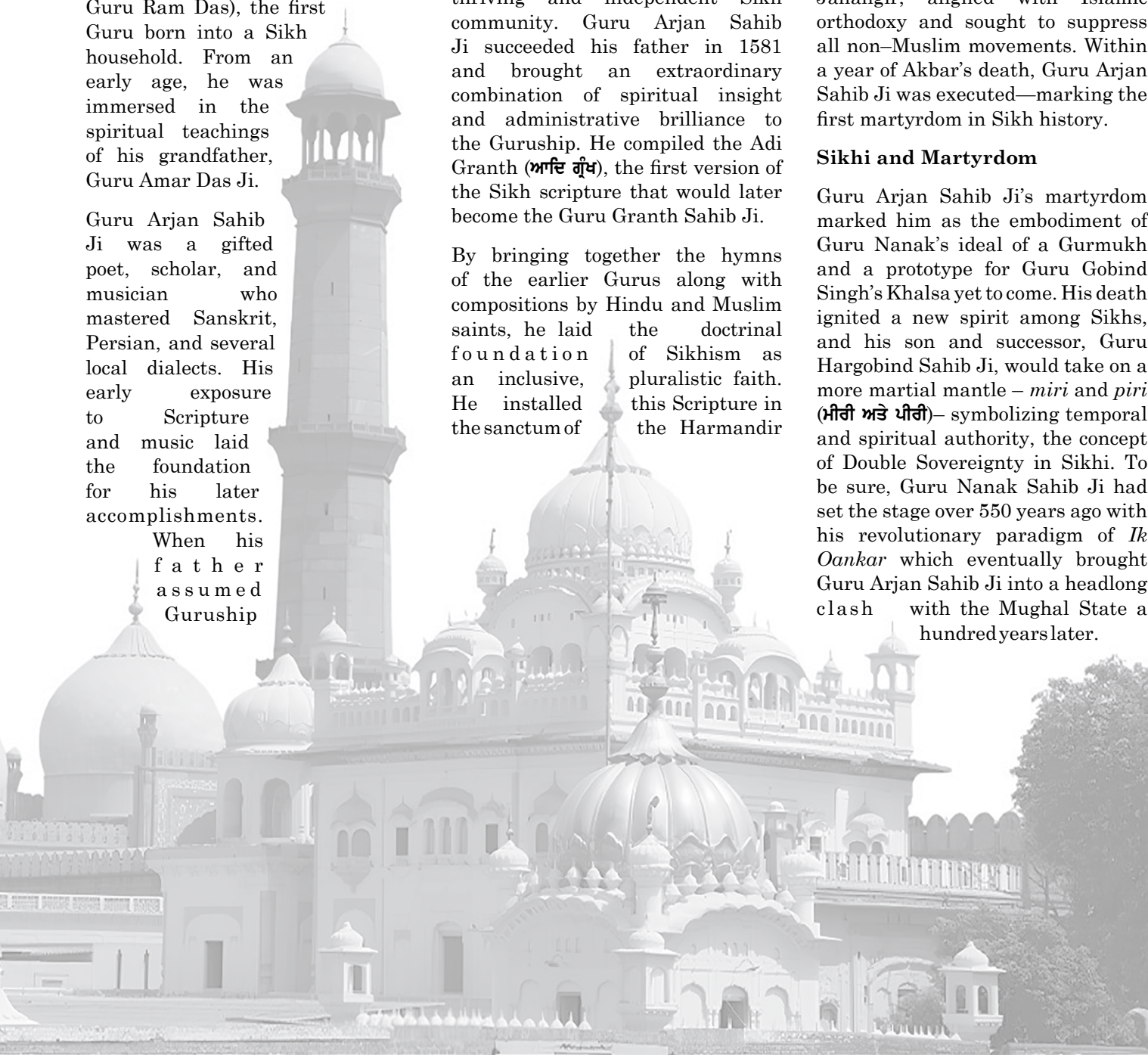
in 1574, Arjan moved with him to Ramdas Pur — now known as Amritsar. Guru Arjan Sahib Ji observed and later oversaw large-scale construction projects there, including excavating the sacred pool that would become the centerpiece of the Harmandir Sahib, or Golden Temple. These efforts weren't just architectural but spiritual and organizational, building the infrastructure for a thriving and independent Sikh community. Guru Arjan Sahib Ji succeeded his father in 1581 and brought an extraordinary combination of spiritual insight and administrative brilliance to the Guruship. He compiled the *Adi Granth* (ਆਦਿ ਗ੍ਰੰਥ), the first version of the Sikh scripture that would later become the *Guru Granth Sahib Ji*.

By bringing together the hymns of the earlier Gurus along with compositions by Hindu and Muslim saints, he laid the doctrinal foundation of Sikhism as an inclusive, pluralistic faith. He installed this Scripture in the sanctum of the Harmandir

Sahib, making the Word—not a person—the eternal Guru of the Sikhs. Under his leadership, Sikhism became a force for social and cultural transformation in Punjab. Guru Arjan Sahib Ji's popularity soared. Even Emperor Akbar visited him and reportedly paid his respects. Followers began to call him *Sacha Patshah* (ਸਚਾ ਪਾਤਸ਼ਾਹ) – the True King. But everything changed when Akbar died in 1605. His successor, Jahangir, aligned with Islamic orthodoxy and sought to suppress all non-Muslim movements. Within a year of Akbar's death, Guru Arjan Sahib Ji was executed—marking the first martyrdom in Sikh history.

### **Sikhi and Martyrdom**

Guru Arjan Sahib Ji's martyrdom marked him as the embodiment of Guru Nanak's ideal of a Gurmukh and a prototype for Guru Gobind Singh's Khalsa yet to come. His death ignited a new spirit among Sikhs, and his son and successor, Guru Hargobind Sahib Ji, would take on a more martial mantle – *miri* and *piri* (ਮੀਰੀ ਅਤੇ ਪੀਰੀ)—symbolizing temporal and spiritual authority, the concept of Double Sovereignty in Sikhi. To be sure, Guru Nanak Sahib Ji had set the stage over 550 years ago with his revolutionary paradigm of *Ik Oankar* which eventually brought Guru Arjan Sahib Ji into a headlong clash with the Mughal State a hundred years later.





Guru Nanak Sahib Ji had challenged religious and political orthodoxy and empowered individual agency as a check on the limits of State power, insisting that legitimate rule must flow from the ultimate Sovereign, *nahin har saman ko raja* (ਨਹੀ ਹਰ ਸਮਾਨ ਕੋ ਰਾਜਾ) In his lifetime, Guru Nanak Sahib Ji set a personal example by taking a stand, literally and figuratively, against Babar's invasion of India. He aimed wisdom arrows – the *Babarvani* (ਬਾਬਰ ਬਾਣੀ) – not only at Babar, calling him an agent of Death, but also the Lodhi rulers for their connivance and corruption; indeed, he even called out the Creator for watching the sport that it has initiated from the sidelines – *jini upai rangi ravai baitha vekhai ikela* (ਜਿਨੀ ਉਪਾਈ ਰੰਗੀ ਰਾਵਈ ਬੈਠਾ ਵੇਖੇ ਇਕੇਲਾ) pleading for compassion. He gave this message not from afar but by being present at the scene of destruction.

Against the backdrop of violence and war, Guru Nanak Sahib Ji offered a discourse on political governance, justice, and human rights, especially the rights of women whose plight he has described with acute poignancy in the other *Babar-vani* (ਬਾਬਰ ਬਾਣੀ) passages. Guru Nanak Sahib Ji delivered his gospel of Love with militaristic undertones, calling the general populace to wake-up, to take charge of their destiny, follow their dharma, and become agents of social change. Each individual is to represent the Divine Sovereign by playing the game of Love. Love is the glue that holds creation together. But the path of Love is not without sacrifice. Guru Nanak Sahib Ji warned: “If you wish to play the game of love, come with your head on your palm.” Guru Arjan Sahib Ji played this game fully, fearlessly, and without compromise.

His sacrifice was not merely personal but an offering of cosmic significance. In that moment, he taught Sikhs what is worth dying for – and thus what is worth living for. This was self-empowerment through non-

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**By bringing  
together the  
hymns of the  
earlier Gurus  
along with  
compositions  
by Hindu  
and Muslim  
saints, he laid  
the doctrinal  
foundation  
of Sikhism as  
an inclusive,  
pluralistic faith.  
He installed this  
Scripture in  
the sanctum of  
the Harmandir  
Sahib, making  
the Word—not  
a person—the  
eternal Guru of  
the Sikhs.**

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resistance to cultivate *Sahaj* (ਸਹਿਜ) – the Wisdom that comes through Nam (ਨਾਮ) and teaches us when to resist and act by harnessing Hukam (ਹੁਕਮਿ) sometimes we act, and sometimes we submit, go with the flow.

#### Thoughts to Ponder

Today's world is not unlike the one Guru Arjan Sahib Ji lived in: fractured by ideological battles, corruption, and injustice. And just like then, we need spiritual leaders and awakened communities to rise above fear and power politics. We must draw upon the legacy of Guru Arjan Sahib Ji and the spiritual-political blueprint laid out by Guru Nanak Sahib Ji to build societies rooted in Love, justice, and fearless truth.

Sikhs today are global citizens, yet the challenge remains: how do we stay anchored in the Guru's vision while engaging with the complexities of modern life? The path of the Guru is not merely one of remembrance but of action. The Guru still calls us to offer our heads—metaphorically speaking, for truth, Love, and justice. Our unfinished business is to carry that mission forward.

Guru Arjan Sahib Ji's sacrifice poses the question for each of us: Are we willing to suffer for our principles? What kind of world are we willing to build, even in the face of overwhelming odds?

Let us rise to the challenge. Let us, as Guru Arjan Sahib Ji did, choose sweetness in suffering, faith in adversity, and oneness in diversity. Let us, too, become the true Sovereigns of Spirit.

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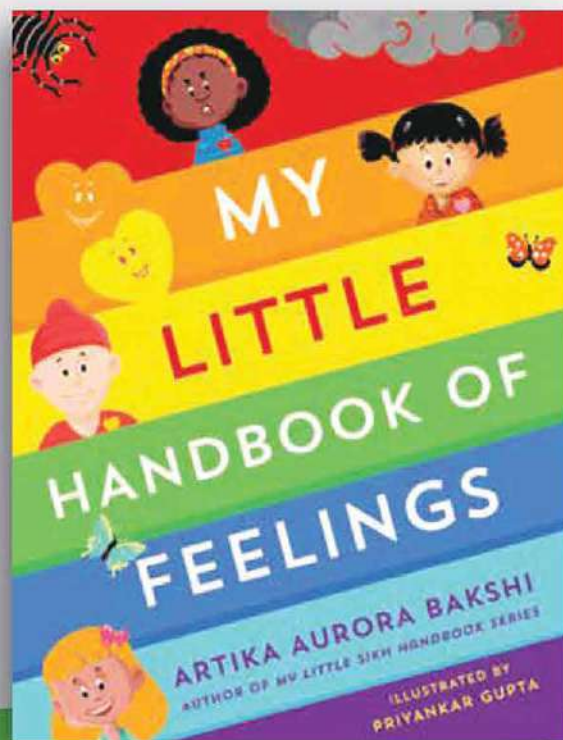
*Ravinder Singh, raised in Singapore and Delhi, has lived in the United States since 1975 and now resides in Westerville, Ohio. Passionate about Sikhs and Sikhi, he is currently devoted to an English transcreation of the Guru Granth Sahib, shared as A Sabad A Day on social media and [www.khojgurbani.org](http://www.khojgurbani.org).*



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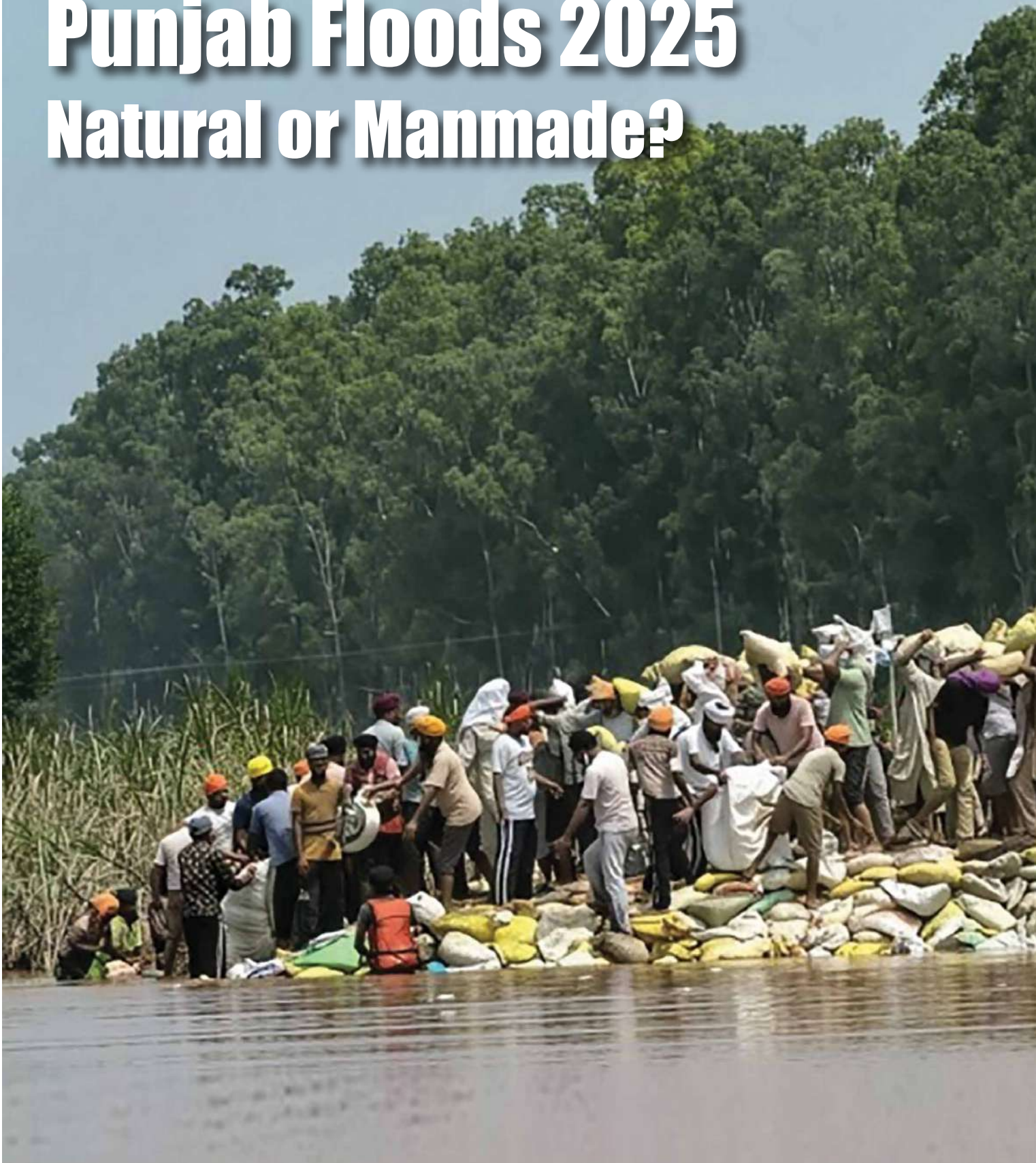
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# Punjab Floods 2025

## Natural or Manmade?







**T**he Punjab floods of 2025 caused widespread devastation across the state. Unprecedented monsoon rains and overflowing rivers like the *Sutlej* and *Beas* submerged villages, damaged crops, and displaced thousands of residents. Roads, bridges, and homes were swept away, disrupting daily life and livelihoods. Rescue teams and volunteers worked tirelessly to provide food, shelter, and medical aid. The disaster highlighted the urgent need for improved flood management, sustainable planning, and climate resilience to prevent future tragedies.

The Punjab government has already declared all twenty three districts of the state as flood-hit, as heavy rainfall and swollen rivers continued to wreak havoc, leaving 30 people dead so far, and affecting more than three hundred and fifty thousand residents. The severity of floods can be gauged from the fact that no district have escaped its wrath. The officials estimate that over two thousand villages across Punjab have been hit by this year's floods, the situation in the state's border districts is worse. Of about one thousand acres of the *Sutlej* riverbed area in village *Kaluwala*, *Ferozepur* district approximately one hundred and fifty acres remain visible; the rest has been swallowed up as the river shifted its course.

*Image credit: Narinder Nanu/AFP*



This tiny village which is surrounded by river *Sutlej* on three sides has international border fencing on the fourth side making it completely sandwiched. The plight of the people, animals, movable, and immovable properties, standing crops has been heart wrenching. The affected population had tragic memories of 1988 floods revived.

What is so strange is that Punjab has been one of earliest and had the best water management systems in place since 1693, when during the reign of Emperor Shah Jahan first canal was built. Next, during Maharaja Ranjit Singh's reign further improvements were made to the canal systems. Then during the *British Raj*, an extensive network of canals were built from 1855–1940.

Finally, after the independence in 1947 and division of Punjab between India and Pakistan, a new wave water management projects were initiated on both sides of the new international borders. This extensive irrigation canal system which transformed the territory into the grain basket of the country lays in ruin today. With digital phones, the images and text messages the news travels faster than the media, making more people aware of the grim situation. Approximately three hundred and seventy five thousand acres of crop was damaged. Flood timing was especially harsh because transplanted paddies were maturing and when fields stay submerged for days, crops lodge or collapse.

### How Floods Unfolded:

A very heavy uninterrupted monsoon rainfall spells in early August triggered the early deluge. In August, Punjab received 253.7 mm of rain, the highest the state has witnessed in the past 25 years. The dam managements were not prepared as they were anticipating a weak Monsoon. The intense rainfall filled the rivers, reservoirs and dams. The *Bhakra Beas Management Board (BBMB)* increased controlled discharges from the dams between August 20 and 28, 2025 as:

Bhakra Dam	95,000 (Water Discharged (Cusecs)
Pong Dam	74,000 (Water Discharged (Cusecs)
Ranjit Sagar Dam	600,000 (Water Discharged (Cusecs)

The Ranjit Sagar Dam on the *Ravi* river had reached close to its maximum capacity of five hundred and twenty seven meters by the end of August. On August 26–27, over six hundred thousand cusecs of water were released from the dam. This massive inflow reached the *Madhopur* barrage, where old infrastructure and lack of maintenance worsened the situation as the floodgates there collapsed, which submerged the villages of Gurdaspur, Pathankot and Amritsar districts. Also, the heavy rainfall caused surge in river flow at Harike Headworks. As of September 03, the inflow touched 346,000 cusecs prompting full gate opening. The *Ghaggar* River, a rainfed system originating in the Shivalik foothills, is highly prone to flashflood, with a past history of breaches. Local tributaries and seasonal choes or streams (such as the *Sirhind Choe* in Ropar and Ludhiana,

and the various basins in *Doaba*) also swelled beyond safe limits during the late August rainfall, inundating adjoining lowlands.

The *Dhussi* bandh was originally laid down in the 1950s on every perennial and even seasonal river of Punjab to protect the countryside areas close to the rivers. The objective of the *Dhussi bandh* on the *Beas* was to protect the downstream areas from the river's unpredictable course. But, while the *bandh* protected several villages outside, around thirty villages inside the bandh, of which sixteen fall on an island-type area and the remaining, along with the river inside the *Dhussi bandh* in Sultanpur Lodhi *tehsil*, remained exposed to back-flow and inundation. Overall, it was a devastating picture for the whole state.

On September 09, 2025, fear again gripped the border villages situated along the *Sutlej* again following a rise in the water level in fields that were already inundated. As per information, the downstream discharge from Harike Headworks stood at 92,000 cusecs, while *Hussainiwala* recorded 80,000 cusecs—almost double the normal flow of 40,000–45,000 cusecs. During the peak of the recent floods, this figure shot up to a staggering 3,00,000 cusecs.

**Causes:** The cause of floods will be the best job left to the experts and the inquiry commissions. But without waiting for their reports some obvious causes are shared as under:

- Interaction between climate stressors—such as glacial melt, erratic monsoon rainfall, and large scale deforestation.
- Unprecedented and concentrated monsoon rains this year 2025.
- Ill-timed water releases of excess water from the reservoirs without sufficient warnings to the population, only intensified the flood's impact, trauma and damage. It addition they take the trust of people away from the government.
- Poor management or lack of management and maintenance of facilities.
- Severe silting in the water management facilities coupled with urbanization and encroachment by builders in flood zones without any concern for environmental impact studies or approvals.

### Mitigation:

Mitigation from the ravages of floods will be costly, time consuming and painful. Yet not doing it is not an option. It is not merely a problem of rehabilitation of the flood victims or their livelihood, but it means saving the nation's granary. The role played by the NGOs – India and based abroad, plus film personalities, music icons, athletes, entertainment world stalwarts have been commendable. Their efforts have galvanized the public opinion and helped bring focus to the sufferings. There will be post-mortem recommendations from the expert's committees and commissions. Knowing from the history of how far these get implemented, it will be an open question. But some common sense suggestions are as under:



1. **Better Warning Systems:** There should be a better warning system so that the population can be warned of an impending disaster. During this year's flooding, the common complaint was that we were not given adequate warning. Just by better managing the warning system the impact of floods can be lessened. Complaints could be heard that; "They (officials) came and informed us just half an hour before the water came. Tell me, how can a man save himself in half an hour?"
2. **Desilting of Reservoirs:** While Punjab was battling one of its worst floods in decades, it came to light that the holding capacity of the Bhakra Dam, the second tallest in the world built upstream on the Sutlej, has been reduced by about 19 per cent in live storage since its inception in 1963. The primary reason, officials say, is that the dam's reservoir has never been desilted all these years. It shows a glaring lack of upkeep of the facilities. The modern dams are designed with features incorporated in design to enable periodical desilting. But no silting for its entire lifespan is a sad commentary on the state of affairs. The revelation came amid criticism of the Bhakra Beas Management Board (BBMB) for "failing to hold back water" in the Bhakra and Pong dams when heavy rain wreaked havoc across Punjab recently. If this is state of India's largest and prestigious project, nothing much is left to said of other projects. So, when the gates are opened to release water we can either expect blockages or sand sludge being discharged, which will only worsen the situation.
3. **Incorporate Desilting features in existing dams:** Desilting affected dams will reduce the likelihood of aquatic weeds and algae blooms, increase storage volume and prolong the life of the dam structure. So, it is imperative that such features be incorporated into the existing dam facilities. Dredging, pneumatic desilting, and sediment flushing are some of the commonly employed methods for desilting. But considering that large scale deforestation is taking place in the mountains from where the rivers originate results in increased silting. On top of that, not having desilting features is an invitation to disaster.
4. **Human encroachment on the dry river land:** *The Dhussi Bundh* is a classic example of human encroachments on the river land. During the flooding, the gauge at *Dharmkot*, meant to measure up to 4.63 lakh cusecs, became inaccessible days after August 26, as *Ravi* crossed more than double its capacity. Officials said this unprecedented pressure overwhelmed embankments. Such encroachments also obstruct the natural flow of water, raising its level further and causing it to spill over into villages and towns along the riverbanks, resulting in higher damage. The fate of houses, animals, farmland and properties were like sitting ducks to be swept away.
5. **Embankment failures:** In 2023, around 100 breaches were reported across different rivers in Punjab. While 50 breaches were reported in Ghaggar river, the remaining were in *Sathuj*, *Beas*, *Ravi* and their tributaries. In 2025, *Ravi* river unleashed its worst fury in Punjab, causing 42 of the 45 breaches reported in the state's *Dhussi bundhs* (embankments), the highest ever in the river's recorded history. When the embankments fail the repercussions on flood's fury translates into an unbearable tragedy. Obviously, there should be a reassessment, reevaluation of these bundh's strength against the higher flow rates being encountered now and it is going to get worse as time passes.
6. **Unplanned Development along with lack of environmental impact studies:** When project approvals and its sanctioning can be achieved through greasing of palms, the projects will get nod not on the basis of merit, but based on connections, grease applied to get the permits and relationships. Environmental concerns get thrown out of window to select the prime view location for the projects based on aesthetic appeal and photogenic background of hills or rivers. According to a report released on February 20, 2023, by the Cross Dependency Initiative, Punjab is among the top 50 regions in the world where climate change is expected to cause the maximum damage to human-made infrastructure. Keeping such international reports in mind, both state and central governments should weigh the developmental projects for sanctioning. This will not mitigate the damage already done but it can prevent the added impact of new projects. Simultaneously, the review of existing development projects need to be made to access their environmental impact. Some fancy projects already built with much political fanfare may provide a better ecological benefit if they are scrapped and returned back to nature.

Thus, the floods in Punjab are not just by natural disasters alone; these are tragedies exacerbated by human actions. These floods are a wakeup call for integrated governance, stronger regulatory stipulations and enforcement, and climate-resilient infrastructure to mitigate recurring cycles of loss and recovery. They are saying it loud and clear stop messing with mother nature. I will end this piece with words of Jane Goodall who just left this world:

"Only if we understand, will we care. Only if we care will we help. Only if we help shall all be saved." — Jane Goodall

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# North of l'Indostan: "les Scheiks"

## Abbé Raynal's *Histoire* & a Map by Rigobert Bonne

**Synopsis:** This article examines a sketch of the Sikhs in Abbé Raynal's 18th century treatise, *Histoire Philosophique et Politique ..... dans les deux Indes*. Raynal notes the principal ideas of the Sikhs, radical in their modernity, and outlines their struggle for survival and subsequent emergence as a regional power. Raynal's account of the Sikhs is reflected in the *Atlas* by Rigobert Bonne that accompanied the final edition of the *Histoire*. The map of India in Bonne's *Atlas* carries the legend 'les Scheiks', making it one of the earliest maps to carry an explicit reference to the Sikhs.

One of the earliest maps to carry an explicit reference to Sikhs is in an atlas published in France in 1780. An early reference to a people is interesting, and in this case also intriguing as the Sikhs had not yet established a political state, nor were they a sufficiently populous group to warrant mention on a map.

The genesis of this map is an 18th century study of European settlement and trade in the 'Indies' by a certain Abbé Guillaume-Thomas Raynal.

### Abbé Raynal and the '*Histoire*'

Educated by the Jesuits in France, Abbé Raynal left religious life to pursue a literary career in Paris. After some minor successes, Raynal gained wide recognition with the publication of his treatise: *Histoire Philosophique et Politique Des Établissements et du Commerce des Européens dans les deux Indes*. The *Histoire* is a survey and critical assessment of European and British commercial and colonial ventures in the 'Indies', a label loosely applied to countries in Asia, in the Americas, even Africa.

First published anonymously in Amsterdam in 1770, a revised edition of the *Histoire* was issued at La Haye (The Hague) in 1774. This was followed by a substantially expanded third edition published in Geneva in 1780. This – the final edition – was supplemented by an atlas by the cartographer, Rigobert Bonne.

The success of the *Histoire* was immense. In its first two decades alone, it is estimated that the book had thirty authorized printings (and forty pirated printings) in the principal languages of Europe, making it among the most well-known works of its time. [Womack 1970, p.3].

An English translation of the 1774 edition of the *Histoire* appeared in 1776. The translation of the definitive 1780 edition followed in 1783, with seven maps by the English cartographer, Thomas Kitchin, in lieu of the *Atlas* by Bonne. In his examination of colonial practices, Raynal denounces slavery and decries the injustice and cruelty that accompany colonization, and religious intolerance which underpins it. The critical stance of the *Histoire* towards prevailing policies in 'les deux Indes' placed it at odds with vested interests, commercial and political. The *Histoire* came to be seen as subversive, a precursor of radical ideas that would soon animate the French Revolution. The Church caused the book to be banned in France and its author exiled.

### L'Indostan

Among the countries examined in the *Histoire* is 'l'Indostan', India. Raynal provides a natural history of the land, its great rivers, its coasts and the Deccan hills that separate them; and proclaims it 'the most fruitful country in the world.' [Raynal 1783, v1, p50].

He describes the trading footholds of the European powers – Portugal, Holland, France and Britain – along the coasts of India. He notes their growing influence in India and their rivalries, and decries 'the rage of conquests, and what is no less destructive an evil, the greediness of traders' that have ravaged the country [Ibid, p5].

In a wide-ranging account of the civil code that governs Hindu life, the author remarks on the caste system and its inequities: 'the most ancient system of slavery' [Ibid, p58]. He surveys the science and the mythology of the people, and examines with serious interest the language, *Sanskrit*, as a vehicle for philosophy and literature.

The rulers of the greater part of the land – the Mughal emperors in Delhi – are reported from a distance. The *Histoire* speaks of the opulence of the imperial court and its arbitrary exercise of power; and observes the diverse people in Mughal dominions and beyond: the Rajputs, the Mahrattas, the Pathans and, among others, the Sikhs.

### A new nation: *Les Seicks*

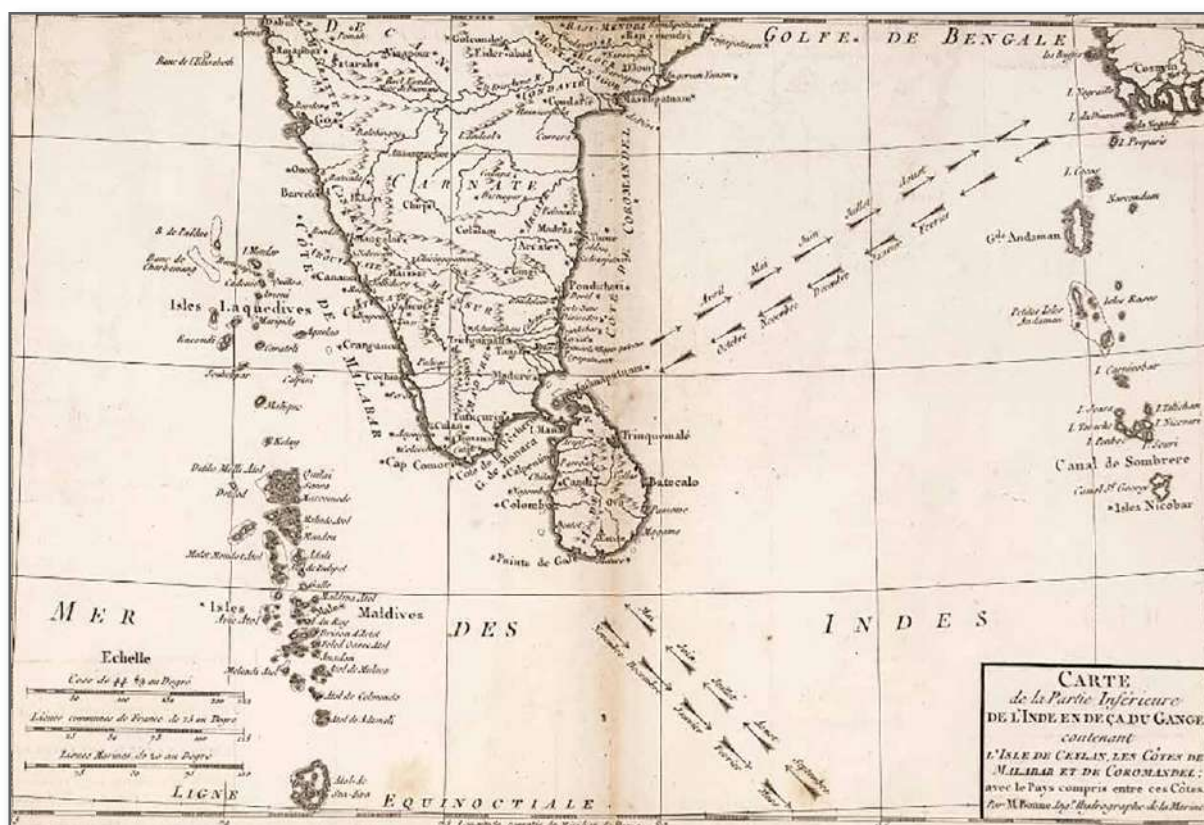
Appearing first in the 1774 edition of the *Histoire*, and repeated in the final 1780 edition, is a sketch of a people largely unknown at the time in Europe:

*'To the north of Indostan there is a new nation of people even more*



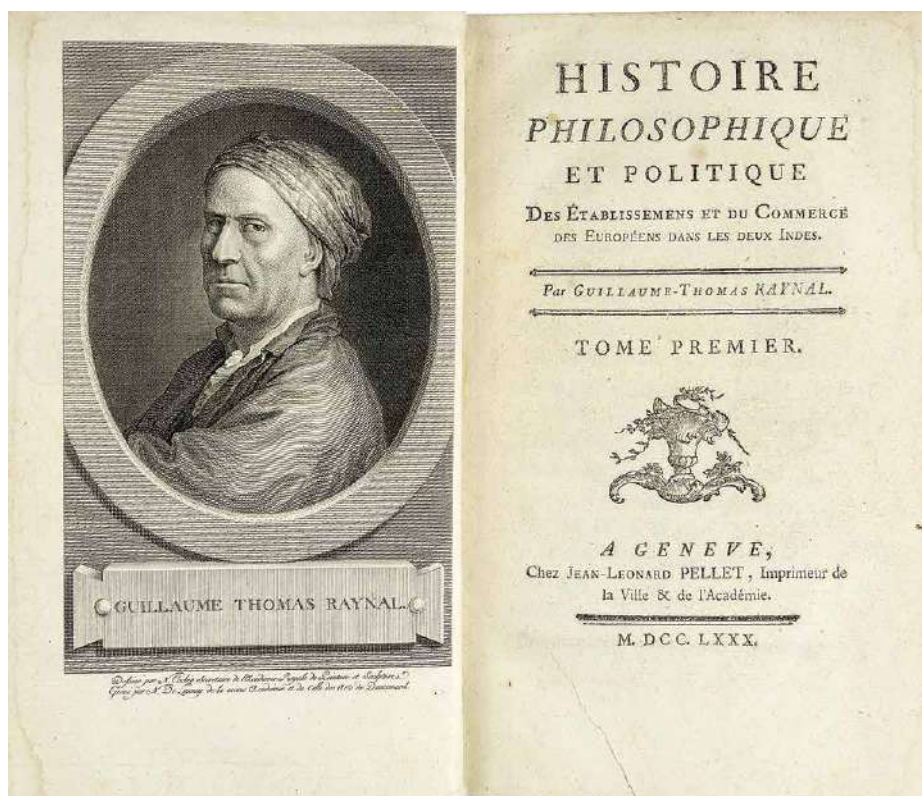


**Figure 4:**  
Carte de  
la Partie  
Supérieure,  
De L'Inde  
en Deça du  
Gange (210  
x 318 mm)  
Rigobert  
Bonne  
(1780)



**Figure 5:**  
Carte de  
la Partie  
Inférieure,  
De L'Inde  
en Deça du  
Gange (210  
x 318 mm)  
Rigobert  
Bonne  
(1780)





**Figure 1: Frontispiece portrait and title page, Raynal's *Histoire* 1780 edition, Geneva, 1781 printing**

formidable (than the Pathans). These people known as Seicks have learned to do away with despotism and superstition, even though they are surrounded by enslaved nations. It is said they are followers of a philosopher .....who gave them ideas of freedom, and taught belief in Deism with no hint of superstition' [Raynal, 1780, v2, p298].

The land 'north of Indostan' is the Punjab, home to the Sikhs, people of a monotheistic faith founded in the 15th century. Infused with ideals of equality and social justice the Sikhs had evolved, by the close of the 17th century, into an egalitarian fraternity with a scripture, a language, and a well-defined identity. Raynal's account of the Sikhs is brief but acute in its remarks on their resolve, and on the sovereign status accorded to their scripture: 'They are said to be firm in their faith, and in their temple is an altar on which is placed their book of laws .... which is the supreme sovereign of their republic'. A notable aspect of Raynal's remarks is the absence of the exotic. There is, for instance, no mention of the distinctive appearance

of the Sikhs, of turbans worn over their long un-cut hair. The attention instead is on their ideas. The growing Sikh movement attracted in the 17th century the attention, and eventually the hostility of the ruling power, the Mughals. The death at Mughal hands of two of the spiritual leaders ('Gurus') of the Sikhs was cause for antipathy towards the regime, and eventually an uprising in the early 18th century.

### The Edict of Genocide

The Sikh uprising saw initial successes but was eventually suppressed, the rebel leader tortured and put to death in public; and his soldiers executed *en masse*. The executions were followed by an imperial edict of genocide: 'every Sicque should, on a refusal of embracing the Mohametan faith, be put to the sword. A valuable reward was also given by the emperor for the head of every Sicque ....' [Forster 1798, v1, p271].

The Mughal edict of 1716 gave sanction to what in fact was already a practice. The half-century that followed saw the Sikh struggle for survival and the genesis of a nation state.

**According to the *Histoire*:** *They (the Sikhs) began to be known at the beginning of the century, though they were then regarded less a nation than a sect. Under the miseries of Mughal rule, their numbers grew considerably with converts from other religions who joined them to find refuge from the oppression and furies of their tyrants'* [Raynal 1780, v2, p299]. The resistance against 'the oppression and furies of their tyrants' took a turn in 1739, with the invasion of India by Nadir Shah of Persia. The destruction that attended the invasion was great; more significant politically was the damage to Mughal authority. That authority would be further battered by Ahmad Shah Abdali, an Afghan protégé of Nadir Shah and his trusted aide in the invasion of India. A palace coup in Persia caused Abdali to flee to Kandahar in 1747. Proclaimed ruler of Afghanistan by his band of followers, Abdali set out to take Lahore, rich capital of the Mughal province of Punjab. The invasion brought him up against the Sikhs.

### Formation of the Sikh *Misls*

The violence that followed the Mughal edict of genocide had led the Sikhs to gather in defensive bands, '*jathas*'. In the face of yet another adversary – the Afghans – the bands coalesced into larger battle groups. At a landmark meeting in 1748, the '*jathas*' came together as a Sikh army, the *Dal Khalsa*, that organized itself into eleven divisions which came to be known as '*misls*', or '*misals*'.

Famously described as '*confederacies of equals, under chiefs of their own selection*' [Prinsep 1834, p. 29], the *misls* were self-governing bodies, each member within it '*an equal among equals*.' A child of necessity, the *misl* would play a pivotal role in the history of the people and in the formation of a state.



The battle groups of the *misl*s consisted mainly of cavalry, the horsemen equipped with whatever weapons each could muster, mainly muskets and the customary hand weapons. Lacking heavy ordnance, the *misl*s had the advantage of speed; another advantage unseen was tacit support of the peasantry.

In the main, the strongholds of the *misl*s lay between the Indus River and the foothills of the Eastern Himalayas (Figure 2), an expanse often loosely described as 'greater Punjab'. The largest and initially the most prominent battlegroup

was the *Bhangi misl*, centered in Amritsar. The overall command of the *Dal Khalsa* was entrusted to an emerging leader, Jassa Singh of the *Ahluwalia misl*. South of the Sutlej River lay a twelfth *misl*, the *Phulkian*, which remained for most part at the periphery of the Sikh struggle. Independent entities, the *misl*s were informally bound by a common imperative of defense. They convened at regular intervals – by custom in Amritsar – on matters of common interest, mainly military. Resolutions (*gurmata*) struck at these public assemblies were morally binding, foreshadowing a future ideal

of governance: of popular engagement and consensus, in principle if not always in fact. Vastly inferior in weaponry and numbers to the ruling Mughals, and to the invading Afghans, the *misl*s would prove to be an obstacle, and eventually a challenge, to both.

### The Afghan Invasions

Abdali's march to Lahore in 1747 was but a step in his road to the Mughal capital, Delhi. It was the first of a series of invasions—ten in all—over the next two decades. The Afghan armies would typically set out at the start of

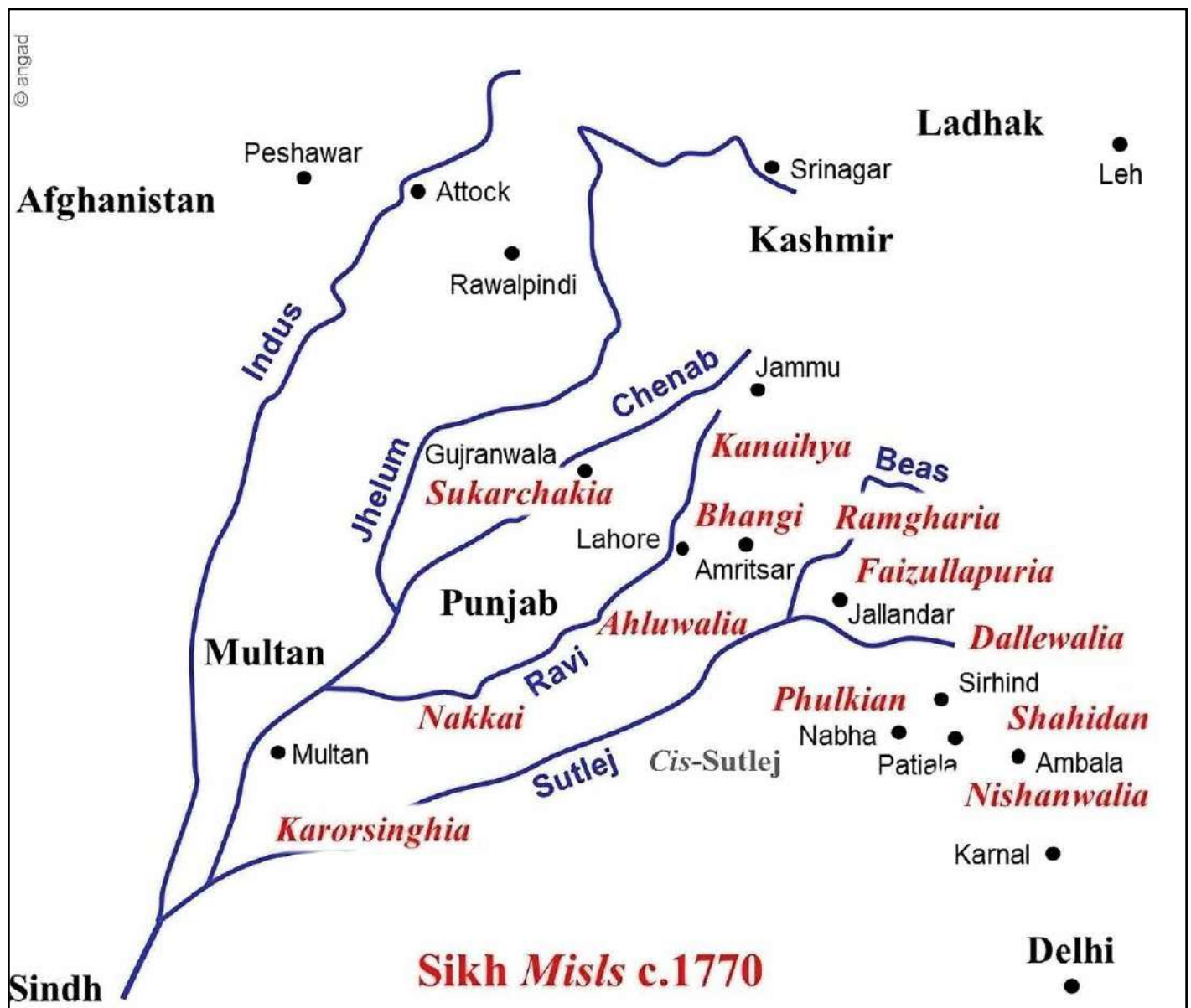


Figure 2: The Sikh misls and their areas of influence c. 1770





Figure 3: Battle scene, Sikh-Afghan Wars (image: commons.wikimedia.org).

“The battle groups of the *misls* consisted mainly of cavalry, the horsemen equipped with whatever weapons each could muster, mainly muskets and the customary hand weapons.”



winter and return to Kandahar before the heat of high summer in India. The Afghan invasions are best understood as large-scale raids to replenish the treasury of Abdali's newly established kingdom.

Territories in India were overrun with impressive ease but there was little attention paid to consolidating the gains. The task of governors installed by Abdali in subjugated provinces was primarily to guard and oversee the extraction of wealth; civic matters were left to existing structures. Under the brunt of successive invasions, the Mughal regime began to give way to Afghan demands. Revenues from '*Chahar Mahal*' – 'four palaces', the cities of Aurangabad, Pasrur, Gujrat and Sialkot – were turned over to Abdali. Also relinquished shortly after was Mughal sovereignty over the province of Multan. Further reverses forced the Mughals to formally surrender Lahore – in effect Punjab, its vital frontier province – in 1752. The Afghans went on to also take the contiguous northern province of Kashmir.

Abdali faced no opposition when his army eventually entered Delhi in 1757. A spark of resistance by citizens triggered a plunder of the capital, followed by the pillaging of other cities in the region. Abdali's son, a minor, was appointed Viceroy; and the district of Sirhind annexed to the Afghan kingdom. A fresh challenge to Abdali arose from the Mahrattas, a Hindu power in the Deccan with ambitions (and a brief history) of occupying the Punjab. The crushing defeat of the Mahratta army at Panipat in 1761, removed the last of the region's rulers to militarily oppose the Afghans.

### Resistance in Punjab

Raids on the Afghan army in its marches through the Punjab marked the war of resistance waged by the Sikh *misls*. On the heels of that army's return to Kandahar, the *misls* stormed territories under Afghan jurisdiction, ejecting the appointed governors, '*throwing them out, like flies out of milk*' [Grewal and Habib 2001, p181]. The collapse of order

in the province gave rise to '*rakhi*', an arrangement by which the *misls* undertook to defend villages for a '*moderate rent, and that mainly in kind*'. A source of revenue for the *misls*, this development also spoke to a certain shift in authority, the *misls* encroaching on revenues previously claimed by Mughal Delhi.

After Panipat, the struggle for Punjab became essentially one between the Afghans and the Sikhs. Still no match for Abdali's army, the *misls* were an increasingly serious obstruction, often holding their own against the Afghans (and at times their provisional allies, the Mughals).

In a surprise maneuver in 1762, Abdali fell upon a *misl* encampment near Sirhind. It was the most punishing loss suffered by the Sikhs in the history of the struggle, and is remembered in Sikh annals as '*Vadda Ghallughara*', the great carnage. The Afghans went on to desecrate and demolish the Sikh shrine at *Guruchak*, the future city of Amritsar.

In turn, the *misls* laid waste to settlements of the Afghans and their vassals and allies in north India. The scale of destruction impelled Abdali to invade the country again, this time in military alliance with neighboring Baluchistan. The combined armies were unable, in the face of fierce resistance, to make headway beyond Sirhind. Abdali's cycle of invasions to gather tributes and monies 'owed' by subjugated regions were now increasingly about battling the *misls*.

The capture of Lahore by the *misls* in 1765 was a turning point, a triumph proclaimed by the minting of a Sikh coin. The inscription on the coin invokes the Sikh Gurus. Also inscribed are the words "*Deg, Tegh, Fateh*", each word charged with meaning:

- *Deg*, a cooking vessel – a promise to feed the populace
- *Tegh*, a sword – the strength to fulfill that promise
- *Fateh*, victory – success in making good that pledge

The language acknowledges the sentiment and memory of the short-lived republic proclaimed by Banda Bahadur (footnote 6). Further invasions by Abdali and his successors still lay ahead, but much of Punjab was now held by the *misls*. Also within their reach lay Multan, even tracts of *trans*-Indus Afghanistan. The Afghan invasions were cause for concern to states beyond the Mughal dominions.

The ascendancy of the *misls* in the Afghan struggle was followed with close interest by powers in the region, Indian and foreign, especially by the British given their own territorial ambitions in India. According to a British dispatch, Lord Clive '*is extremely glad to know that the Shah's (Abdali's) progress has been impeded by the Sikhs ..... as long as he (Abdali) does not defeat the Sikhs, or come to terms with them, he cannot penetrate into India*' [Gupta 1995, v2, p242].

Raynal makes no explicit reference to the *misls* but notes instead the collective military success of the *Seicks* who '*can raise a cavalry of sixty-thousand good horse*', and '*now possess the entire province of Punjab, the larger part of Multan and Sindh, both banks of the Indus River from Cashmere to Talta and the country towards Delhi from Lahore to Sirhind*' [Raynal 1780, v2, p299].

This broad assessment is closely reflected in the maps of India in the atlas by Rigobert Bonne that accompanied the final, 1780, edition of Raynals's *Histoire*.

### Rigobert Bonne : Atlas de Toutes Les Parties Connues du Globe Terrestre.

The final 1780 (Geneva) edition of Raynal's *Histoire* was accompanied by an undated '*Atlas de Toutes Les Parties Connues du Globe Terrestre*' by Rigobert Bonne.

A mathematician and military engineer, Rigobert Bonne served as a cartographer in the Hydrographical Office of France and was appointed Royal Hydrographer in 1773. He



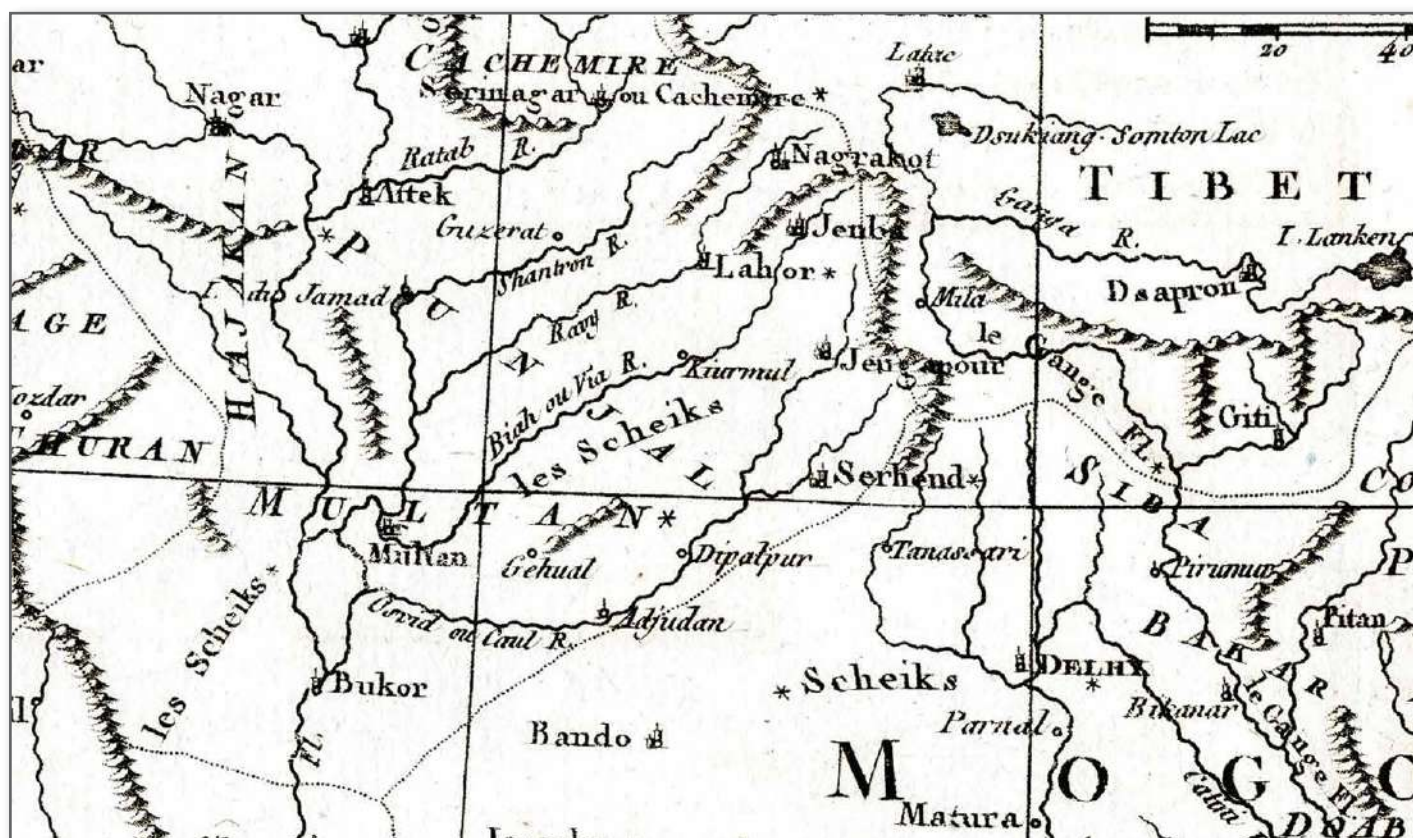


Figure 4A: Map of North India – detail

contributed to maritime and geographical atlases and other publications (notably the 2-volume *Atlas Encyclopédique*), but he is best remembered for his *Atlas* that accompanied Abbé Raynal's *Histoire* which had begun to gain renown. Bonne's *Atlas* is prefaced by a 28-page 'Analyse Succincte', primarily cartographic source data for maps of the world. Also gathered in the *Atlas* are 23 tables of statistical data on trade by European nations – France, Britain, Holland, Spain and Portugal – in the diverse lands of 'les deux Indes'. The main body of the *Atlas* consists of 49 double-page maps. Noted above each map is the 'book number' of the 1780 edition of the *Histoire* in which that region is discussed. People and place names that appear in Raynal's text are highlighted in the maps with an asterisk (\*). Absent in the maps in Bonne's *Atlas* are the flourishes, the cartouche and the compass rose, of the more decorative maps of the era. The attention instead is on the technical dimension, on function and precision. The map of the southern peninsula

carries more detail, the region being better known to European nations with their trading interests and outposts along the two coasts.

To that, Bonne adds useful information, notably the months and direction of the monsoon winds that regulate the agricultural seasons of India. Noted in both maps, in addition to geographical data, are the military forts in the land. The greater number of these appear, on cursory examination, in the map of North India, the battleground of historic invasions.

#### Map of North India detail – 'les Scheiks'

A segment of Bonne's map of North India, (Figure 4A), allows a closer examination of the region. Indicated on the map, albeit with a broad brush, are territories under the influence, and at times control, of 'les Scheiks'. Explicit mention of the Sikhs appears at three points on the map of greater Punjab, misspelt here as 'Punjal'. The label 'Les Scheiks' in the region

below the Beas River ('Beah ou Via R') can be said to refer to the main body of the *misl*s spread between the great rivers of Punjab (Figure 2).

These battlegroups, by virtue of their strength and location, were the most prominent in confronting the Afghans. They would later play prominent roles in the consolidation and founding of a political state. Another label 'les Scheiks' finds place south-west of Multan, in *trans*-Indus Afghanistan. The authority of the *misl*s in the region west of the Indus River was tenuous, but it was enough to deter Abdali's Baluchi military ally in the joint invasion in 1764 from accepting a gift of the 'territory of Quetta .... and the adjoining territories of Derahs, Multan and Jhang, the whole country west of the Chenab, but the Khan ... respectfully declined to accept this gift, most probably for fear of the Sikhs' [Gupta 1995, v2, p224–225].

The third label 'Scheiks' is placed south of Sirhind, due west of Delhi. With their occupation of Sirhind

“Ranjit Singh, young heir to the Sukarchakia *misl*, set about bringing – through marriage alliances, diplomacy and muscle – the *misl*s north of the Sutlej under his flag to establish what would become the kingdom of Lahore.”

and adjacent territories in 1764, the *misl*s ‘carried their victories right up to Delhi and ... into the heart of the Gangetic plain’ [Singh 1997, v3, p96]. Within three years of Bonne’s map, the *misl*s would enter Delhi, the Mughal capital, itself. More than a show of strength, the entry of the *misl*s into Delhi in 1783 was significant in that the *misl*s compelled the Mughal ruler to assent to the building of *gurdwaras* on sites in the city sacred to the memory of their *Gurus*, most significantly the sites associated with the beheading of the ninth Sikh *Guru* by an earlier Mughal regime [Gupta, v3, p168].

#### The Emergence of the Sikh *Misl*s

The text on the Sikhs in Raynal’s *Histoire* first appeared in the 1774 edition. The same text is repeated without change in the 1780 edition. The labels – ‘*les Scheiks*’ – in Bonne’s map of 1780 therefore refer to a reality of 1774.

By then, the *misl*s had blunted the Afghan invasions; and, against a backdrop of a half-century struggle against the Mughal edict of genocide, had wrested control of sizeable territories from Afghan hands. With the capture of Lahore, the *misl*s supplanted the Mughals as the *de facto* authority, if not yet rulers, of the Punjab.

Territories held by the Sikh *misl*s – both banks of the Indus below Multan, and the Punjab plains north of the Sutlej – now formed the northern limit of the Mughal India. Hence, the Raynal reference to a ‘*new nation ... north of Indostan*’.

The mention of ‘*Scheiks*’ in Bonne’s *Carte de la Partie Supérieure* indicates a seismic change, a shift in authority in regions nominally still part of ‘*Mogol de Indostan*’. Much of greater Punjab now lay under the influence and to some degree control of ‘*les Scheiks*’.

That control was still fluid, the boundaries neither clear nor constant. Minutiae in Bonne’s map, ‘*les Scheiks*’ acknowledge a new presence – military, political and social – in

the ‘*land north of Indostan*’. It would be a few decades before ‘*les Scheiks*’ would coalesce into a nation state, but the transformation of the *misl*s into sovereign entities had begun.

**Postscript:** Over the next two decades, the *misl*s that comprise ‘*Les Scheiks*’ in Bonne’s map went on to consolidate their territories and assume broader powers of governance. Ranjit Singh, young heir to the *Sukarchakia misl*, set about bringing – through marriage alliances, diplomacy and muscle – the *misl*s north of the Sutlej under his flag to establish what would become the kingdom of Lahore.

#### Acknowledgements

The English translation of the text in Raynal’s *Histoire*, (Geneva 1780, v 2, pp298–299) is by Marlène Lepage. All other quotations from the *Histoire* are from the Justamond translation, 1783.

Gratefully acknowledged are the resources and staff of the BnF (*Bibliothèque nationale de France*), Paris; Cambridge University Library, UK; Robarts Library and Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library, both at the University of Toronto; the Toronto Public Reference Library; and the electronic archives of the University of Michigan, the University of Oklahoma and of the Metropolitan Library of New York. Also thanked is Prof. Harjot S. Oberoi (UBC) for helpful comments on this work.

This article is an abridged version of “*The Emergence of the Sikh Misl*s – Abbé Raynal’s *Histoire* and a map by Rigobert Bonne”, B. S. Marwah, originally published in *Sikh Formations*, Volume 19, 2023–Issue 4. [<https://doi.org/10.1080/177448727.2023.2262146>]

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# When the Rivers Rose

## The Tragedy of Punjab's 2025 Floods

**In 2025, Punjab faced one of its most devastating floods, triggered by record monsoon rains and overflowing rivers that submerged villages, destroyed crops, and displaced thousands. The disaster underscored the urgent need to shift from reactive relief efforts to preventive, long-term strategies.**

**D**era Baba Nanak (Punjab): Standing amidst scattered heaps of sand in the hot and humid weather, Dilpreet Singh, a farmer from flood-affected *Thetharke* village of Gurdaspur district was waiting to receive a cavalcade of tractors to clear sand and silt from his fields.

Dilpreet's village *Thetharke* is one among many others in Punjab's *Majha* region which was devastated by the overflowing Ravi river during the floods in the last week of August.

"All these 4.5 acres were my fields, but now they are buried under four to five feet of sand. By now, I would have started harvesting my cauliflower crop. Instead, here I am, staring at losses of around Rs 10 lakh," he said.

*The Wire* visited Dera Baba Nanak, *Pakhoke Tahli Sahib*, and *Thetharke* in Gurdaspur district, and *Ghonerwal* and *Machiwala* villages in Amritsar, all of which were ravaged by the floods. The picture is similar in farmlands.

Pointing at an under-construction embankment, Dilpreet said that on the night between August 27 and 28, their village was submerged under 15 to 16 feet of water. "The water broke the *Khasa-Thetharke Dhussi Bandh* (embankment) and created a 150-foot gap in it. The river also swept away logs, particularly the tall eucalyptus trees, causing massive loss to life, land, and houses," he added. Dilpreet is being helped by the Hoshiarpur-based organisation

*Pagdi Sambhal Jatta*, which is assisting him in clearing his fields. In this group was Jatinder Singh Jhaur, a farmer from *Bhaini Milwan village*, also from Gurdaspur district, who despite having lost his 10 acres of paddy and sugarcane crop had reached *Thetharke* to help clear sand in the fields of other farmers.

"Everybody is in crisis and needs help. There are hundreds of people like me, who are on the ground despite their own losses. I have been volunteering right from first day of the floods," he said. Earlier, Baljinder Singh, the president of *Pagdi Sambhal Jatta*, had said that he had come with more than 50 youths on 25 tractors from Hoshiarpur to work in the fields.

### **Massive damage at Indo-Pak border's last village in Kartarpur Corridor.**

*The Wire* also visited the last village on the Indo-Pak border – *Pakhoke Tahli Sahib* at the Dera Baba Nanak town of Gurdaspur – where the aftermath of floods was massive. The famous Kartarpur Sahib corridor is situated just around three kilometres away from *Pakhoke Tahli Sahib*.

A major portion of the Indo-Pak border dividing Gurdaspur from Pakistan was washed away in the floods. The jawans of the last Border Security Forces post on Kartarpur Sahib corridor had to take refuge in Gurdwara Darbar Sahib in Dera Baba Nanak during floods. Around 30 kilometres of the physical Indo-Pak border has been washed away in

the floods, affecting BSF check posts in the border districts of Gurdaspur, Amritsar and Ferozepur sectors. The floods also ravaged Pakistan, leading to several deaths. The border point at *Pakhoke Tahli Sahib* was inundated when this reporter visited. It had a 70-foot-deep and 482-foot-wide gap in it. The extent of damage was such that Pakistan's marooned fields were clearly visible from the village embankments. While farmer groups and social organisations tried to clear sand from their fields, BSF jawans could be seen keeping vigil on the exposed border point. Councillor Gurnam Singh of *Pakhoke Tahli Sahib* village lost 15 acres of cauliflower crop. The region is famous for its all-weather cauliflower which is supplied to parts of Punjab and Jammu and Kashmir. Gurnam said his fields, like that of many others', were also covered by sand and silt. He was facing losses of around Rs 45 lakh. Extracting sand from the fields was also a major expense in terms of diesel consumption, he shared. "The work to clear sand from the fields started in our village on September 15. Within a fortnight, people have spent Rs 25 lakh on diesel alone. We are deeply thankful to Sikh organisations, volunteers from Dera Radha Soami Satsang Beas, people from Haryana, Rajasthan, and Uttar Pradesh, who stood shoulder to shoulder with us," he said. The Punjab government has launched a one-time '*Jehda Khet, Ohdi ret*' scheme, under





*Photo credit: X*



*Photo credit: Press Trust of India*







*Photo credit: Agence France-Presse (AFP)*



which farmers can extract and sell the sand accumulated in their fields. “We are clearing sand from the fields but there is no clarity as to when it will be lifted. We also have no idea that how the farmers would get compensation for the same,” Gurnam added. Another farmer, Naseeb Singh, from the same village, said that his nine acres of agricultural land was buried under sand. “Once the sand is cleared, we will have to spend at least Rupees 3 lakh per acre to prepare the fields to make it cultivable,” he shared.

### **Houses washed away, terraces and walls have cracks**

If it is a race against time for farmers, it was even more difficult for labourers and those from the financially weaker sections to restart life with few resources. At the worst-affected *Ghoneval*, *Machhiwala* and *Ramdaas* villages of Amritsar, the situation was grim. Almost every second house was either broken or has developed cracks in walls, terrace, and floors. Road connectivity

is badly hit too. Most of the roads have been washed away while lanes are choked with dust as work to lay embankments is going on at full speed. The cattle sheds have been washed away in the floods, leaving villagers with no option but to tie their cattle in the open. *Sulakhan Masih*, a farm labourer from *Ghoneval* village told *The Wire* that he was dependent on rations and essentials donated by various organisations. “The walls and the terrace of my house were lying broken and the rooms were filled with



*Amid the devastating Punjab floods, an elderly man's bravery moved millions. Risking his own life to save a stranded stray dog, his selfless act became a powerful reminder that humanity still prevails.*



*Photo credit: X*



*Photo credit: X*

Punjab experienced its worst floods in nearly four decades in August 2025, inundating over 1,900 villages and causing extensive damage. The floods resulted in the loss of at least 51 lives and displaced approximately 384,000 people across seven districts. Agriculture was severely affected, with 400,000 acres of farmland submerged, including significant losses in paddy and sugarcane crops.



silt. My cow was also swept away in the floods,” he said, adding that he used to earn a living by spraying pesticides in the fields but that source of livelihood is gone now. Sulakhan said that as his house was situated in the middle of the village, he and his family were stuck on the terrace of his house for the first three days. “I also lost a cart, which I had made just a few days before the floods. Now, I spend my day standing at the intersection of *Ghonewal* and *Machhiwala* villages in search of some work,” he said. Malkit Singh, a farmer from *Machhiwala* spoke of how the tiles of his floor caved in at his newly constructed house. “The boundary wall of my house also got washed away,” he said. While Malkit rushed his wife and kids to his in-law’s house in Amritsar, he could not get to his buffaloes. “I left my house in a car and came back on a boat. For three days, my eight buffaloes were in stuck in flood water and survived without any fodder. I am thankful to the almighty that my cattle survived in the floods,” he said.

At *Pakhoke Tahli Sahib* village, most labourer families have been living in filthy conditions. Nearly, all the houses have a thick layer of silt in them. Residents have been keeping their belongings in tarpaulin sheds.

Showing a dumping site where most villagers had thrown away their damaged furniture, electronics, blankets, utensils and clothing, Nazir Masih and his wife Madhu said, “We are limping towards normalcy. It is like beginning life from the scratch.”

The couple thanked the Global Sikhs NGO headed by Amarpreet Singh and his team for giving them a brand-new refrigerator, washing machine, bed, and mattress.

Sabi Masih, another labourer, showed how a horizontal black line across all houses reflected where the water stood – 12 feet high. “We could not collect anything, no documents, no cash, or essentials. Everything was washed away and damaged within minutes,” he said. Sabi said also got a bed, fridge, and mattress from

Global Sikh team, but his house was completely damaged and he had to keep those at a relative’s house, he said.

Raj, another flood victim from the same village, showed how the floods damaged her newly constructed house. “I constructed my house five months ago. Now, it has developed cracks while the silt has led to dampness in the rooms,” she said. Showing the aftermath of floods, Gurnam Singh told *The Wire* that though no flood water entered his house but still the walls of his house and the floor had developed major cracks. He said that following the floods, the water level has increased and that in turn has led to dampness in the soil. “Receding water level and sunlight exposure will further increase these cracks in flood affected areas,” he added. From broken houses to dusty lanes, from fallen trees to damaged electricity poles, from marooned fields to disease infested livestock, life was seemingly on a pause for most in these villages.

The Global Sikhs NGO has been helping villagers in laying embankments, levelling fields, constructing houses, providing household essentials, and supplying medicines, rations and drinking water.

### Union versus Punjab governments

Terming the Rs 1600–crore package announced by the Union government as minuscule in the wake of the massive loss, chief minister Bhagwant Mann on September 30 met Union Home Minister Amit Shah and demanded a special relief package for Punjab. Mann said that 60 people lost their lives while more than 20 lakh people across 2,614 villages were affected. Around 6.87 lakh people were displaced because of floods, according to state government records. The devastating floods destroyed more than 4.8 lakh acres of crops and more than 17,000 houses were damaged. He said that the floods affected over 2.5 lakh livestock while 4,675 kilometres of rural roads, 485 bridges, 1,417 culverts and 190 grain markets were damaged too. The chief



minister stated that the preliminary estimate of losses stands at Rupees 13,800 crore and this amount was likely to increase more in the coming days. He also raised the issue of the Union government’s pending share of Rupees 11,297 crore of Rural Development Fund and market fee. However, a press statement issued by the Press Information Bureau (PIB) reveals that Union home minister Amit Shah told CM Bhagwant Mann



*Photo credit: Indian Air Force*

that the State Disaster Response Fund (SDRF) has sufficient funds to the tune of Rupees 12,589 crores, which could be utilised for the relief and rehabilitation of affected people.

The press statement mentioned that out of the financial assistance of Rupees 1,600 crore announced by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Rupees 805 crore has already been released to the state government intended beneficiaries under various schemes.

It also said that an Inter-Ministerial Central Team (IMCT) was constituted on September 1, 2025 without waiting for the receipt of memorandum from Punjab.

Further, Shah stated that the Union government team visited the affected areas for an on-the-spot assessment of damages in the state from September 3 to 6, 2025.

“However, the state government was yet to submit a detailed

memorandum. After the receipt of the memorandum, the same will be considered by the central government as per the Government of India approved norms,” the PIB statement read.

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*Kusum Arora is an award winning Punjab based freelance journalist writing for The Wire, Delhi. She covers Punjab, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh and has been contributing for different international media houses.*



# Phulkari: A Tale of Threads, Tradition, & Tenacity

A needle pierced the khaddar cloth. A scalpel pierced the flushed skin. Vibrant colours emerged from both. And within that earthy red, a shape took form – The *Phulkari* was ready; she was born.

*Phul* – Flower; *Kari* – Work/ Embroidery – The definition of a *Phulkari* is “a traditional floral embroidery done on *shawls* and *dupattas* made of a particular kind of cotton called *khaddar*”. However, a *Phulkari* is so much more than just a kind of embroidery. It is a craft, a legacy, a bond, sustenance, and a tool that tells multiple stories of resilience, beauty, and pride. When one hears the word ‘*Phulkari*’, the mind immediately associates it with the culture of Punjab, and rightly so.

Some historians claim that *Phulkaris* have been created in the region since the 15th century, and that it was first mentioned in the literary work of the famous poet Waris Shah, Heer Ranjha. However, earlier works such as the 7th century *Harishcharitra* mention a similar kind of floral embroidery, this proving that *Phulkari* may have been done earlier as well. Some even claim that the earliest specimens of *Phulkari*, which are now located in Dera Baba Nanak, were in fact, made by Bebe Nanaki herself! Despite the

varying and contradicting accounts, one cannot disregard the historical value of this rich embroidery.

There is no doubt that *Phulkaris* are an integral part of Punjab's rich embroidery traditions, both in skill and aesthetics. The intricate floral patterns of a *Phulkari* are further elevated by vibrant silk threads or pat that stand out on the plain *khaddar* cotton base. Yet, what makes a *Phulkari* even more remarkable is the meaning it holds –





both due to its functionality and its symbolism. There are multiple kinds of *Phulkaris*, each used for a specific purpose.

For example, the *Sainchi Phulkari* is one where scenes from daily life, and animal and plant motifs are depicted along with the traditional flower motifs. These often acted as mediums of information or trends as they depicted the life in the village as well as any change in the rural landscape such as the arrival of the railways. A *Thirma* is made on cream or white *khaddar* with shades of pink and red threads to signify purity.

These are generally worn by older women or widows in traditional settings, but can be worn by others too. The *Darshan Dwar Phulkari* is a unique one as it is traditionally made for a sacred space instead of a person. Literally translating into the 'door through which we see God', it was made as an offering for temples and gurudwaras. A Bagh is a *Phulkari* where the cloth is completely embroidered and none of the *khaddar* shows from below.

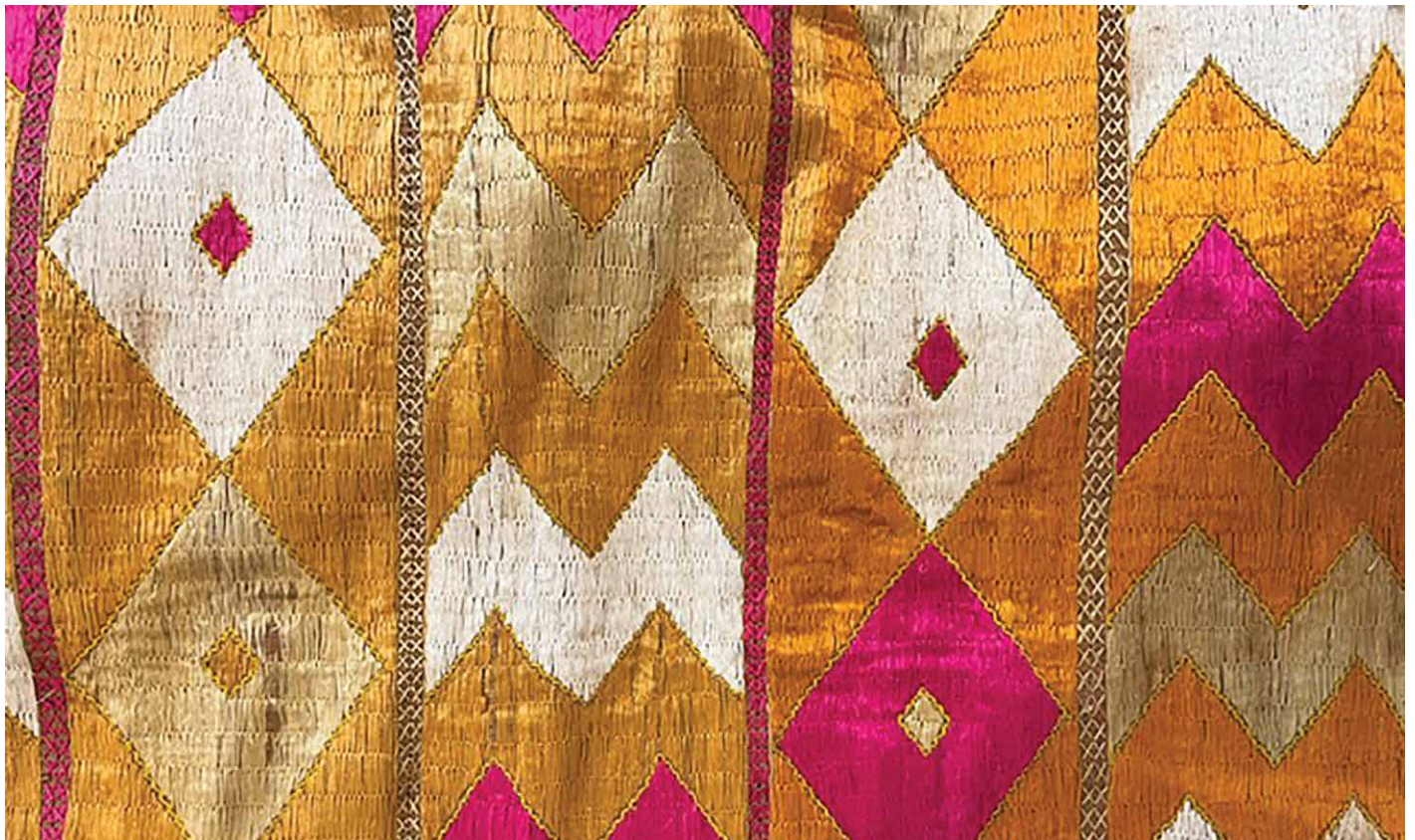
There are various kinds of Baghs, each having distinct designs and motifs. For instance, a *Vari-da-Bagh* is a kind of Bagh that is traditionally gifted to the bride by her in-laws when she enters her new house. This piece of embroidered cloth symbolises the bride's new position in the household and her role in being responsible for its well-being. While the use of a *Phulkari* holds meaning, it is the hands that craft it—and the emotions woven into every stitch—that truly define its identity.

Traditionally, *Phulkaris* were made by the women of a household, with work starting on most pieces with the birth of a girl child (In the case of *Vari-da-Bagh*, the grandmother starts it on the birth of her grandson). From the eldest member down to little girls, the entire household was involved in embroidering pieces of *khaddar* with pat.

As girls grew up, the pieces of cloth were put together to make a complete shawl or dupatta. All this was done in order to create a *Phulkari* that would be gifted to a daughter of the household on her wedding day.

This *Phulkari* contained not only the skills of generations of women, but each thread, each stitch, and each minute that went into making it held within it the blessings of the entire household. The establishment of colonial rule in Punjab led to the commercialisation of this traditional art. What once was contained within the courtyard or veda of a Punjabi household, now got the impetus to create for the wider market. This trend is said to have been catapulted partially by the necessity to gift British officials embroidered textiles such as *Phulkari* shawls and scarves. Soon, the *Phulkari* made its way out and never looked back. The embroidery started making an appearance in modern and westernised adaptations such as coats and dresses (An example of such a piece can be found at the Partition Museum in Amritsar, India).

However, the demand and manufacture of embroidered items also saw a dip during certain periods such as with the rise of industrialisation when textiles





started being made with machines at a large scale. This reduced the demand of handmade items such as the *Phulkari*. Craftspeople experienced a similar fate during the devastating Partition of 1947 when lives were completely uprooted, which resulted in a break in the market for *Phulkaris*.

Yet, there were instances where this very humble *Phulkari* became the beacon of light for many households. Left penniless and helpless, many Punjabi women started creating embroidered pieces within their makeshift homes to bring in some money. This contribution helped quite a few people stand up on their feet again after the Partition.

Over 75 years later, the quintessential *Phulkari* has taken on many other forms – embroidered on trendy denim jackets, crafted into the desi potli (bags), adorning the walls of many homes, and so on. While many may label this modern mechanisation of the *Phulkari* a travesty to the craftsperson and art itself, one cannot

deny the fact how it has opened up *Phulkari* to the world and made it more accessible to those who may not be able to afford handmade versions, but would still like to be able to own a part of their heritage, one that could fade away faster if not for this adaptation. And this is so because a *Phulkari*'s link to its people, and in particular women, is one that would take much more to break. A link that begins at the birth of a woman, is embroidered through her childhood, draped around her when she gets engaged, shades her as she walks down the wedding aisle, is laid at her feet during her Anand Karaj and makes its way to her new home as part of her precious heritage-rich trousseau.

On a recent visit to Tarn Taran, I had the privilege of engaging with local women who warmly shared insights into the region's rich traditions, especially the art of *Phulkari*. During our conversation, one of them recited a heartfelt poem about it—an evocative piece that has remained etched in my memory ever since.

*“Phulkari di har phul ne aurat de har padhaan nu pesh kita hai. Je chhote chhote phul ne, oh chhote chhote bachian nu pesh kita hai. Te jede khile hue phul haan, oh aurat de allan puren nu pesh karde haan. Ehi jo phul jadd mahin hunde jaande haan, te vade hunde jande haan, oh jimidariyan da bojh banda jaanda hai. Jiddan jidaan phulan vich bareeki aundi jaande hai, aurat di soch te samajhdaari oh jede haan oh duniya de rubaroo auni shuroo ho jandi hai. Phulkari aurat te janam te ude maran te udi chit te aurat da gehna hai. Har jiyundi aurat da suhag jeda hai soohe rang de vich pesh hunda hai. Ohh sooha rang kida hai? Phulkari da. Phulkari da sooha rang kithon aaya? Aurat de us khoon ton jide naal oh apniyan naslaan seench de hai. Jide naal oh aaun vali duniya nu is navi duniya vich aun da moka dendī hai. Phulkari aurat de us sehej te suhird roop nu pesh kardī hai jeda aurat apne shabdaan naal kade nai kar paondi.”*







ਫੁਲਕਾਰੀਆਂ ਦੇ ਹਰ ਫੁੱਲ ਨੇ ਔਰਤ ਦੇ ਹਰ ਪੜਾਅ ਨੂੰ ਪੇਸ਼ ਕੀਤਾ ਹੈ। ਜੇ ਛੋਟੇ ਛੋਟੇ ਫੁੱਲ ਨੇ, ਉਹ ਛੋਟੇ ਛੋਟੇ ਬੱਚਿਆਂ ਨੂੰ ਪੇਸ਼ ਕਰਦੇ ਹਨ। ਤੇ ਜੇ ਖਿੜੇ ਹੋਏ ਫੁੱਲ ਹਨ, ਉਹ ਔਰਤ ਦੇ ਅਲਾ ਪੂਰਨ ਨੂੰ ਪੇਸ਼ ਕਰਦੇ ਹਨ। ਇਹੀ ਜੇ ਫੁੱਲ ਜਦ ਮਹਿਨ ਹੁੰਦੇ ਜਾਂਦੇ ਹਨ, ਤੇ ਵੱਡੇ ਹੁੰਦੇ ਜਾਂਦੇ ਹਨ, ਉਹ ਜ਼ਿੰਮੇਦਾਰੀਆਂ ਦਾ ਬੋਝ ਬਣਦਾ ਜਾਂਦਾ ਹੈ। ਜਿਵੇਂ ਜਿਵੇਂ ਫੁੱਲਾਂ ਵਿੱਚ ਬਰੀਕੀ ਆਉਂਦੀ ਜਾਂਦੀ ਹੈ, ਔਰਤ ਦੀ ਸੋਚ ਤੇ ਸਮਝਦਾਰੀ ਜੇ ਹੋ ਉਹ ਦੁਨੀਆ ਦੇ ਰੂਬਰੂ ਆਉਣੀ ਸ਼ੁਰੂ ਹੋ ਜਾਂਦੀ ਹੈ।

ਫੁਲਕਾਰੀ ਔਰਤ ਦੇ ਜਨਮ, ਉਸ ਦੀ ਮੌਤ, ਤੇ ਉਸ ਦੀ ਚਿੱਤ 'ਤੇ, ਔਰਤ ਦਾ ਗਹਿਣਾ ਹੈ। ਹਰ ਜੀਉਂਦੀ ਔਰਤ ਦਾ ਸੁਹਾਗ ਜੇ ਹੈ, ਸੁੱਹੇ ਰੰਗ ਵਿੱਚ ਪੇਸ਼ ਹੁੰਦਾ ਹੈ। ਉਹ ਸੁੱਹਾ ਰੰਗ ਕਵਿੰ ਦਾ ਹੈ? ਫੁਲਕਾਰੀ ਦਾ। ਫੁਲਕਾਰੀ ਦਾ ਸੁੱਹਾ ਰੰਗ ਕਿੱਥੋਂ ਆਇਆ? ਔਰਤ ਦੇ ਉਸ ਖੂਨ ਤੋਂ, ਜਿਸ ਨਾਲ ਉਹ ਆਪਣੀਆਂ ਨਸਲਾਂ ਸੋਚਦੀ ਹੈ। ਜਿਸ ਨਾਲ ਉਹ ਆਉਣ ਵਾਲੀ ਦੁਨੀਆ ਨੂੰ ਇਸ ਨਵੀਂ ਦੁਨੀਆ ਵਿੱਚ ਆਉਣ ਦਾ ਮੌਕਾ ਦਿੰਦੀ ਹੈ।

ਫੁਲਕਾਰੀ ਔਰਤ ਦੇ ਉਸ ਸਹਿਜ ਤੇ ਸੁਹਿਰਦ ਰੂਪ ਨੂੰ ਪੇਸ਼ ਕਰਦੀ ਹੈ ਜੋ ਔਰਤ ਆਪਣੇ ਸ਼ਬਦਾਂ ਨਾਲ ਕਦੇ ਨਹੀਂ ਕਰ ਸਕਦੀ।

“Each and every flower in the *Phulkari* is a representation of the each stage of a woman's life. The smaller flowers represent a woman as a small girl, while the flowers that have bloomed, symbolise a woman's maturity. When these very flowers get more detailed and grow with time, it is in parallel with the increase in responsibilities that a woman is made to bear.

As and when the flowers get more intricate, the thoughts and feelings of a woman are revealed to the world. *Phulkari* is a jewel that adorns a woman at the time of her birth, her death and her funeral pyre. The colour of every woman's marital status is represented in the colour red. But where does this red come from? It comes from a *Phulkari*. Where does the red in a *Phulkari* come from? It comes from a woman's blood, the very blood she uses to water her kin. The very blood she uses to birth the future into the present world. *Phulkari* is a symbol of a woman's that special patience and sincerity, something she is not able to put into words”.

A 'young heritage professional', Nanki works to create awareness of and preserve our national and global heritage. She has been exposed to the workings of numerous heritage institutions & monuments in Europe, Egypt, as well as at the Partition Museum in Amritsar and INTACH.





# The Poet Speaks

## Dr. Ishmeet Kaur Chaudhry

Interviewed by Artika Aurora Bakshi

### Motivation

*As we talk of our woes  
our elders share stories of our Gurus  
their worthwhile lives*

*Sacrifices*

*Challenges*

*Resistances*

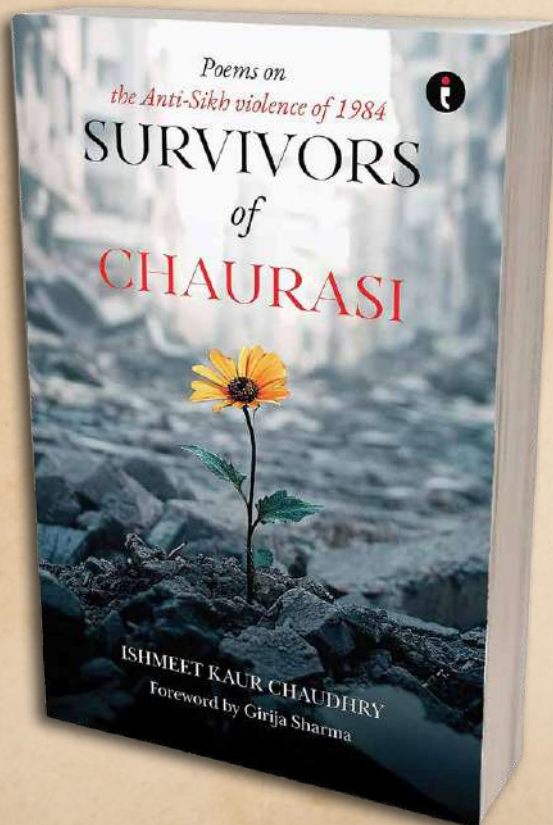
*Movements...*

*We rise*

*ready to face all challenges  
head towards Karkardooma courts*

*or Patiala House courts*

*where piles and piles of our affidavits—tales of Chaurasi—lie  
we hope for justice ... in Chardikala ... maybe someday  
Our dead won't return though...*



In the first issue of 2025, we featured *The Kaurs of 1984: The Untold, Unheard Stories of Sikh Women* by Sanam Sutirath Wazir—an essential work reclaiming the voices of Sikh women whose lives were forever altered by the violence of that year.

Justice remains elusive, but memory endures.

The events of 1984—the build-up, the pogroms, and the long shadow they continue to cast—still evoke deep pain and unanswered questions. In the face of silence, erasure, and institutional amnesia, writers and poets from Punjab and the diaspora have taken it upon themselves to document, remember, and resist. Their words refuse to let the past be buried.

Dr. Ishmeet Kaur Chaudhry is one such voice. An academic, poet, and author, her work on Sikhism, the 1984 anti-Sikh violence, and Sikh cultural memory has been both courageous and consequential. Her latest offering, *The Survivors of Chaurasi and Other Poems*, is a poignant collection of fifteen poems rooted in the violence and aftermath of 1984. Through spare yet searing verse, she gives voice to those often left unnamed—widows, children, and survivors navigating a world that refuses to acknowledge their grief.

Poetry born of trauma does not fade with time. Ishmeet, who was a young child in the relative



safety of Shimla during the riots, grew up with questions. Over the years, her understanding of the magnitude of 1984 deepened. She became increasingly drawn to the silences that surrounded it—to what was left unsaid, what was not recorded, and how the repercussions of that violence are still felt across generations.

### **What inspired this collection of poetry?**

I have been working on 1984 for many years, and Chaurasi has always been a part of my poetry collections. These poems were written at different times. Sometimes, while researching the subject, one comes across a painful read, or while talking to the eyewitnesses, or even reading a memoir. Every time, it touched my heart and would linger on in my mind, and as a result, a poem was born. Publishing this book, particularly the poems, and that too on the 1984 anti-Sikh violence, once again, was not without challenges.

The desire to get the poems out was strong. The poems have been there, but somehow, lost in different spaces and platforms. So, I decided to put them together in one place and give them the visibility they deserve. There was no choice but to self-publish it, with one such publisher. Finally the book, once out, was received very warmly and is doing extremely well. This outreach of the book is very motivating. I do think about moving to other subjects, but I keep coming back to 1984. Maybe, I am holding a certain kind of trauma, a childhood trauma, which does not find recovery. And it finds expression only in writing. I discussed this with my former teacher and PhD Supervisor, Prof. Girija Sharma, Prof. of English and former Dean of Academics, HPU, Shimla, and requested her to write a foreword, for which she readily agreed. Prof. Sharma is a fellow traveller on the same journey, somebody who stands with you, and holds your hand wherever required. Likewise, Dr. Charanjit Kaur, a respected and senior academic, and a dear friend, Principal (ret'd) from SMT. CHM College, Ulhasnagar, read these poems with me and offered valuable feedback. She has written the afterword. I will always cherish their contribution to the cause.

### **Is constant revisiting of traumatic events delaying healing, and creating more dissent?**

I don't think so. I think it's rather mending the relationship, because the divide is already there. The divide has been widened by different narratives, which are political and propagandist in nature than actually addressing the truth. By that I mean the experiences of the innocent. By talking about what happened, more people, who were not even vaguely connected with 1984 are now aware. They want to know more and understand. I have done a lot of talks on 1984 in circles where I thought that nobody would be bothered. I was amazed to see the kind of response that I got for those talks and how people came forward to talk about it. Even when we talk to people in places that had not experienced the Partition of 1947, or had little to do with 1984, being in the south or far east, the interest in the stories of people is quite encouraging. The idea of such

talks is to create awareness, and help people understand history, even if they are far removed from it. Very recently, in Shimla, we organised a session on Chaurasi. There was a young student, who came and said that the only thing he knew about 1984 was that Indira Gandhi was assassinated by her Sikh security guards. When he read the poems, he looked up all he could find online, realising that there was much more than met the eye. He had not heard about the violence or the plight of the survivors. I could see his sensitivity and empathy. Hence, I feel that all the material, poetic, fictional, or nonfictional, only helps in bringing people together rather than creating a divide.

### **Justice has not been served, but on a general level, what has been done, and what more can be done?**

One does see a certain kind of indifference within the community too. The community does not want to talk about 1984. People want to ignore and move on. Someone once asked why did we keep talking about the violence of 1984, when these constant reminders are like self-inflicted violence on yourself. Why do we go back to 1984 again and again? The bodies that are politically connected also don't talk about it for reasons we all know well. The survivors were looked at as charitable cases, and after the initial assistance, forgotten. There has not been any rehabilitation or trauma management assistance. When I talk of survivors I talk about the ordinary people, who lived peacefully, have always been proud of the country, and had nothing to do with the political agendas of any party, committee, or organisation. They were brutally killed and abused because of the turbans they wore, and the articles of Sikhism that they proudly carried. These are the people whom we as a community have failed. The government too didn't care. My poems focus on these forgotten people, the women, the children, the aged, who to date, suffer because of what happened. Did they deserve this? Were they participants in anything? Why did they have to go through this? Did the community take responsibility for what was happening to them? In a way, those who could help these survivors turned them into grounds for charity. We, as a community, known for our selfless service, failed to empower our people.

Hopefully, as more and more people read these poems and the stories, more can be done for those who need help, and maybe history won't repeat itself.

### **How do we move forward?**

When we deal with traumatic issues, it's also very important to talk about hope. The last poem in the collection, Wish, is my way of saying that hope is always there where there is suffering. Where there is darkness, there is also light. Hope is a companion of despair or trauma. The poem encapsulates our Punjabi culture, which always looks at hope and celebration. I hope for a Rangla Punjab, one that celebrates Baisakhi and Lohri, one with bright turbans and colourful phulkaris. Much has happened, and people have forgotten to celebrate. There was so much pain, even now, given that conflict continues to disturb Punjab in

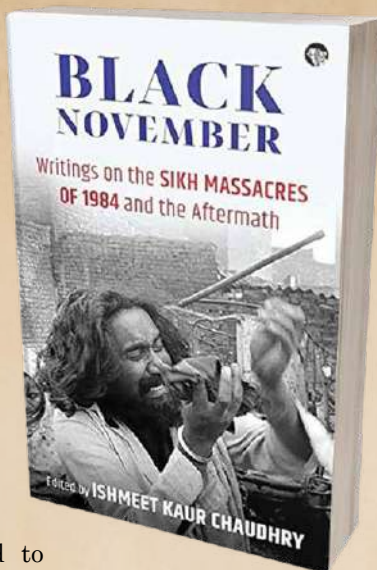


some way or the other. These issues need to be addressed, but let us hope for a better future, where tradition and modernity exist side by side.

Many times, people have asked me how the community, which has endured so much, from the times of the Mughals, to 1947, to 1984, keeps rising?

As mentioned in my poems, many times, we have been subjected to ridicule, yet we never give up. My answer to that has always been the concept of Chardi Kala. It is not entirely about religion. We carry our cultural history with us, making sure that while we worship, we also stand for the truth, even when everything else goes against us.

That's Chardi Kala, always rising and ever-optimistic.



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# The Sikh Grandparents

A Poem by Dr. Ishmeet Kaur Chaudhry

White starched turban crisp as Lay's potato chips  
decorated the head of Sardarji whom we lovingly called Papaji

Grandmother placed a vessel on the earthen stove—a Sunday ritual  
preparing starch boiling rice water or flour dipping the turban in it and let it stay

Two people were needed to spread it on a rope to dry it  
Once dried I waited to bring it down

The turban would stick to itself I would tear it open the crisp  
*kach kach* sound and the playful pulling it apart has its own pleasure

Badi Mummy, my grandmother, would inspect the starch to see if it was  
patchy or evenly distributed then fold it and put it aside

The days of starched turbans are gone so have starchy Sundays  
Gone are Papaji and Badi Mummy

Many turbans were burnt mercilessly... not while starching them  
but in Chaurasi

What remains is the memory of the Sunday ritual  
and the crisp *kach kach* sound in some corner of our hearts

---

*Dr. Ishmeet Kaur Chaudhry is an educationist, author, and poet. She teaches at the Centre for English Studies at Central University of Gujarat. She was recognised as an Inspired Teacher for The President of India's In-residence Program at Rashtrapati Bhawan, New Delhi in June 2015.*



# **Sustained by the Timeless**

## **The Khalsa Panth within Sikhi**







ਤਿਸੁ ਵਿਚਿ ਧਰਤੀ ਥਾਪਿ ਰਖੀ ਧਰਮ ਸਾਲ ॥

In the midst of these, He established the earth as a home for *Dharma*.

*Sri Guru Granth Sahib [Ang 7]*

It was in the 15th Century at the banks of the *Kali Bein* in Punjab that a Mystic once disappeared; thought to be consumed by the waves. For three days the villagers searched, for three days they found nothing. The “*Janamsakhis*” or retellings of life narrate that the Mystic emerged through the river unscathed and mesmerized, as if in a trance. Gazing upon the fields and the bulging crowd gathering before him, he uttered but one phrase.

“No one a Hindu, No one a Muslim. There is but one God”.

Stunned by the unexplainable streak of miracles that followed, the masses listened close; guided by his teachings; “*Sikhya*” the morning dawn itself becoming the first of his students. Thus, starting the chain of events that would lead to birth of a new way, a separate “*Panth*”. These new teachings, heretical to the orthodox of old gained traction; with those living by it earning a new name: “*Nanakpanth*”, today better known as “*Sikhism*”.

The core philosophy of the Sikh faith emerged in the heyday of the *Bhakti* movement that had marked its course through the heart of India. A disavowed rejection of rigidity in the faiths lead to focus being placed upon the divine and its experience itself rather than rituals of appeasement and other sacraments. Sikhism, established on the words and actions of ten successive Gurus who chalked out its principles established a new path towards salvation in its “purest” interpretation. A complete renunciation of any form of extremity. No more would the thirsty and hungry have to wander forests, traverse mountains, cross barren deserts, living life in an attempt to mimic the perfect, abandoning sons and daughters but rather feel their creator through the absolution that was living one’s own life.

ਬਰਤ ਨੇਮ ਸੰਜਮ ਮਹਿ ਰਹਤਾ ਤਿਨ ਕਾ ਆਢੁ ਨ ਪਾਇਆ ॥

Fasting, daily rituals, and austere self-discipline – those who keep the practice of these, are rewarded with less than a shell.



ਆਗੈ ਚਲਣੁ ਅਉਰੁ ਹੈ ਭਾਈ ਊਹਾ ਕਾਮਿ ਨ  
ਆਇਆ ॥੧॥

Hereafter, the way is different, O Siblings of Destiny. There, these things are of no use at all. ||1||

*Sri Guru Granth Sahib [Ang 216]*

These new scriptures were not to be distant wisdom uttered by the privileged bound to be esoteric but rather taught, preached and sung in a language the masses spoke. Wisdom was mandated to be shared as an extension to preserving the instinctual needs of mankind. Man need not give up life as a whole if he is to attain salvation but rather submit to the will of the Almighty known through “*Gurbani*” as divine command, “*Hukum*”.

ਰਾਮ ਰਹਿਮ ਪੁਰਾਨ ਕੁਰਾਨ ਅਨੇਕ ਕਹੈ ਮਤ ਏਕ  
ਨ ਮਾਨਯੋ ॥

*Ram & Rahim, The Puran & Qur'an* talk about you in different ways but I agree with none.

ਸਿੰਮ੍ਰਿਤਿ ਸਾਸਤਰ ਬੇਦ ਸਭੈ ਬਹੁ ਭੇਦ ਕਹੈ ਹਮ  
ਏਕ ਨ ਜਾਨਯੋ ॥

The *Simritis*, *Shastras* and *Vedas* describe several mysteries of yours, but I do not agree with any of them. *Chaubis Avtaar*, Sri Dasam Granth Sahib.

The Vedas, Puranas, veneration of Deities & the sayings of Prophets had been rejected in absolute alongside a denial to the idealistic aversion to “*Maya*” itself. This world as we know it was indeed understood to have been an act of God therefore the question arose now was thus:

Why reject the creation of God in absolute instead of aiming to preserve its sanctity?

At the heart of Sikhi, one finds two crossed swords. The sword of Miri, Temporal Authority over the realm of life interlocked with Piri, the sword of Spiritual Authority. Primarily, the philosophy delegates man to lead a life on an ever-sharp delicate balance of “*Miri-Piri*” and being free to hold,

understand and execute authority of the Temporal alongside Spiritual affairs of this world. To not shy away from the harsh realities of nature but rather to embrace and mould it unto the path of righteousness. Where action informed or arising out of the spiritual heart completes one's purpose and meaning in the world of action: The pursuit of the Eternal Truth.

This idealization of the supposed correction of the corrupt and sinful towards justice, freedom and tolerance went through the meat grinder of history; adapting to the times. This “idealization” itself manifested in what the Panth today regards as its Dharma. Before we can gaze at the journey of societal revolution, we must first understand the principles of Dharma within the faith.

#### **Dharma as was inherited**

The first Sikh prayer of the day, Japji Sahib ends with an emphasis on an assumed entity known as “*Dharamraj*”.

ਚੰਗਿਆਈਆ ਬੁਰਿਆਈਆ ਵਾਰੈ ਧਰਮੁ  
ਹਦੂਰਿ ॥

Good deeds and bad deeds—the record is read out in the Presence of the Lord of *Dharma*.

ਕਰਮੀ ਆਪੇ ਆਪਣੀ ਕੇ ਨੇੜੈ ਕੇ ਦੂਰਿ ॥

According to their own actions, some are drawn closer, and some are driven farther away.

*Sri Guru Granth Sahib [Ang 8]*

Contemporary Sikh thought establishes that Dharamraj is not a deity that sits in an actual court but rather should be seen as an allegory for God himself. The all-knowing aspect of the Almighty is invoked as being the rightful judge of the deeds of mankind. Herein, the conscious and subconscious minds are referred to as the famous scribes of legend, “*Chitr*” and “*Gupt*” which note and detail all urges that were felt and which ones were given into. A detailed account of deeds undertaken. Thus, *Dharma* is tangible and ever present. Therefore, *Dharma* has consequences, it is not

to be relegated to a metaphysical concept understood through one's trivial feelings of comfort, discomfort, approval and disapproval but rather something tangible, a duty imposed upon those willing or unwilling in this world play called life.

ਧਰਮ ਰਾਇ ਨੇ ਹੁਕਮੁ ਹੈ ਬਹਿ ਸਚਾ ਧਰਮੁ  
ਬੀਚਾਰਿ ॥

The Righteous Judge of *Dharma*, by the order of God's Command, sits and administers True Justice.

*Sri Guru Granth Sahib [Ang 38]*







The path forged by Sikhism considers *Karma* to be intrinsic to the journey towards “*Mukti*” and thus is referred to heavily in scripture. The notion of Justice itself being a derivative result of divine intervention in the universe that goes beyond man made courtrooms. To each his own, with words, actions and deeds undone:

**ਕਰਮ ਧਰਤੀ ਸਰੀਰੁ ਜੁਗ ਅੰਤਰਿ ਜੇ ਬੇਵੈ ਸੇ ਖਾਤਿ ॥**

The body is the field of *karma* in this age; whatever you plant, you shall harvest.

*Sri Guru Granth Sahib [Ang 78]*

*Gurdwara Kartarpur Sahib, situated in Pakistan’s Narowal district near the India–Pakistan border, is among the holiest sites in Sikhism. It marks the sacred place where Guru Nanak Dev Ji, the first Sikh Guru, spent his final 18 years spreading the message of equality, peace, and humanity. The beautifully built shrine stands as a powerful symbol of faith and harmony. The Kartarpur Corridor allows pilgrims from India to visit the Gurdwara without a visa, promoting cross-border peace.*



### Of words uttered in silence

To be tallied among the ranks of Saints is no easy feat, the herculean task of not just defeating but conquering your vices is one that breaks even the most learned of men. “*Gyan-Kharag*” can be directly translated as “*The Sword of Wisdom*” and thus is an interpretation of the sword of “*Piri*” bestowed upon Mankind to wield authority in the realm of spirituality. Within traditionalist Sikh circles, *Gyan-Kharag* is what symbolized the “Guru-ship” of the Sikh Masters. The insight of knowing exactly what to do and how, often depicted as being handed down to the next Guru is uniquely enough not held as being exclusive to the blessed.

**ਗਿਆਨ ਖੜਗੁ ਲੈ ਮਨ ਸਉ ਲੂਝੈ ਮਨਸਾ ਮਨਹਿ ਸਮਾਈ ਹੇ ॥੩॥**

Taking up the sword of spiritual wisdom, she struggles with her mind, and hope and desire are smoothed over in her mind. ||3||

*Sri Guru Granth Sahib [Ang 1022]*

All is attainable if only man would reach out and try. The Sword being obtained through penance and service, wielded not by mastery of recitation but rather understanding and actions.

*Gyan Kharag* as a concept is also extended beyond the peace of sacred spaces, to the roar of courage calling injustice out to its face whenever and wherever encountered. To use the power of wisdom to correct suffering in this world through words alone

**ਪਾਪ ਕੀ ਜੰਵ ਲੈ ਕਾਬਲਹੁ ਧਾਇਆ ਜੇਰੀ ਮੰਗੈ ਦਾਨੁ ਵੇ ਲਾਲੇ ॥**

Bringing the marriage party of sin, Babar has invaded from Kabul, demanding our land as his wedding gift, *O Lalo*.

**ਸਰਮੁ ਧਰਮੁ ਦੁਇ ਛਪਿ ਖਲੋਏ ਕੂੜੁ ਫਿਰੈ ਪਰਧਾਨੁ ਵੇ ਲਾਲੇ ॥**

Modesty and righteousness both have vanished, and falsehood struts around like a leader, *O Lalo*

**ਕਾਜੀਆ ਬਾਮਣਾ ਕੀ ਗਲ ਥਕੀ ਅਗਦੁ ਪੜੈ ਸੈਤਾਨੁ ਵੇ ਲਾਲੇ ॥**

The Qazi and the Brahmin have lost their roles, as Satan now conducts the marriage rites, *O Lalo*

*Sri Guru Granth Sahib [Ang 722]*

To chastise a marauding emperor simply because it was the right thing to do. That is what *Gyan Kharag* truly symbolizes.

### Of a Nectar churned with might

**ਚੌਂ ਕਾਰ ਅਜ ਹਮ ਚਿਲਤ ਦਰਗ਼ਤ**

Lawful is the flash of steel

**ਦਲਾਲਤ ਬਰਦਨ ਭੈ ਸ਼ਮਸ਼ੀਰਿ ਦਸਤ**

When all methods to obtain peace have failed.

*Verse 22, Zafarnama Patshahi Dasvi*

It was on Baisakhi in 1699 when an entire populace declared eternal war against all tyrants. The 10th Master of the Sikhs, Guru Gobind Rai





At the heart of Sikhi, one finds two crossed swords. The sword of *Miri*, Temporal Authority over the realm of life interlocked with *Piri*, the sword of Spiritual Authority. Primarily, the philosophy delegates man to lead a life on an ever-sharp delicate balance of “*Miri-Piri*” and being free to hold, understand and execute authority of the Temporal alongside Spiritual affairs of this world. To not shy away from the harsh realities of nature but rather to embrace and mould it unto the path of righteousness. Where action informed or arising out of the spiritual heart completes one’s purpose and meaning in the world of action: The pursuit of the Eternal Truth.

revealed the birth of the “Khalsa”. A new tradition that would be re-born through wrought iron. The first five initiates if the legends are to be believed, were decapitated. Accounts narrate that The Guru walked out of a tent, brandishing a blade asking for volunteers to quench its thirst. After a panic among the crowd, one man stood up and offered his head. Once inside the tent, those outside heard a loud blow as blood splashed out and the Guru re-emerged with a now bloody visage. He asked for more heads and as the accounts narrate, four more men did follow.

After the bloody spectacle had ended, all five of the volunteers emerged alive and dressed in the blue robes of the Khalsa, having partaken the nectar prepared by the Guru who would then undergo initiation by their hands. Once the day had ended, the present crowd had transformed. No more were they peasants, water

carriers, merchants, farmers or workers but rather warriors. Each man walked out with a new name, “Singh”, a lion with a dagger strapped to his side and an eternal oath on his tongue.

The militarization of the Sikh faith had drastically altered how its followers understood their place in this world. The house of Nanak had been through brushes with fighting for justice but this time it was different. It was to be more direct. It was revolutionary.

ਜਉ ਤਉ ਪ੍ਰੇਮ ਖੇਲਣ ਕਾ ਚਾਉ ॥

If you desire to play this game of love with Me,

ਸਿਰੁ ਧਰਿ ਤਲੀ ਗਲੀ ਮੇਰੀ ਆਉ ॥

Then step onto My Path with your head in hand.

*Sri Guru Granth Sahib [Ang 1412]*

### The Creed of Wrought Iron

What followed was an era remembered today as the “Age of Heroes”. Conquest, Genocide, Justice, Revenge and Imperial Ambition are all hallmarks of 18th through 19th Centuries in Punjab. The trampling Abdalis at *Khyber* from Afghanistan, Sly Mughal governors in Sirhind struggling to hold onto whatever crumbling power they had left, The endless stream of the victorious Marathas crashing at the banks of the Sutlej as a storm of steel roared across *Majha* in the north are all intrinsic to understanding the historic application of what the Khalsa today considers as its *Dharma*. That moulding the world towards divinity through prayer is vital yes but so is smiting the wicked when needed.

ਅਸਿ ਕ੍ਰਿਪਾਨ ਖੰਡੇ ਖੜਗ; ਤੁਪਕ ਤਬਰ ਅਰੁ ਤੀਰ ॥

The Sabre, The Straight Sword, The Broad Sword; The Gun, The Axe and the Arrow



Photo credit: Pushpindar Singh

*Khalsa Panth holds a central place in Sikhism as the collective body of initiated Sikhs, founded by Guru Gobind Singh in 1699. It represents a community committed to living by the values of courage, equality, and devotion to God. Kartarpur Sahib is one of Sikhism's holiest sites and is located just across the India-Pakistan border. The Kartarpur Corridor, opened recently, allows pilgrims from India to visit, reinforcing the enduring bond of the Khalsa Panth and the timeless teachings of the Sikh Gurus.*

ਸੈਫ ਸਰੋਹੀ ਸੈਰਬੀ; ਯਹੈ ਹਮਾਰੈ ਪੀਰ ॥੩॥

The Scimitar, The Curved Sword, The Spear, these are our Saints.

*Dasam Granth [Ang 717]*

The creed of wrought iron, translates to “*Sarbloh*”, the iron once used to create weapons of war, worshipped by the Khalsa as a manifestation of the destructive capacity of God. The 10th master, Guru Gobind Singh described weaponry as not being for bloodthirst but rather as instruments for protecting the innocent & upholding righteousness. Countless instances including the tale of revered Bhai Kanhaiya indicate that waging “war” must not always end in death but rather a transformation. From the accursed to blessed.

The verses of Sri Gur Panth Prakash are a first-hand account of the journey and life of the Khalsa completed in 1841 by Rattan Singh, a soldier among the ranks of Maharaja Ranjit Singh's armies. The text provides a historical window into the mind-set of some of the most recognized names in Sikh history.

ਕਹੈ ਦਗਿਓਂ ਹਮ ਕਿਮ ਟਰੈਂ ਦੰਗੇ ਹਮਰੀ ਜਾਤ ।

And he declared, “How can we shy away from war? For war is our creed”

ਦੰਗੇ ਖਾਤਰ ਹਮ ਕੀਏ ਸ੍ਰੀ ਸਤਿਗੁਰ ਜੀ ਆਪ  
॥੧੦॥

“For war were we established by you”  
*Sakhi 84, Sri Gur Panth Prakash*

The most consistent theme among the lives of all those mentioned is an obsession with waging war against the unjust and establishing righteousness unto this world. The eternal duty of a devout Khalsa, “*Dharmayudh*” an obsession that re-emerged and thus united the faith most recently during The Indian Freedom Struggle. To call out injustice when it happens as the Akali's once did through the 1910s–1920s. And to smite evil through an offering of blood, as did Kartar Singh Sarabha and the Gadhar Party in 1915 who's



sacrifices would go on to inspire the likes of Bhagat Singh and the HSRA.

Thus, summarising in the shortest way possible, The Sikh understanding of Dharma is two-fold:

1. How to live your own life as perceived by Guru Nanak in the Three Pillars
  - I. ਨਾਮ ਜਪੇ: To chant the name of God.
  - II. ਕਿਰਤ ਕਰੇ: To work hard and make an honest living.
  - III. ਵੰਡ ਛਕੇ: To share and partake with those who need.
2. The Khalsai Rehat as established by Guru Gobind Singh; to live as a Saint-Soldier and thus mould the world in accordance with Dharma and bring upon it Justice in its purest form.

### ਰਹਿਣੀ ਰਹੈ ਸੇਈ ਸਿਖ ਮੇਰਾ ॥

It is the disciplined I consider as my Sikhs

### ਉਹ ਠਾਕੁਰ ਮੈ ਉਸ ਕਾ ਚੇਰਾ ॥

For they are my lords and I their humble servant.

*Amrit Kirtan Rehat Nama, Pg. 1014*

### Monuments to purpose

"Sri Akal Takht, the Immortal Throne is the only institution of its kind in the world, which has been influencing the course of the history and life of a community that is essentially non-violent, yet so self-respecting, most secular but deeply religious, dedicated to self-sacrifice, yet pledged to self-preservation too."

*Dr. H. S. Dilgeer*

It was during the Age of Heroes when the young faith managed to gain not just a foothold but birth an empire. The *Sarkar-E-Khalsa* as it was known ruled Punjab for half a century. In the most poetic of coincidences, Ranjit Singh united the Sikh Confederacy exactly 100 years after The Khalsa's inception at Anandpur Sahib. In the peace that followed, the Sikhs would not only construct but expand and restore all

that had been offered to the great fire amid the furnace of history. The Golden Temple as seen today was built atop the ruins left by Ahmed Shah Durrani's great massacre and defilement in 1757.

From the ashes arose the Akal Takht, the exact spot where some of the earliest Sikhs had taken up arms in insurrection after the Mughal Emperor Jahangir had executed the 5th Sikh Guru on false grounds.

**ਅਕਾਲ ਤਖਤ - ਅਮਰ ਅਕਾਲੀ ਕਾ ਮੁੱਖ ਮੰਦਰ,  
ਜਿਸ ਪ੍ਰਸਾਦਿ ਪੰਥ ਦਾ ਪ੍ਰਧਾਨ ਅਖਾੜਾ  
ਜਰੂਰੀ ਹੈ।**

*Akal Takht* – The principal throne of the immortal Akalis, at whose mercy the principal congregation of the Sikh Panth is mandated.

**ਅਕਾਲ ਤਖਤ - ਅਮਰ ਅਕਾਲੀ ਕਾ ਰਾਜ  
ਸਿੰਘਾਸਨ।**

*Akal Takht* – The sovereign throne of the immortal Akalis.

*Vol. 1 Mahankosh, "Panth-Rattan"  
Bhai Kahn Singh Nabha*

Historically, the building has been home to Sikh leaders appointed through "*Sarbat Khalsa*", A democratic process through which the initiated gather and make decisions regarding the Temporal Affairs of the world through "*Gurmattas*". The architecture of the entire complex is steeped in symbolism. Built at a 22° angle, the *Takht* is designed in a manner that when one stands the Inner Sanctum is prominently visible through most if not all angles. However, the inverse is not true.

The Immortal Throne gazes' outwards unto the plains of northern India. The halls echo with the deeds of those who understood what was whispered to all, "Let the pious know, it is their duty to protect the world and Dharma

And let the protectors know, it is their *dharma* to safeguard and ensure Justice for all". For a moment, harken back to the first line of scripture mentioned on the cover, "The mythological bull of *Dharma* is the son of Compassion".

The full verse is as follows:

**ਧੋਲੁ ਧਰਮੁ ਦਇਆ ਕਾ ਪੁਤੁ ॥**

The mythological bull of *Dharma* is the son of Compassion.

**ਸੰਤੋਖੁ ਥਾਪਿ ਰਖਿਆ ਜਿਨਿ ਸੁਤਿ ॥**

This is what patiently holds the earth in its place.

*Sri Guru Granth Sahib [Ang 3]*

It is *Dharma* that holds the world in its place indeed but where does this great anchor come from? What is it that lays its foundation? Guides the hands of those that implement it?

Through compassion of course. Not only that, to even enter the shrine one must climb down to what is allegedly the lowest point in the city. A silent proclamation that divinity resides not among the highest of heavens but rather among the lowest of the low. To forsake ego and step down towards humility. The walls reverberate as the prayers of hundreds synchronize in perfect unison, voices of those who chant the name of God.

The system in place is sustained entirely by volunteers and their donations, sweaty brows of those who yearn to work hard and make an honest living. The Guru Ram Das langar hall feeds millions still, all by the hands of those who share and partake with those who need. So long the Panth exists, the vow of *Dharma* it established shall never end, so long the Nishan flies high still, there will be those who live for compassion, so long compassion exists, it shall birth *Dharma*. May the world forever be held in its place.

**ਗੁਰਮੁਖਿ ਵੈਰ ਵਿਰੋਧ ਗਵਾਵੈ ॥**

The *Gurmukh* eliminates hate and envy.

*Sri Guru Granth Sahib [Ang 3]*

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*Kuvamjeet Singh is a University Student [Law] with a deep passion for history and theology, writing on the enduring dialogue between faith, law, and geopolitics in shaping human destiny. He can be contacted at kuvamjeets@gmail.com*



# BOOK REVIEW: Music in Colonial Punjab

**Courtesans, Bards, and Connoisseurs, 1800–1947, Dr. Radha Kapuria**

**Reviewed by Ganeev Kaur Dhillon**

“Whereas other regions like Rajasthan, UP, Bengal and Maharashtra lay claim to equally vibrant folk traditions, they are simultaneously seen to possess highly visible traditions of classical music. It is Punjab alone, of all the major Indian regions, that is seen as possessing a primarily folk culture.”

In *Music in Colonial Punjab*, Dr. Radha Kapuria takes the period from 1800–1947, and looks at:

- (i) the role of music at Ranjit Singh’s court,
- (ii) the Mirasi community and their engagement with the colonialists,
- (iii) the effect of colonial rule on middle-class moralities, and
- (iv) the role of the princely states in patronising music in Punjab.

Dr. Kapuria wonderfully brings together conventional history and oral sources, and draws out how much of

the colonial encounter revolved around gender and caste. A striking point that I noticed was what seems to have been the ubiquity of *Hafiz* being sung in Punjab!—understandable when you realise that Persian was a widely-learned language and music was ever-present. So, we have Bashiran, who was a favourite of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, and whose forte was singing ghazals from the *Diwan of Hafez*; and a mention





of hearing Hafez's *Taza ba Taza* being sung at the Golden Temple in 1889.

The book addresses a number of western biases in looking at Punjabi history and the many ways in which we have ingrained that colonial viewpoint into how we practice religion and culture today. Many of the practices today that are taken as the norm and considered to be "traditional" were creations of colonial politics and morality. The book deals with the role and position of courtesans in Punjab in quite a lot of detail, and how their position changed over the years. These courtesans were often connoisseurs of classical music and repositories of knowledge. Dr. Kapuria points out how contemporary Indian chronicles do not reflect any moral opprobrium against Ranjit Singh for having married courtesans, while European accounts do. Similarly, a publication from the late 19th century is astounded to note that dancing-girls in Punjab "enjoy public favour", and "greater attention and respect are shown to them than to married ladies". But as Punjab's middle-class gets anglicised, and the religious reform movements gain ground, the courtesans are marginalised and outlawed.

The mirasi community was also traditionally well-versed in classical music, and Dr. Kapuria draws out the complexity of their relationship with the colonial state. The British held them in disdain as a lower caste, but at the same time, depended on the mirasis for the colonial work of collecting and formalizing "knowledge" of Punjab's tales, proverbs and songs. While many books were written based on the traditional repertoire of the mirasis, none of the (largely) male, British authors named their sources, invisibilizing the knowledge and importance of the mirasis.

Indian music and its relationship to Indians were matters of "bewilderment" for the early Westerners. Dr. Kapuria shares an instance where the trance-like state induced by music on a Punjabi man in a congregation is a cause for astonishment for the British missionary, who would have lived his life according to very restrained Victorian attitudes.

The Punjabi middle-class enthusiastically engaged with the colonial experiment of "Indian in blood

and colour, but English in tastes, in opinions, in morals." This had far-ranging effects on society, and the book looks at the effect on music. She questions the ways in which Pt. Vishnu Digamber Paluskar's 'cleansed' and 'reformed' Indian music, the manner in which English-educated middle-class nationalist elites in Punjab interacted with music, and the impact this had on the lives of musicians and dancers.

She draws out how even as music became respectable and an art encouraged to be practiced by the daughters of the house, musicians, dancers and uninhibited expressions of joy came to be looked down upon – the Punjabis adopted Victorian mores and habits. The words of traditional sithniyan that parodied kin, and marriage songs that could be bawdy, were converted into songs of moral stricture, but sung to the original melody.

Lastly, the book considers the development of music in the princely states of Patiala and Kapurthala, the rulers of both states through the decades continuing their patronage until 1947. Following the extremely violent British suppression of the 1857 uprising, both princely states became home to a number of artistes who fled the horrors of Delhi. The legendary singer Tanras Khan of Delhi settled in Patiala, while Mir Nasir Khan, the leading binkar at the Delhi court, was said to have been saved from execution by the personal intervention of Kanwar Bikramjit Singh of Kapurthala.

Dr. Kapuria recognises the unique position of Patiala in embracing both



cosmopolitan (Hindustani ragadari) and devotional musical (Sikh Gurbani) traditions. On the other hand, she finds Kapurthala to have fostered a greater environment for dialogue with western music.

Dr. Kapuria touches upon a number of ideas, many as she says, requiring further in-depth research. One of the questions the book raises that struck a chord with me is this—despite having had a very vibrant classical music tradition, why is Punjab associated only with folk music today? Why and how was the memory of classical music lost? Who are the custodians and audiences of classical music over the decades? Punjab is considered as the centre of origin for many musical practices – it is possibly the place of origin for the tabla as well as the sarangi. Furthermore, being located on important migration routes, its vocal traditions also spread far and wide, "as evident in the influence of Patiala vocalists as far as Afghanistan."

Perhaps it is the cataclysm of 1947, she suggests, "that is responsible for the cultural amnesia", but new research is required to be done to establish the extent to which the Partition of Punjab shaped the assumptions of its musical traditions.

# Chalo Amritsar

## Samita Kaur

A group of environmentalists, individuals and NGOs had written to the Punjab Government on suggestions for the 450th year anniversary of the foundation of Shri Amritsar Sahib. A representation of the suggestions were sent to CM Punjab, PPCB Chairperson, DC Amritsar, MC Amritsar, Kultar Singh Sandhwan, Pargat Singh, Inderbir Singh Nijjar, Gurjit Aujla, President SGPC and Jathedar Akal Takht Sahib and others Punjab Government had asked for suggestions for the 450th foundation anniversary of Amritsar.

We've given the following suggestions:

1. Implementation of Single Use Plastic (SUP) Ban to make Amritsar Plastic Free.
2. To decommission Bhagtanwala Landfill so that there is a complete stoppage of even the tiniest spec of garbage. As it is only 1500 metres away from the Golden Temple. The sheen of the Golden temple is being lost due to toxic gases released from the Landfill. Bhagtanwala is right next to the *Dana Mandi* (grain market).

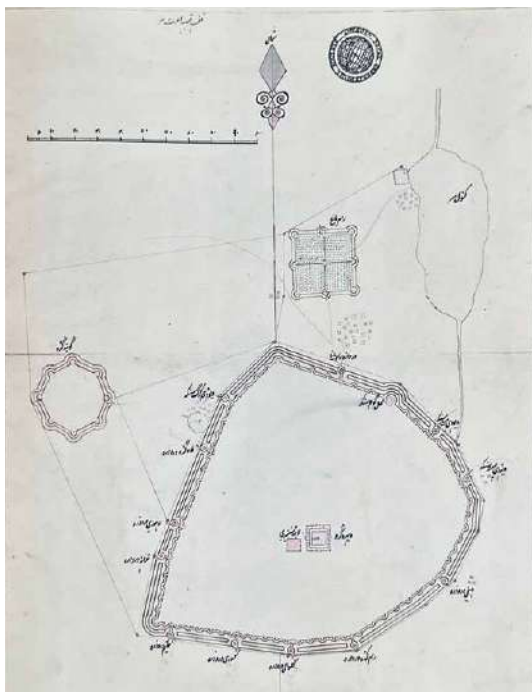
3. Planting of 450 *bagichas* (orchards) each *bagichas* comprising of 450 trees in the entire Amritsar district. These trees should be of native variety.

We must remember that when Guru Ram Dass ji founded this area, it had lakes and was full of lush green trees and forests. Everyone in Punjab reveres the Sikh Gurus and comes to pay obeisance at the Golden Temple irrespective of their religion. Just as merchants, traders, farmers, artisans etc. came together to create Amritsar in the guidance of Guru Ram Dass ji, time has come for us to make it the clean and beautiful *Guru Di Nagari*.

Interestingly women in large numbers are coming forward and forming a collective called *Chalo Amritsar* with a wish to bring Amritsar back to its glory, including our group of women, comprising of Indu Aurora, Samita Kaur, Dr. Navneet Bhullar, Swaranjit Kaur, Shweta Mehra, Simarpreet Sandhu, Ripanjot Bagga, Ritu Malhan and Manpreet Khaira. This can't be a coincidence that the first supporters were also Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce & Industry Ladies Organisation (FICCI FLO), Phulkari Amritsar, Neelam Ahluwalia from People for







Aravallis, Pingalwara all women led organisation. Looking back into history we see that Bibi Bhani ji daughter of Guru Amar Das ji had a major role in creation of Amritsar. When Akhbar donated land after seeing the langar sewa

of the Sikh Gurus treating everyone with respect, dignity, humility and equality. Emperor then offered the jagir as a wedding gift for Bibi Bhani. Bibi Bhani Ji got married to Bhai Jetha Ji, later known as Guru Ram Dass. Guru Amar Das deputed Bhai Jetha with the task of establishing a new Sikh center at a location that first was known as “Ramdasar”. Bibi Bhani donated the entire jagir for construction of Ramdaspur. Bibi Bhani Ji’s role in shaping Sikh history was significant. As the wife of Guru Ram Das, she played a pivotal part in expanding the town of Ramdaspur (later known as Amritsar). Women at helm of affairs whether it’s Reena Gupta, PPCB Chairperson, or Sakshi Sawhney DC Amritsar isn’t it a coincidence! History again has given a chance to women to work towards.

With a recent announcement of CM Baghwant Singh Mann regarding Old Walled City of Amritsar we are hopeful that the area around the 12 gates of Old Walled city of Amritsar are declared as Plastic Free Zone. Recently Ms. Reena Gupta, PPCB Chairperson also called upon 14 industries to look towards Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR to take back 70% of the plastic products sent un the market). Restoration of historical and holy city marked by 450 orchards.

All women team: Samita Kaur – Vatruxh Foundation, Dr. Navneet Bhullar– AGAPP, Indu Aurora– Voice of Amritsar, Ripanjot Kaur Bagga – educationist, Swaranjit Kaur – environmentalist, Ritu Malhan – The Green Thumb, Dr. Simarpreet Sandhu – OTT Transformative Trust, Manpreet Khaira and Shweta Mehra – Earthy Instincts.

Written by: Samita Kaur is an environmentalist founder of Vatruxh Foundation and We Support Our Farmers. Working on policy planning like Tree Protection Act for Punjab, Mattewara Forest Restoration, Solid Waste Management etc.

ਚੱਲੋ ਅੰਮ੍ਰਿਤਸਰ


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# Missing Kalgi of Guru Gobind Singh

New year of 1966 brought a precious gift for the Sikh community – return of the relics of Guru Gobind Singh taken from the *Toshakhana* of Maharaja Ranjit Singh in 1849 by Lord Dalhousie, then Governor-General of India. Return of the relics, through the efforts of the Government of India, then headed by a gentle Prime Minister, Lal Bahadur Shastri, was a milestone in recent Sikh history. Enthusiasm created by the news of return of the relics from the United Kingdom was so great that I travelled all the way from Patiala to Delhi, knowing fully well that the precious heritage was to be taken in procession to my city as well. Watching the arrival of Air India's special aeroplane – *Akash Doot* – at the Safdarjung airport was an experience which can't be described in finite words. The relics were reverently received by Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri and handed over to S.B. Ujjal Singh, then Governor of Panjab. For young enthusiasts like me, it was a moment of fulfilment and joy to watch the guard of honour being given to the relics by the Sikh regiment. After being taken in procession for *darshan* by devotees in different parts of the national capital and other important cities of Panjab, this precious heritage found a permanent home in *Takhat Kesgarh Sahib*, Anandpur, where Guru Gobind Singh created the order of the Khalsa.

While the community was glad to get back their precious heritage, there was disappointment that the precious *Kalgi* of Guru Gobind Singh was missing. There are clear proofs about the *Kalgi* and other relics preserved in the *Toshakhana* of Maharaja Ranjit Singh. As per account given in an *urzee* (petition) of Misar Megh Raj, In-charge of the *Toshakhana*, following items were presented to Maharaja Ranjit Singh by a *Sahibzada* (descendant of Guru Nanak) of Vairawal on 7th Chet, 1881 (1824 AD): *Dae-Ahinee*, *Neza*, *Chakar-i-Ahinee*, *Shamsheer Tegh*, *Kulgee-i-Kuch* (a crest of glass in a silver case), *Burchee*, *Burcha* (Mentioned in letter no. 236 from Maj. G.H. MacGregor to P. Malville Esquire, Secy. Board of Admn., Lahore. File Nos. 23-24/Foreign –C, NAI).

In the files of National Archives of India, I also found a handwritten note by Lord Dalhousie, Governor of India, saying, "It would not be politic to permit any Sikh institution to obtain possession either by way of gift (for the intrinsic value of them in insignificant) or by means of sales of these sacred and war like symbols of a war like faith" (Letter no. 2903 18th December 1858 in file no. 111-12, 27th December, 1850). In view of the intrinsic value of the *Kalgi*, Lord Dalhousie took personal interest in getting the item insured before its shipment to London. That the sacred *kalgi* of Guru Gobind Singh was present in the *Toshakhana* of Maharaja Ranjit Singh is also supported by the popular accounts which mention that after morning ablutions, the

Maharaja would take a *Waak* from the original *Adi Granth* Bir and reverently kissed the *kalgi* before proceeding on day's routine. Again, the fact of the *kalgi* being in the possession of descendants of Lord Dalhousie is proved beyond doubt from the correspondence between Col. W.H. Broun of the Dalhousie family and Cecil Smith of the South Kensington Museum, London, which clearly mentions about this precious relic being loaned to the Museum on 28th August 1918 for display in the Exhibition on Indian Jewels and Arms.

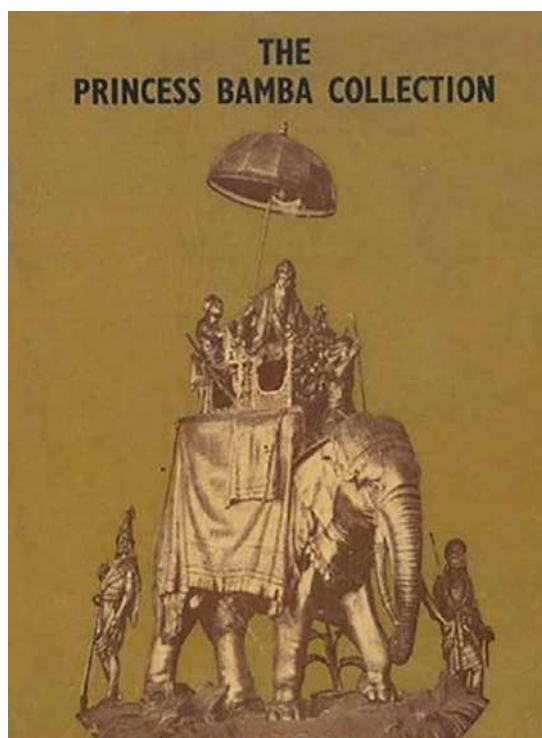
After the receipt of relics of Guru Gobind Singh in January 1966, no serious effort was made by the authorities to locate the missing *Kalgi*, until 1976, when Giani Zail Singh, Chief Minister of Punjab, constituted a high-level committee consisting of Dr. Ganda Singh, Prof. Harbans Singh, Prof. Pritam Singh, Giani Nahar Singh M.A. and Sardar Tarlochan Singh. Since I had spent some time on locating this plume while I was in England pursuing my doctoral research, I was also co-opted to the committee on my return. In the meeting held on 5th October, 1976, the committee seriously deliberated on ways and means of carrying on further research with a view to trace and bring back this important relic. To my surprise, the CM suggested that I should go to London to carry on further research and help in bringing back the *Kalgi*. As I had just returned after finishing my field work in UK and was keen to complete my doctoral thesis, I expressed my inability to accept the generous offer.



**Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri receiving the Relics and passing them over to Sardar Bahadur Ujjal Singh, Governor of Punjab.**



My interest in the *Kalgi* suddenly revived when the SGPC announced the 'arrival of the missing *Kalgi*' and its display in the *Akal Takhat* along with other relics through the efforts of S. Kamaljit Singh Boparai. As controversy erupted over the authenticity of *Kalgi*, SGPC formed a committee of scholars to go into the matter and come out with a report. While I expressed my inability to serve on the committee, my old teacher, Prof. Prithipal Singh Kapur, persuaded me to accept the responsibility and help the SGPC get out of impasse. When I reached for the meeting, I was surprised to find a number of TV channels and other non-members already sitting and discussing the issue. On my request, TV channels and non-members left the committee room to ensure serious and meaningful discussion and resolution of the issue.



#### MISCELLANEOUS

##### 81. HORSE TRAPPINGS OF MAHARAJA RANJIT SINGH

In three pieces (i) Sar Band; (ii) Seena Band and Dum Gazz (tail strap) covered with red velvet richly covered with gold decorations and studded with diamonds rubies, jaspers.

##### (i) Sar Band:

Set with 77 small and 6 medium size flowers, in plate gold, with eight petals, each petal studded with turquoise; a tika weight 10 tolas of gold with ten pendants of 100 kt. One *Kalgi* and two solid gold buckle – The Tika and *Kalgi* are richly studded with jewels.

##### (ii) Seena Band:

Total length 4'-11" with 35 small and 2 medium size flowers of plate gold weighing 20 tolas. Each flower has eight petals studded with 14 turquoise and a diamond; a medallion of 10 tolas of gold set with a large piece of turquoise and other small beads of stones.

##### (iii) Dum Gazz (Tail):

Total length 5'-6" with 64 small flowers of plate gold weight 32 tolas; two medium size and one big buckle of solid gold weighing 2 tolas and 10 tolas respectively; studded with jewels and precious and semi precious stones.

***Mention of the Kalgi in the Sarband trappings of Maharaja Ranjit Singh's famous horse Laili.***

As I had already done some spade work on the subject while in London and later in the National Archive of India, New Delhi, I posed a simple question to Mr. Boparai, as to how the *Kalgi* had travelled from Lord Dalhousie's descendants in England to Canada and was now with the daughter of Dr. Chanan Singh Chan, an antique dealer, of questionable credentials. Rather than offering any logical explanation, he replied that he got the *Kalgi* from the collection of Princess Bamba in Lahore. I told him that I had seen the Bamba collection in Lahore Fort Museum in May 2000. I showed him the original catalogue which clearly mentions

this as *Kalgi* of Horse of Maharaja Ranjit Singh with following description:

"*Sar Band*: set with 77 small and 6 medium size flowers, in plate gold, with eight petals, each petal studded with turquoise; a tika weight 10 tolas of gold with ten pendants of 100 kt. One *Kalgi* and two solid gold buckle – *The Tika* and *Kalgi* are richly studded with jewels".

After seeing the original catalogue and reading the description therein, Boparai and his colleague, S. Harpreet Singh Sidhu, found it difficult to defend themselves. Rather than continuing the dialogue, they abruptly left the meeting. The President of SGPC and other members were pleased that the dubious claims of Boparai and his team had been exposed. To ensure that the issue does not resurface, I requested the authorities to bring the '*Kalgi*' so that all members could see it for themselves. After being fully convinced, the '*fake Kalgi*' was sent to the *Maal-Khana*.

While there is a clear evidence of Guru Gobind Singh's *Kalgi* being despatched to London and given on loan by the Dalhousie family to the South Kensington Museum for display at an exhibition in London on 9th June, 1898, there is no evidence of it being either returned to the Dalhousie family or sold in auction. This is a riddle which remains unresolved.



***Relics of Guru Gobind Singh on display in Takhat Sri Kesgarh Sahib, Anandpur.***

*Mohinder Singh is Director, National Institute of Panjab Studies, Bhai Vir Singh Sahitya Sadan and Former Member, National Commission for Minority Educational Institutions, Govt. of India.*

# The Soul of Punjab

## In Conversation with Sunaini Guleria Sharma

Interviewed by Artika Aurora Bakshi



*From the resonant voice of Surinder Kaur, celebrated as the Nightingale of Punjab, to her daughter Dolly Guleria, and now her granddaughter Sunaini Guleria Sharma, the story of music in Punjab finds a living continuum in this family. Through wars, migrations, and cultural shifts, their voices have carried the essence of Punjab, its dard (pain), rang (colour), and rooh (soul). Surinder Kaur's pioneering journey broke boundaries for women singers in mid-20th-century India, giving Punjabi folk and Sufi poetry a luminous platform. Her daughter, Dolly Guleria, preserved that purity of sound and language, refusing to let commerce dilute culture. And now, her granddaughter, Sunaini Guleria Sharma, carries the same virasat (heritage) forward, as performer, educator, and ethnomusicologist, interpreting the philosophy and symbolism woven into Punjabi traditional lyrics and Sufiana kalam.*

*In this conversation with Artika Aurora Bakshi, Sunaini reflects on the legacy of her foremothers, the challenges and transformations across generations, and what it means to carry the rooh of Punjab in today's fragmented times.*





**Artika Aurora Bakshi (AAB):** *What's the legacy that you carry?*

**Sunaini Guleria Sharma (SGS):** So, when you say what is the legacy that you carry, I carry within me the soul of Punjab! Its earthy boli, the language, the rich poetry, the vibrant rang. When I say rang, colour, it's not just the colour of the phulkaris or the fashion, It's the colour of the soul, the colour of Punjab etched on our souls. It's generous food, the inclusive way of life, the rangla, hasda, wasda, nachda, and gonda Punjab. And this, of course, is a blessing to me by virtue of being born in the home of Dolly Guleria and my father, Sharanjeet Singh Guleria. My mother, Dolly Guleria, is the daughter of the legendary Nightingale of Punjab, Surinder Kaur, and the niece of the legendary singer, Prakash Kaur. My grandmother's family, Nanima's family, had ten children, five sons and five daughters. Out of the five sisters, three sang professionally, and one of them was also a songwriter. There are very interesting songs like Aaj likh sajna de paasey ve munshi khat likh de... That was written by another sister who never sang professionally, but was part of this gifted family.

Our guru, Ustad Abdul Rehman Khan of Patiala Gharana, teacher to my grandmother Surinder Kaur, and my mother, Dolly Guleria and me, taught us that music is not performance alone. It is sabar, shukar, sukoon. The power of healing is through music. That is the kind of music they lived, and the kind of music I have grown up with, music for the soul. The legacy flows from the verses of the virsa, from the universal truths of Guru Nanak's *shabads*, from Kabir's piercing *dohas*, and from Bulleh Shah's divine love songs. It also flows to me in Nanima's voice through the modern poets she sang, Shiv Kumar Batalvi's aching romance, Amrita Pritam's cries of longing, Dr. Harbhajan Singh's quiet, subtle wisdom among others from the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The legacy is both a duty of the heart, *dil da farz*, and a *zimmedaari*, a social responsibility to preserve Punjab's *dard*, *rang*, and *rooh* for generations to come.

**AAB:** *Anything that you remember that she said, a quote from her that became your guiding force, or your mother's guiding force?*

**SGS:** She was a very dynamic woman. The fact that she had only three daughters, the world would ask her, even her sisters would ask, if she longed for a son. She would say, "That is something beyond logic for me. My children are my children, there is no gender bias." For my grandparents to live that life, feeling complete and not bound by societal pressure, was remarkable. My grandmother travelled twenty-five days of the month, and my grandfather; a professor at Delhi University, HOD (Punjabi), Khalsa College, New Delhi, proudly raised his three girls, inculcated values and a fearless mature outlook to life. He was truly the spine of these women, the visionary. He used to recite *Faiz* and say... *maqām 'faiz' koī raah meñ jachā hī nahīñ jo kūr-e-yār se nikle to sūr-e-dār chale* Allama Iqbal who was his favourite, and



he always quoted him... *na tū zamīn ke liye hai na āsmān ke liye jahān hai tere liye tū nahīn jahān ke liye.*

He knew seven languages and often recited in Farsi, composed poems for Nanima and was the central concept creator during the jamming sessions at home. He always told us, "Spread your wings, the world is all yours." Had it not been his vision, the three daughters would not have grown up the way they did. For a man to respect his partner — who was constantly travelling and performing with male musicians, showed his strength. He trusted her completely. My grandmother was strong, dynamic, and commanding. People were in awe of her personality, I feel they were a bit scared of her as well! She carried that "no nonsense" aura.

My mother is the same! She learned horse riding, captained her cricket team, and was never told, "You're a girl, you can't do this." Interestingly, there's exactly a 20-year gap between the three of us. When Nanima turned 40 and my mother was 20, I was born. Nanima was born in 1929, my mother in 1949, and I in 1971. So the closeness was incredible. Being the

first grandchild, I lived most of my childhood with Darji and Nanima. Even my name was given by my grandfather. My mother's real name is Rupini, and her sisters Nandini, Pramodini, and I am Sunaini.

**AAB:** *You have talked about your father as well. Though we're talking about the musical legacy, he seems to have been a supportive presence, much like your grandfather.*

**SGS:** Absolutely. My father supported my mother through every important decision. I was born and raised in Delhi. I saw the 1984 riots. My father has served in the Indian Army and has been a dedicated patriot!

During that time, there were restrictions on who could enter the cantonment. Many of our ustads were Muslim, Ustad Abdul Rehman Khan, Ustad Iqbal Ahmed Khan. My father ensured their safety and I believe there was special permission requested for them to still come to our home for *riyaz* sessions. If he hadn't done that, perhaps my mother couldn't have continued her music training. His understanding and respect made it all possible.

**AAB:** *And now, your daughter is also an artist. Does this legacy continue naturally, or do children feel obligated to carry it forward?*

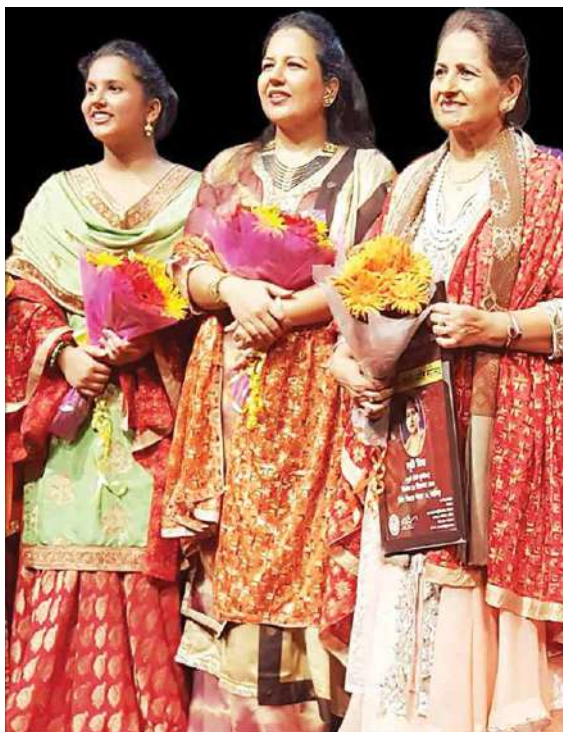
**SGS:** Well! Both my children surprised me. I thought they'd prefer the current trend of upbeat music especially the Punjabi music, the kind we hear today, but they told me they prefer older genres. They've heard Big Nani's songs, even the peppy numbers at weddings, but they are drawn to Shiv Kumar Batalvi's poetry and complex classical compositions. My daughter sings Adele and Usha Uthup; my son listens to soulful Sufi or Western

classical music, he's drawn to Vivaldi, and the beat of the timpani, and in the same breath, to ghazal music, Arijit, Javed Ali, and he listens to these in solitude, not by force. That comforts me. It means the love for soulful music flows naturally.

**AAB:** *How are the challenges faced then and now, different? What has changed?*

**SGS:** In my grandmother's time, singing itself was *taboo* for women. For a girl from a Gursikh family to go to a radio station and sing was revolutionary. For my mother, the challenge was to preserve the purity of folk music amidst 1980s commercialisation. The owner of a well-known music company once offered her two lakh rupees per song to remix and "modernise" her work. She refused, saying, "I cannot distort the lyrics." That stand ensured the legacy reached me untarnished. For me, the challenge is to remain visible and relevant, and to make people understand the philosophy behind lyrics. For instance, take the *Madhania* song sung at weddings. Why is the *Madhani* (butter churner) the only kitchen tool mentioned? Because it transforms milk, pure





and white, through a process into *lassi*, *makhan*, and finally ghee. It's a metaphor for the journey of a woman from innocence to spiritual maturity, the transformation to purity through experience. That's the Vedic essence hidden in our folk songs.

**AAB:** *What is the path you see yourself on in today's changed world?*

**SGS:** Ethnomusicology is how I identify myself now, studying and explaining the philosophy behind music. Performing comes naturally.



Talent can't be learned; it's inherited. The supportive men, the real men in our lives are our biggest blessing. My father also sings beautifully. His favourites are Talat Mehmood, Jagjit Singh, and Mukesh. My husband Dharminder too, has a keen ear for refined music. He's our biggest critic, which helps us grow. My daughter has learned music but hasn't gone out formally. She's academically driven and writes poetry. Once, in ninth grade, she wrote, "In the world there are seven billion people and fourteen billion faces." That line stunned me, it showed deep awareness and as parents we chose to encourage her since. I've never seen my mother participate in any kitty or fashion groups. She's always been simple and pure-hearted. That same simplicity has organically been passed to me and now to my daughter. She's not caught in the materialistic race.

**AAB:** *Talking about challenges, legacy, and your children, we see that you're deeply invested in explaining the meaning of songs. But how did we lose this understanding? How did we stop connecting with that essence?*

**SGS:** Punjab lost its depth when commerce began to overshadow culture. After Partition, which truly only Punjab and Bengal experienced, our hands were cut off, so to speak. We were left with pain and memory, but not the means to express it. My nanima used to say, "*rissdey zakhma te malham lgon da kam kerde ne lok geet*." Traditional music has an embalming, comforting effect on our mental wounds. She believed it was women's moral duty to heal society through tenderness. Her music was that balm. Her voice on the radio reached both sides of Punjab, Lahore and Amritsar, healing hearts divided by borders. Even today, young women tell me they listen to Nanima's songs like *paath*, as if listening to *Gurbani Sangeet*. It's spiritual.

**AAB:** *Was she saddened by the changing nature of music, the rise of commercial trends in the 80s and 90s?*

**SGS:** She would laugh and say, "In our times, we used to sit and sing and the audience would dance. Now the artist dances, and the audience just watches." She disliked lip-syncing and stage antics. She believed music must rise from within, from the abdomen, from the soul. She would say, "You are a vessel; your voice must rise from inside you." That's true *sadhna*, not just performance.

**AAB:** *Do you think Punjabi folk and Sufi music can be lost?*

**SGS:** Music never dies. The tragedy is that we haven't documented enough. We still rely on Western scholars to tell us our own stories. We need to write and archive our own *virasat*. Otherwise, we lose the thread. I'm currently working with twelve scholars across the world, because to study the essence of undivided Punjab, we must collaborate with voices from both sides. There's an urgent need for translation, transliteration, transcription, large-scale documentation. Unfortunately, what we see today are scattered efforts, mushroom groups seeking recognition rather than unity. We need one umbrella, one collective archive, so that fifty or a hundred years from now, anyone studying Punjab and *Punjabiyaat* can find it all at the click of a button, tracing the entire lineage of our shared cultural soul.

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Sunaini Guleria Sharma: Ethnomusicologist, performer, and educator, Sunaini Guleria Sharma carries forward the musical legacy of her grandmother, Surinder Kaur, the "Nightingale of Punjab", and her mother, Dolly Guleria. She works to preserve and reinterpret the folk and Sufi traditions of undivided Punjab, exploring their cultural, linguistic, and spiritual depth.

Instagram: @soulmusic.naini29



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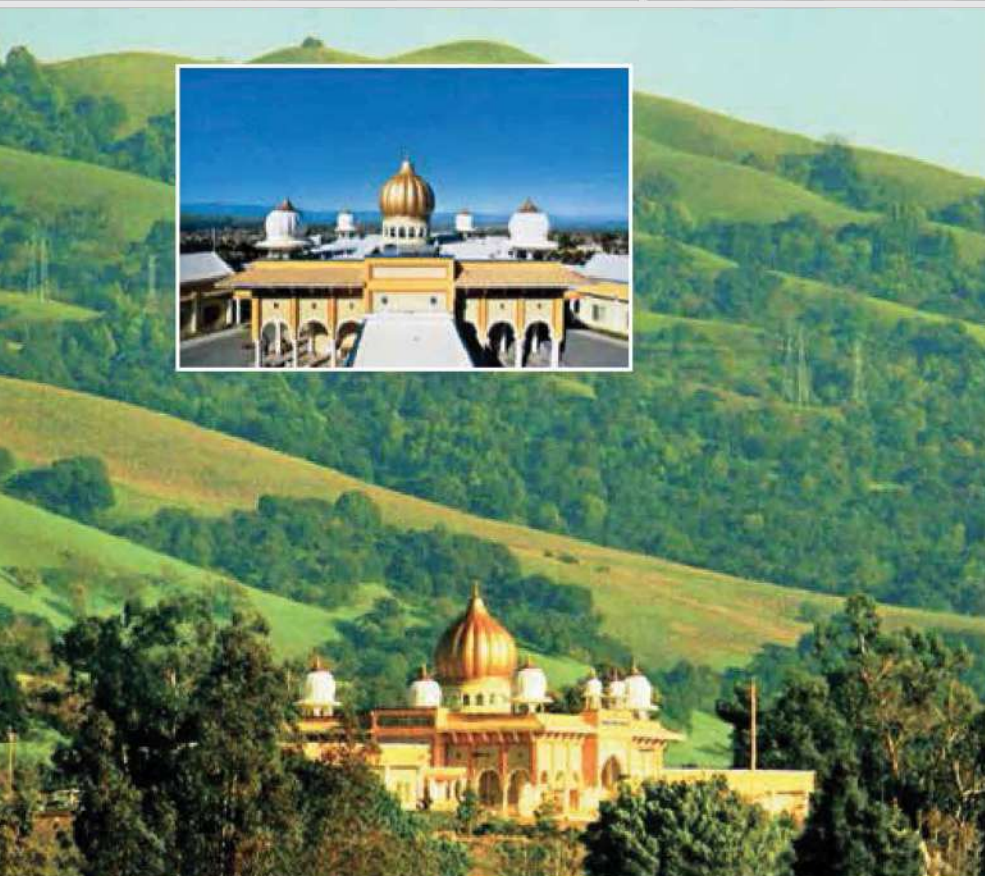
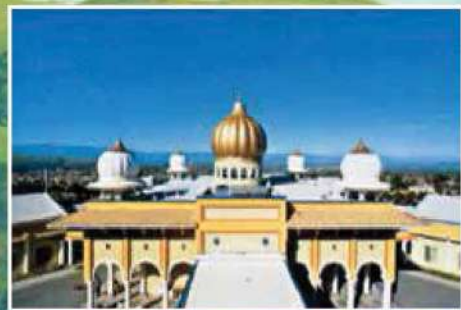
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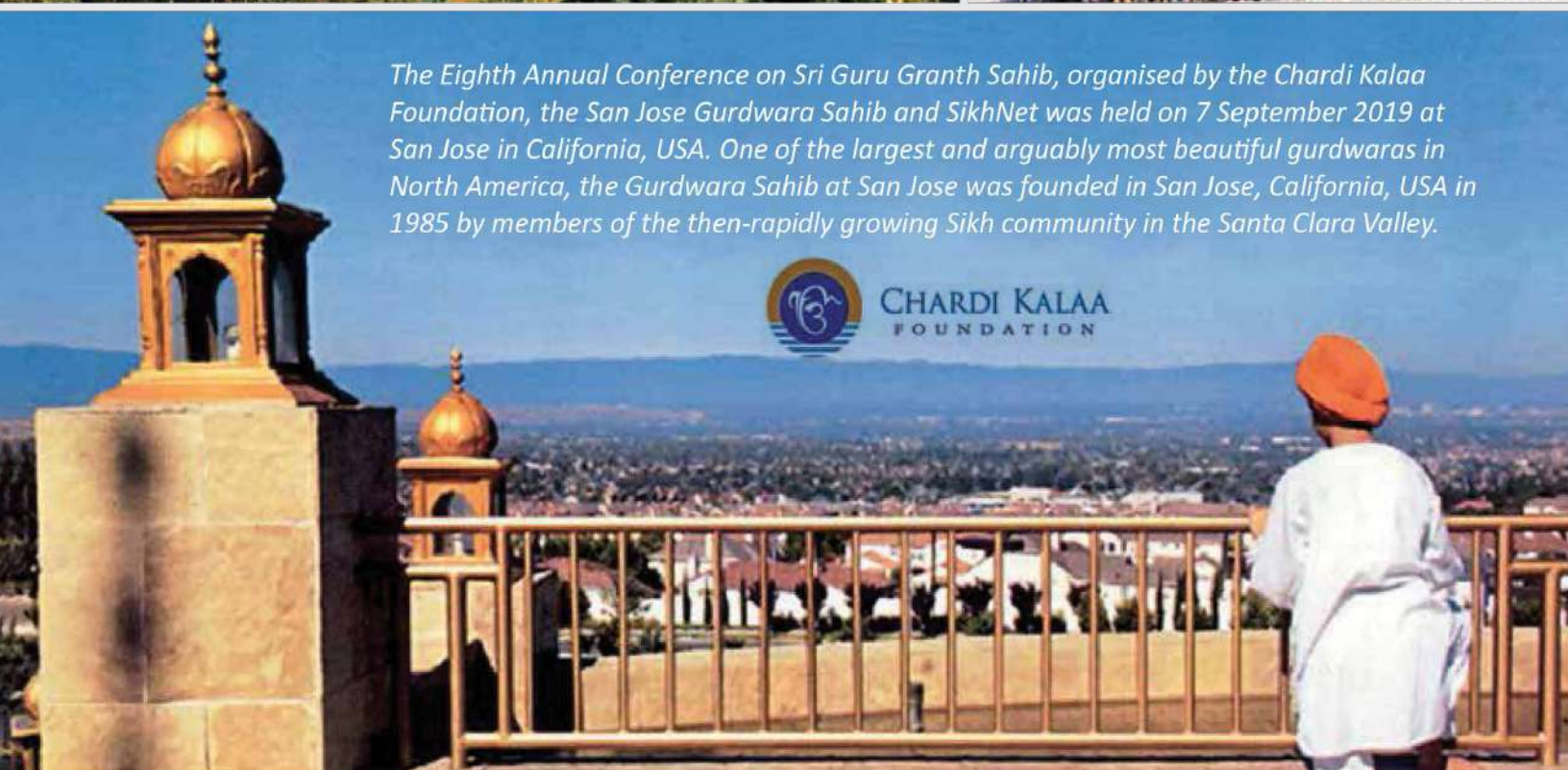




*The Eighth Annual Conference on Sri Guru Granth Sahib, organised by the Chardi Kalaa Foundation, the San Jose Gurdwara Sahib and SikhNet was held on 7 September 2019 at San Jose in California, USA. One of the largest and arguably most beautiful gurdwaras in North America, the Gurdwara Sahib at San Jose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



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