

ISSUE I / 2026

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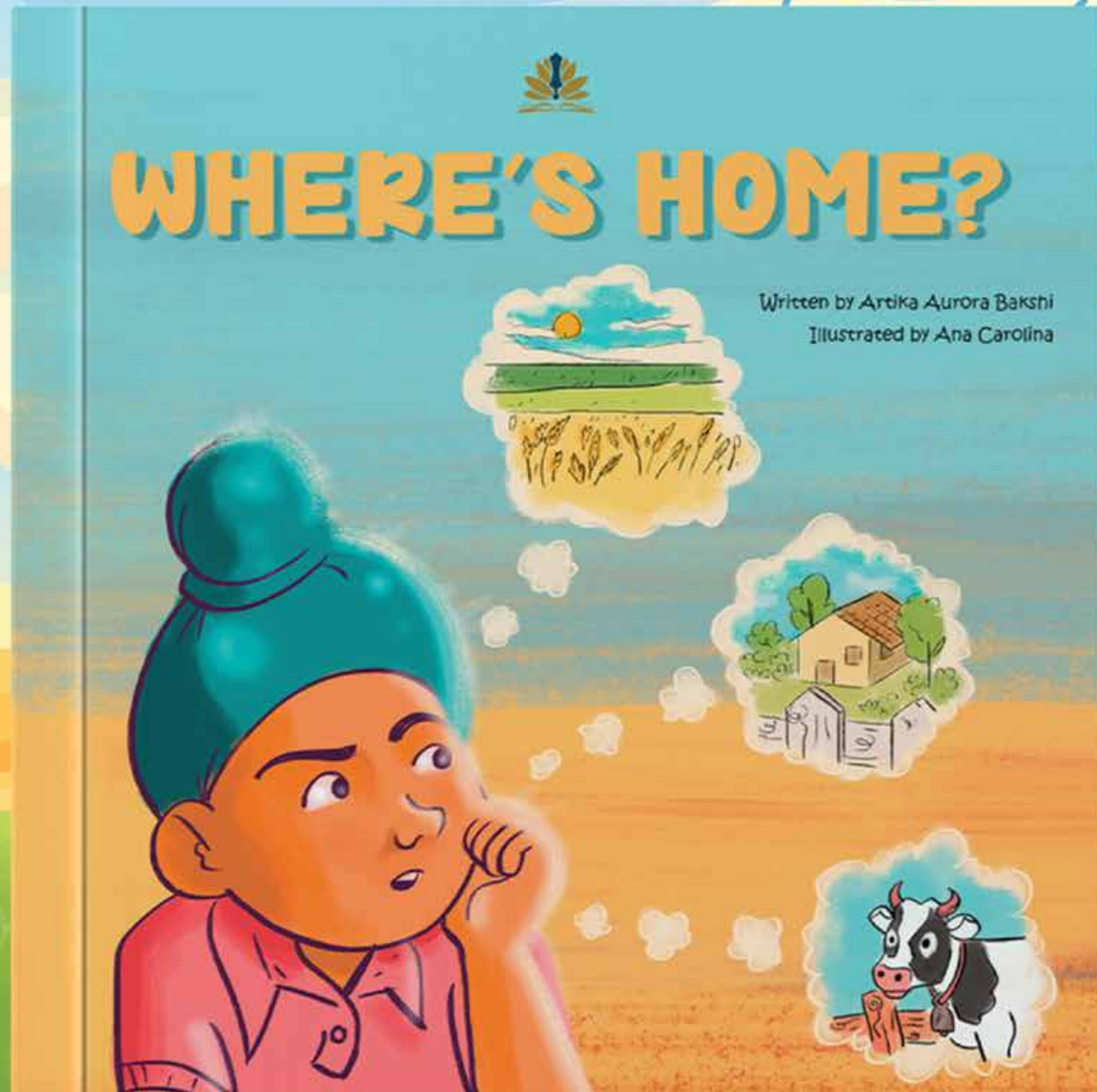


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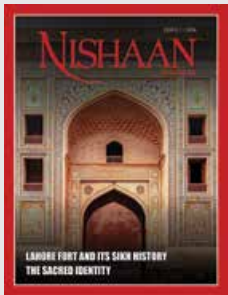
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CONTENTS

ISSUE I / 2026



Hathi Paur Darwaza
(Door of Elephant feet) at
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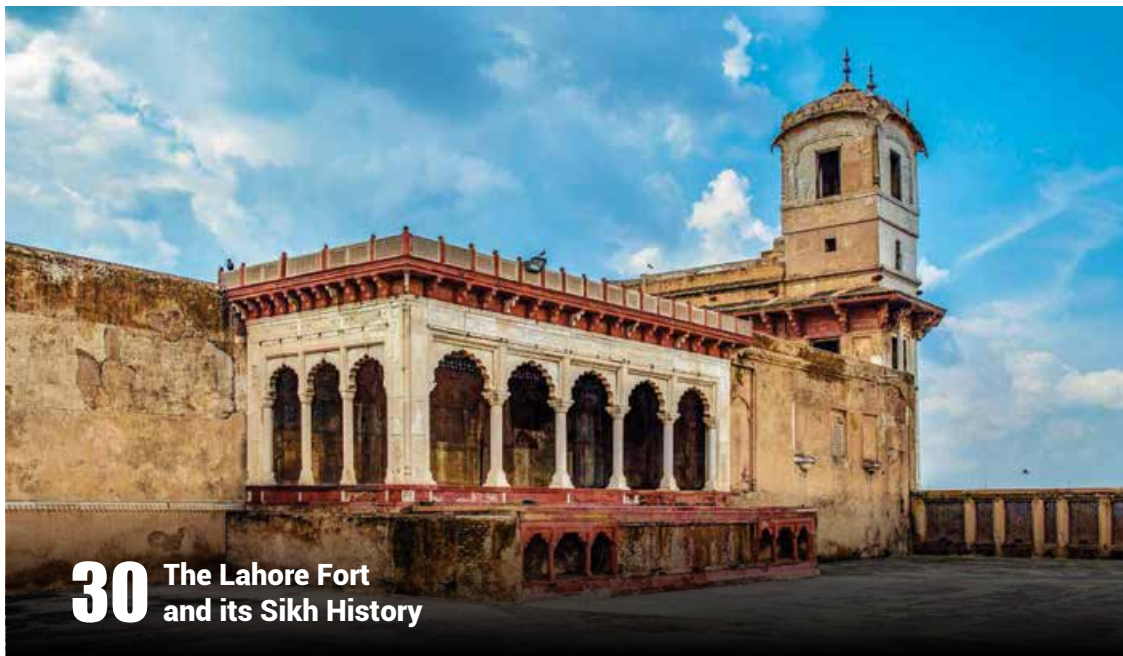
Editorial	3
Sands of Time – Dr. I.J. Singh	
Chardi Kalaa Always!	4
Dr. Inder Jit Singh Tribute by Roopinder Singh and Inni Kaur	8
The Wandering Mind – Bhupinder ‘Bo’ Singh	10
The Sacred Identity – Dr. Stuti Malhotra	15
Sardarji’s Taxi in Calcutta – Manjit Singh Chahal	18
Vaisakhi in Sikh Tradition – Devinder Pal Singh and Harbans Lal	26
The Lahore Fort and its Sikh History – Dr. Tarunjit Singh Butalia	30
Savage Partition – Nishaan Archives	46
Sehra – A Joyous Poetic Tradition – Nanki Kaur	56
The Art of Sovereignty: A Conversation on Guru Gobind Singh Sahib: Life, Vision & Wisdom	59
From the Fields to Stadiums: A Story of Field Hockey – Interviewed by Artika Aurora Bakshi	62
Akali Baba Phula Singh – Dr. Jasbir Singh Sarna	66
What the World Holds Gently – A poem by Inni Kaur	71



15 The Sacred Identity



46 Savage Partition



30 The Lahore Fort
and its Sikh History



56 Sehra – A Joyous
Poetic Tradition



EDITORIAL

Sands of Time

A cat, no matter how meticulous and finicky, or a dog, no matter how smart, never check their watch ten times a day — not even once in a lifetime. Birds migrate thousands of miles every year and have an incredibly precise sense of the changing of seasons, but nary a computer or clock to track how time flies. Early humans noted the passage of time by the play of day and night, as also by the changing pattern of sun, moon, and stars. Sundials date back 3500 years; sand-filled hourglasses existed over 1500 years ago.

Today we seem attached by our umbilical cords to chronographs and atomic clocks that capture fractions of a second. Only humans obsess about time, whether in seconds, minutes, and hours, years, or eternity; forget not fractions like milli, micro or nano seconds.

We all have watches inseparably attached to our wrists, but never seem to have enough time on our hands for all the chores that life demands. I am reminded of Hippocrates who reputedly advised us that: “Art is long, life is short, experiment uncertain, opportunity fleeting, and judgement difficult”. How true!

Cruel is the passage of time. So much to do, so little time, Remember that one must exhale before there is room to inhale. One must discover a little emptiness, create a little space before it can be filled. No one can live a single moment for someone else; this we must do for ourselves.

The best preparation for tomorrow is what we do today, just as what we did yesterday made today what it is. Keep in mind the words of Joseph Campbell who asks us to “let go of the life we have planned, in order to welcome the life that is waiting for us.”

We celebrate birthdays as markers of life that has no end? We ignore that each passing year — day, hour...moment — reminds us of time running out. “*Audh ghatyae dinus rainaray...*” (Guru Granth, p. 13). Commonsense affirms that only an unreal metaphoric life is eternal. Time marches on and runs out. Thus, mortality bestows challenge and quality to life.

If a life has no end, demands of quality can be deferred and choices pushed aside; in life without end there is no urgency to imperatives of meaning and value. In an eternal life there is no overwhelming hunger for meaning.

But there is a way to eternity that also addresses the purpose of life. Our past merges with the future through continuity of blood lines; community and, more importantly, through the work that we do, through issues and events that define us in this the societies that we create, causes for which we live and die. Matters that we value more than life itself. This is the way to progress and immortality.

Open any page of Sikh history an object lesson in such events and their lessons. In fact, since its inception, Sikhi has been a defining powerhouse in the cause of human development.

Is mine, then, a call to the future or is this a step back into the hoary past? Past, present and future are inexorably intertwined. I ask that we stand solidly in the present, rooted comfortably in the soil of the past, resolutely facing the future. That's how the past becomes prologue to the future. Forget not that the past is dead, the future yet unborn; the moment of the present is ours to shape and breathe life into our future. Says Dolly Parton, “If you want to see the rainbow, you gotta put up with the rain.” It is important in life to look ahead, also to look back.

I.J. SINGH

Editorial Director

Dr. IJ Singh

Founder Editor

Pushpinder Singh

Editorial Panel

Bhayee Sikandar Singh
Inder Mohan Singh
Ravinder Singh Taneja
Ganeev Kaur Dhillon
Artika Aurora Bakshi
Nanki Kaur

Postal Address

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India

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Email: nishaan.nagaara@gmail.com

Website: www.nishaannagaara.com

Facebook: @NishaanNagaara

Instagram: @nishaan_nagaara

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Chardi Kalaa Always!



Vaisakhi 2026 Celebrating Harvest, Happiness & Heritage

Millions of Sikhs and Punjabis across the world marked Vaisakhi 2026 with vibrant celebrations, religious devotion, and community gatherings, reaffirming the festival's strong connect more than three centuries after its origin.

Observed on April 13 or 14 each year, Vaisakhi is both a harvest festival and one of the most sacred dates in Sikh history. It commemorates the founding of the Khalsa

in 1699 by Guru Gobind Singh, an event that reshaped Sikh identity and established a collective commitment to equality, justice, and courage.

The historical roots of Vaisakhi lie in the agrarian rhythms of Punjab, where it marks the harvesting of rabi crops and the beginning of a new solar year. Over time, its meaning expanded profoundly within Sikhism. In 1699, Guru Gobind Singh initiated the Khalsa, an order of committed



Sikhs, during a time of persecution and political turmoil, giving the festival its spiritual and historical depth. The day also carries a solemn historical association with the 1919 Jallianwala Bagh massacre, adding a layer of remembrance to the otherwise celebratory occasion.

Across the global Sikh diaspora, gurdwaras hosted Nagar Kirtan processions, kirtan recitals, and langar services serving free meals to all, reflecting Sikh principles of

sewa and equality. In cities from London to Vancouver and Delhi, devotees gathered in colorful attire, performed martial arts displays known as gatka, and participated in turban-tying events and cultural exhibitions. The festival also fosters intergenerational bonding, with younger Sikhs learning heritage and values while communities strengthen social ties and charitable initiatives worldwide today as well.

Ranvir Singh Sachdeva: Youngest speaker at India AI Impact Summit



Eight-year-old Ranvir Sachdeva became the youngest keynote speaker at the 'India AI Impact Summit 2026.' He met Google CEO Sundar Pichai and OpenAI CEO Sam Altman and shared his vision for inclusive AI.

Ranvir Sachdeva is not new to the tech world. Before speaking at the India AI Impact Summit 2026, he has already spoken at international conferences, studied advanced machine learning concepts, and engaged with global AI communities. Some of his highlights include coding at the age of three, machine learning models and has delivered talks at international tech forums where he advocated combining Indian philosophy with artificial intelligence.

During his keynote address, his core ideas on AI included; AI must be accessible to everyone, not just experts, India can lead in building ethical AI systems with ancient Indian values guiding modern technology, AI should solve real-world problems for common people. His journey proves that a passion for artificial intelligence can begin at any age.

From Village roots to National Glory

Simrandeep Kaur from Birarhwal village in Nabha tehsil of Patiala district in Punjab cracked one of the country's toughest examinations, the Union Public Service Commission (UPSC), securing an impressive All-India Rank 15. Born into a humble farming family, Simrandeep's journey to becoming an Indian Administrative Service officer is a testament to determination, patience and unwavering belief. Simrandeep completed her post-graduation in Political Science from Khalsa College. It was in her fourth attempt that her years of hard work finally paid off, placing her among the top achievers in the country.

Speaking after her success, Simrandeep said she wants to remain deeply connected with her roots. *"Being a girl from a village, I understand the challenges faced by rural communities. I want to work for the development of villages and contribute towards improving the lives of people living there."*

Her father, Kuldeep Singh, a farmer, expressed immense pride and gratitude. Overwhelmed with emotion, he said the family will visit Sri Harmandir Sahib in Amritsar to offer prayers and thank God for this achievement. Simrandeep's success story is now being celebrated across the region, serving as a powerful reminder that talent and determination can flourish even in the most modest circumstances.



First Sikh in Pakistan Army promoted to Lieutenant Colonel

Harcharan Singh, is the first Pakistani Sikh decorated with the rank of Lieutenant Colonel. In 2007 at the age of 20, he joined the Pakistan Army. Harcharan Singh later volunteered for a combat role and was posted to the 12th Battalion of the Baloch Regiment where he served in demanding operational and border areas while being at the rank of Major.

Pakistan Punjab's Minister for Minorities Affairs Ramesh Singh Arora stated that *"Lt Col Singh's achievement has proved that there is no barrier for the minorities in Pakistan. Only talent speaks and sets the parameters for success. Lt Col Singh is an example of equality of all religions and unity in Pakistan."* Delighted at his brother's success, Mastan Singh, the former president of Pakistan Sikh Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee stated that, *"Lt Col Singh is the pride of Baba Nanak's city and the whole Sikh community, as well"*.

Humanitarian relief during the 2026 Victoria Bushfires



During the 2026 Victoria bushfires in Australia, Sikh-led humanitarian groups stepped in rapidly to support affected communities, demonstrating the core Sikh principle of seva (selfless service). Organizations such as UNITED SIKHS and Sikh Volunteers Australia mobilized volunteers to deliver hot meals, drinking water, and essential supplies to evacuees and frontline firefighters in hard-hit regions like Mansfield and Seymour. Using the tradition of langar (community kitchens), they provided free, freshly cooked food to anyone in need, regardless of background. Their swift grassroots response helped fill critical gaps in emergency relief, highlighting the Sikh community's ongoing global commitment to humanitarian aid during natural disasters, while also fostering unity, compassion, resilience, and interfaith solidarity among diverse local communities during the crisis.



Gentleman Scholar who helped Sikhs connect

IJ Singh (28 April 1937-12 May 2026)

A Tribute by Roopinder Singh

Changing “melded” with “welded” earned me a lesson and a lifelong friendship with Dr. Inderjit (IJ) Singh, Professor Emeritus of anatomical sciences at New York University, a dentist who preferred teaching to practice, a Sikh who spoke through his articles and books, and above all, a gentleman. Soon after I started working in New York, I edited an article and made the change mentioned above. I was invited to a meal cooked by IJ at his apartment near the United Nations. The difference between the two terms was gently explained, and a freewheeling discussion followed, lasting for hours. An intellectually curious person, he was well-versed in Western literature, especially Henry James, and loved Western classical music. I asked him about his parents and found out that he was 14 when they migrated from Sargodha, Pakistan, after Partition, and that his father became Secretary of the Punjab Public Service Commission soon after it was formed in the mid-1950s.

IJ loved literature but studied Dentistry at the Government Medical College, Amritsar, and then applied for a Murry & Leonie Guggenheim Foundation fellowship that took him to New York in 1960 to study paediatric dentistry. Subsequently, he acquired a PhD in anatomy from the University of Oregon Medical School and a DDS from Columbia University. A distinguished career in teaching followed.

IJ Singh had to explain his turban and religion so many times that he also had to graduate from being a cultural Sikh to one who studied the religion, so he could explain it. He was also an activist who participated in the 1970s in a gender-equality march led by Gloria Steinem, another against the Vietnam War, and others against racial inequality. He also joined the 1984 protests, and that was around the time I met him. A thoroughly cosmopolitan man, he exposed me to some of the finer cultural nuances of life in New York. I, in turn, would introduce him to people who were visiting from India, and a lively interaction would follow. He would be perfectly at ease talking with anyone and could be devastating with his logic and disarmingly witty. By the time I met him in New York, he was also an articulate spokesman for the Sikhs. IJ Singh's exposure to and reading of other traditions enabled him to understand and appreciate them. Thus, when he spoke about the religion and customs of the Sikhs, he did so in a language that appealed to the American audiences. I remember working with him to prepare the leaflet that we distributed at the first Baisakhi parade in New York City.



Sketch of IJ Singh by Sandeep Joshi. 2026 Watercolour on paper.

Thousands of these leaflets were distributed to Americans as we marched down Broadway.

A person of deep secular convictions, he found his tolerance strained when he interacted with zealots of any kind. He was a man of taste and took great pleasure in introducing me to several things that were novel to me at the time.

I remember him holding forth on Henry James once, to the extent that the venerable academic who devoted his life to studying the American writer exclaimed: “How come I haven't read any paper of yours?” Dr. Singh replied: “This is not my academic focus; I am on the faculty of New York University, where I am now Professor and Coordinator of Anatomical Sciences.” He wrote over a hundred academic papers. We kept in touch intermittently after I came back from New York in 1990, but thanks to the Internet, we were able to reconnect. He was always supportive of my endeavours and of what I wrote, and I reciprocated, sometimes interacting with him when he developed his papers. Dr. I J Singh was on the editorial board of the venerable Sikh Review of Calcutta and the Nishaan magazine in New Delhi. He also supported organisations such as the United Sikhs, Sikh RI, and SikhLens. He had an outsized influence on younger generations of the Sikh diaspora, especially because he worked outside the traditional religious infrastructure and took great pains to explain and answer questions rationally. Most found

his presentation of Sikh thought and practices relatable, although he would ruffle a few orthodox feathers from time to time.

Five anthologies of his essays were published, including *Sikhs and Sikhism: A View with a Bias* (1997), *The Sikh Way: A Pilgrim's Progress* (2002), *Being and Becoming a Sikh* (2003), *The World According to Sikhi* (2006), and *Sikhi: The Journey & The Destination* (2018). I read all of them and reviewed some.

When I met IJ, he was single. His first marriage had dissolved after three years, and they had a daughter, Anna Piar, named after her two grandmothers. His answering machine had her message, so we heard her, yet never met her. After I had left New York, he would find Neena, his wife and companion for life. Many years later, when we met in Delhi, he spoke rather fondly of her. It was wonderful to reconnect physically, although we had always been in touch by email and phone. He had been invited by

the Bhai Vir Singh Sahitya Sadan for a seminar, as were Bhayee Sikandar Singh and I. His declining health and, in recent years, faculties, were a cause of concern, and he was 89 when he passed away in New York on 12 May 2026. Somehow, even as one did not meet him, one carried the image of this vital man who made a place for himself in the New World and became a bridge connecting those born there to their roots and interpreting their heritage for them.

Roopinder Singh is an author and a journalist who retired a Senior Associate Editor, The Tribune, Chandigarh. His wrote Gurdwaras: Abodes of the Guru, Sikh Heritage, Ethos and Relics (co-author), Delhi '84, Guru Nanak: His Life and Teachings and Arjan Singh DFC: Marshal of the Indian Air Force. He has also published festschrifts on his parents: Giani Gurdit Singh 1923–2007 and Inderjit Kaur Sandhu: An Inspiring Journey.

“So, What Do You Think?” A Tribute by Inni Kaur

There are people whose knowledge impresses you.

There are others whose presence enlarges you.

I.J. Singh did both.

To many, he was Dr. I.J. Singh. Writer. Thinker. Teacher. The self-described “gray-beard” who spent decades helping Sikhs think more deeply about themselves and the world around them. To me, he was also a friend. One of those friendships built through words, disagreement, encouragement, affection, and the joy of thinking aloud with another person. For years, we dueled with words. Sometimes gently. Sometimes stubbornly. Always joyfully. He would send me an article and ask,

“So, what do you think?”

And he genuinely wanted to know. Not because he needed agreement. He simply loved thinking with people. Even our disagreements carried warmth. Inder could talk to anyone. I used to joke that if he went to the moon, he would find someone there to talk to for hours. And honestly, he probably would have. Students. Academics. Taxi drivers. Young Sikhs trying to understand themselves. Strangers beside him on a train. It did not matter. He was curious about people, especially the contradictions they carried. He loved contradictions. Even when he disagreed with you, you never felt diminished. He would shift the angle slightly, ask another question, tell a story, and leave you thinking about the conversation long after it had ended. Years ago, I wrote that he had a way of helping you arrive at your own conclusion with just a hint of prodding. That, to me, was the sign of a true teacher. So many younger Sikhs were drawn to him because he took them seriously, their questions, their doubts, their attempts to make sense of multiple worlds. He never spoke down to people. He met them where they were.

Over the years, our paths kept crossing through Nishaan, SikhRI, articles, conversations, and the many evolving questions around Sikh thought and identity. He once wrote, “I was born a Sikh, but I regard myself as a convert to Sikhism.” That sentence stayed with me. It explained something essential about him. He never hid behind certainty. He questioned deeply, read constantly, argued passionately, and still remained open. Even after decades of writing and teaching, there was still searching in him. And humor. Always humor. Even in serious conversations, there would suddenly be a line, a story, a perfectly timed remark, and the whole room would soften. He belonged fully to multiple worlds without apologizing for any of them. He wrote the foreword for my “Journey with the Gurus” series with tremendous generosity. He was generous with his time in a way that feels increasingly rare now. Even later, when illness had already begun taking pieces from him, warmth remained. And then dementia slowly carried him somewhere language could no longer fully reach. It was hard to watch. Yesterday evening, I received a call from his sister.

Inder had passed away. Since then, I have been thinking about how many people carry pieces of him within themselves. A conversation. A question. An article tucked into a bookshelf. An old email exchange. A moment of encouragement that arrived at the right time. Some people leave behind books. Others leave behind people who think more honestly, listen more carefully, and move through the world with a little more openness because they knew them.

Inder did both.

The Wandering Mind

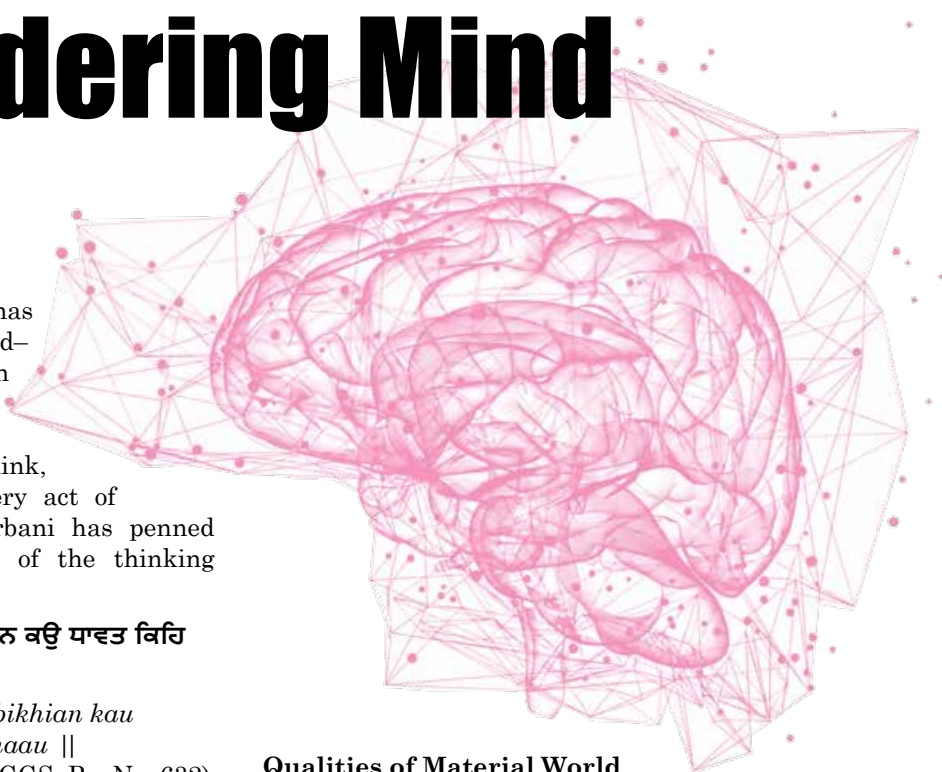
The wandering nature of mind has been a proven reality. The Mind-Wondering is shift of attention from tasks to internal self-generated thoughts. The famous saying of philosopher Rene Descartes is, “I think, therefore I am,” proves that the very act of thinking makes us human. But Gurbani has penned another aspect of this stark reality of the thinking processes in these words:

ਮਾਈ ਮਨੁ ਮੇਰੇ ਬਸਿ ਨਾਹਿ ॥ ਨਿਸ ਬਾਸੁਰ ਬਿਖਿਅਨ ਕਉ ਧਾਵਤ ਕਿਹਿ
ਬਿਧਿ ਰੇਕਉ ਤਾਹਿ ॥੧॥ ਰਹਾਉ ॥

*Maiee mun mero bas naeh. Nis baasur bikhian kau
dhaavat keh bidh rokau taeh ||1|| Rahaau ||*
(SGGS, Pg. No. 632)

Translation: O mother, my mind is out of control. Night and day, it runs after the material world. How can I restrain it? ||1|| Pause ||

The characteristics of material world are that first they attract, yet fleeting, fickle, constantly changing yet never satisfying. In this article we will explore qualities of material world, mind's fickle nature and how the mind goes on a thoughts trajectory. Finally we will look at some of the remedies for this wandering nature of mind.



Qualities of Material World

Gurbani has characterised three operating characteristics of material world as:

ਤਿਹੁ ਗੁਣ ਬੰਧੀ ਦੇਹੁਰੀ ਜੇ ਆਇਆ ਜਗਿ ਸੇ ਖੇਲੁ ॥

Trihau gun bandhee dehuree jo aaiaa jug so khel.
(SGGS, Pg. No. 21)

Translation: The three qualities of Maya hold the body in bondage; whoever comes into the world is subject to their play.

The three qualities have been defined as:

Gurbani Name (Alternate Name)	Transliteration	Translation	Qualities (examples/not a complete list)
ਰਜ ਗੁਣ (ਅਗਨਿ ਸਾਗਰ)	<i>Raj gun/Rajjo</i> (Agan Sagar)	Passion	Hopes, desires, wishes, doubts, stress, anxiety
ਤਮ ਗੁਣ (ਬਿਖੁ ਸਾਗਰ)	<i>Tam gun/Tammo</i> (Bikh Sagar)	Ignorance	Lust, greed, anger, pride, attachment, slandering
ਸਤ ਗੁਣ (ਸੁਖ ਸਾਗਰ)	<i>Sat gun/Satto</i> (Sukh Sagar)	Goodness	Compassion, principled, service, philanthropy, humility

Gurbani has many quotes elaborating on these three qualities of Maya, and their influence on mind. One example where the three characteristics of Maya have been defined is:

ਰਜ ਗੁਣ ਤਮ ਗੁਣ ਸਤ ਗੁਣ ਕਹੀਐ ਇਹ ਤੇਰੀ ਸਭ ਮਾਇਆ ॥

Raj gun tam gun sat gun kaheai ih teri sabh maya
(SGGS, Pg. No. 1123)

Translation: (O God) *Raajas*, *Taamas*, and *Saatav* modes are the creations of Your Maya (illusion).

Mind's Fickle Nature

According to science, human mind have about 60,000 to 70,000 thoughts in a day, making it very fickle in nature. Out of this range, 70 percent are negative, and 90 percent are same as the day before. Thus, very nature of mind is not being present in the now, but to dwell in the past or worry about future. The scientific world has coined a name for it as “exquisite time-traveling masters.” No wonder Gurbani has put this fickle aspect of mind in these words:

ਮਨੁ ਚੰਚਲੁ ਧਾਵਤੁ ਫੁਨਿ ਧਾਵੈ ॥

Mun chanchal dhaavat phun dhaavai ॥
(SGGS, Pg. No. 222)

Translation: My fickle mind continuously running after fleeting things.

The nature of the fickle mind is to wander around with thoughts that are negative, repetitive, and ruinous as well, putting us in a loop of paralysis of endless options. There is a beautiful story from Guru Nanak Dev Ji's life, which elaborates what the problem of the mind is. This event took place in 1497, during Guru Ji's period of employment with Nawab Daulat Khan Lodhi, in Sultanpur. One day, Guru Ji went in River Bein for his early morning bath but did not return. Bhai Mardana waited for a long time and finally returned home alone. He duly informed Guru Ji's employer Nawab Daulat Khan, as well as the parents about Guru Ji's disappearance. Guru Ji had spent three days in a secluded place contemplating how to spread the message of living with Divine Virtues to the people. On the third day someone saw Guru Ji sitting at the graveyard. Guru Ji was heard saying, “There is no Hindu or Muslim.” Guru Ji's message was about Oneness of humankind. Soon the news reached nawab and messengers were sent to bring Guru Ji to the palace. Nawab asked Guru Ji if there are no faith differences, and everyone is God's creation that he should be OK to perform Namaz (Muslim prayer) in the mosque with him. Guru Ji accepted the invitation, and all proceeded to the mosque.

At the mosque, Qazi led the prayers and Nawab joined in. After the prayers, Nawab asked Guru Nanak why he did not join in the prayers? Guru Ji replied, “Dear Nawab, whom would have joined in the prayer? Your mind was in Kandahar (Afghanistan) purchasing horses, while your body was here.” The Nawab said, “Nanak, if my mind was not present in the prayer, you should have joined the Qazi.” Guru Ji said, “The Qazi's mind was looking after the newly born colt at home.” Qazi admitted that his mind was with the colt as pointed out by Guru Ji. Guru Ji in his first sermon thus demonstrated the wandering nature of mind, and the significance of being present in the moment. Even the scientific world has realised the potential of practicing mindfulness, which helps to calm the wandering nature of mind.

It is for this reason the mind in Gurbani has been compared to a monkey, always jumping from one limb of the tree to another. It has also been compared to a bird hopping and perching from one branch to another tree branch, and even to an elephant wreaking havoc in the forest. So, Gurbani wants us to change this thinking process by listening to Guru's teachings. Guru Ji's advice is stop following your own mind and follow Guru's teachings:

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

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

Translation: Take the Guru's wisdom, you ignorant fool; without devotion, even the (so called) clever have drowned.

Guru Ji calls us an ignorant fool, for becoming victims by drowning in the three worldly oceans.

Remedies for Wandering Mind

ਮਨ ਕੀ ਮਤਿ ਤਿਆਗੀਐ ਸੁਣੀਐ ਉਪਦੇਸੁ ॥੧॥ ਰਹਾਉ ॥

Mun kee mat tiaageeai suneeai upadhes ॥1॥
Rahaau ॥ (SGGS, Pg. No. 814)

Translation: So, renounce the intellectual cleverness of your mind, and listen to the (Guru's) Teachings. ॥ 1 ॥ Pause ॥

Guru ji says by listening to Guru Ji's wisdom implement it in life by eliminating the other from the mind:

ਤਿਆਗੋ ਮਨ ਕੀ ਮਤੜੀ ਵਿਸਾਰੋ ਦੁਜਾ ਭਾਉ ਜੀਉ ॥

Tiaage(n) mun kee mataRee visaare(n) dhoojaa bhaau jeeau ॥
(SGGS, Pg. No. 763)

Translation: Abandon the evil pursuits of your mind and forget the love of other (which is Maya/then One God alone will remain).

What duality does is it gives birth to fickle nature of mind. One minute it makes one decision and next minute cancels it and opt for another approach. Even following the chosen approach there is always a doubt in mind whether it work or not. When the unnecessary, and negative thoughts are absent the mind is stilled, calmed, and it becomes purer:

ਚੰਚਲ ਮਨੁ ਦਹ ਦਿਸਿ ਕਉ ਧਾਵਤ ਅਚਲ ਜਾਹਿ ਠਹਰਾਨੇ ॥

Chanchal mun dheh dhis kau dhaavat achal jaeh
Thaharaano ॥ (SGGS, Pg. No. 685)

Translation: The restless mind wanders in ten directions – it needs to be calmed down.

Guru Ji provides guidance as well as benefits in these words:

ਗੁਰ ਕੈ ਸਬਦਿ ਬਨਾਵਹੁ ਇਹੁ ਮਨੁ ॥ ਤਿਪਤਿ ਅਘਾਵਨੁ ਸਾਰੈ ਨਾਇ ॥

Gur kai shabad banaavahu ihu mun ॥ Tirapat
aghaavan saachai nai ॥ (SGGS, Pg. No. 377)

Translation: O brother! Remold this mind after the Guru's wisdom. The mind becomes satisfied and satiated by the True Name (*Sat Naam*).

When the anger, jealousy, wishes, and desires including others are gone, the fires burning within cools and mind becomes calm. So, how does this trait of mind chasing after desires and wants, can be calmed down? Gurbani tells us to start by observing the mind:

**ਅਪਨੈ ਬੀਚਾਰਿ ਅਸਵਾਰੀ ਕੀਜੈ ॥ ਸਹਜ ਕੈ ਪਾਵੜੈ ਪਗੁ ਧਰਿ ਲੀਜੈ ॥੧॥
ਰਹਾਉ ॥**

*Apanai beechaar asavaaree keejai || Sahaj kai paavaRai
pag dhar leejai || 1 || Rahaau ||* (SGGS, Pg. No. 329)

Translation: I made self-reflection my mount, and in the stirrups of intuitive poise, I placed my feet. || 1 || Pause ||

Here Kabir Ji has shared an example of rider and his relationship to his mount (horse) as a metaphor. Before going further, a word of caution. In today's digital lexicon the word mount connotes altogether a new definition, but in those days it was exclusively used for horses. He says just as the rider has to be aware of his mount then only he can steer it. The rider is focused, aware of the body and mind of the horse he is riding. The rider's approach is that he is trying to help the horse understand what is required of him and then steer it to do its job better and more efficiently. So, when the horse makes a wrong turn, the alert rider quickly takes timely corrective action. Same way by constantly monitoring the flight of mind, the negative, harmful thoughts are corrected at the earliest before they gain traction. As this practice of watching the mind advances, coupled with the growing experience of watching it, many of these choices will come intuitively, reflexively without an effort or a thought. Earlier we were unconscious of this tendency of mind to wander, but under observation a new mysterious aspect seeps into our conscious awareness, making us alert as soon mind takes a flight. Next, try to stop the trajectory of its flight by nudging it back home within, with a gentle reminder:

**ਕਹਾ ਚਲਹੁ ਮਨ ਰਹਹੁ ਘਰੇ ॥ ਗੁਰਮੁਖਿ ਰਾਮ ਨਾਮਿ ਤ੍ਰਿਪਤਾਸੇ ਖੋਜਤ
ਪਾਵਹੁ ਸਹਜਿ ਹਰੇ ॥੧॥ ਰਹਾਉ ॥**

*Kahaa chalahu mun rahahu ghare || Gurmukh raam
naam tirapataase khojat paavahu sahaj hare || 1 ||
Rahaau ||* (SGGS, Pg. No. 414)

Translation: Where are you going, O mind? Come back, remain in your own home. The Gurmukhs remain calm with the remembrance of God's Name (Sat Naam); searching, they find God (within). || 1 || Pause ||

Observation of mind makes it detached from the thoughts, instead one becomes a witnesser. Next steer it to remain within, not wandering out by these words:

ਮੇਰੇ ਮਨ ਪਰਦੇਸੀ ਵੇ ਪਿਆਰੇ ਆਉ ਘਰੇ ॥

Mere mun paradhesee ve piaare aau ghare ||
(SGGS, Pg. No. 451)

Translation: O my dear beloved foreigner mind, please come (back) home!

Gurbani wants us to pay attention to our attention, chasing after the material wealth (Maya) of three qualities. As

soon as its chase is observed, restrain it and redirect the attention. However, if the random thought was something important, worthwhile even if it is not related to the subject of attention, make a quick note of that thought so as not to lose that information, next step bring the attention back. Thus, in the process, the multiple thoughts in mind become replaced by single thought of Darshan of God.

These multiple unsolicited thoughts have been compared to filth of mind, which Gurbani stresses can be removed by meditation in these words:

ਪ੍ਰਭ ਕੈ ਸਿਮਰਨਿ ਮਨ ਕੀ ਮਲੁ ਜਾਇ ॥

Parabh kaie simran mun kee mull jaa-ae ||
(SGGS, Pg. No. 263)

Translation: In the meditation/remembrance of God, the filth of the mind is removed.

This non-stop rambling of the mind in pursuit of material possessions makes it anxious. Besides the removal of the filth of unnecessary thoughts, Gurbani has shared many other benefits of meditation in this shabad as well (not covered here). Even the scientific world has now embraced the concept that mediation can calm the mind. Finally, with the Grace of God no thoughts are left, making mind free from thoughts:

**ਗੁਰਮੁਖਿ ਅਖਰੁ ਜਿਤੁ ਧਾਵਤੁ ਰਹਤਾ ॥ ਗੁਰਮੁਖਿ ਉਪਦੇਸੁ ਦੁਖੁ ਸੁਖੁ ਸਮ
ਸਹਤਾ ॥**

*Gurmukh akhar jit dhaavat rahataa || Gurmukh upadhes
dhukh sukh sam sahataa ||* (SGGS, Pg. No. 131)

Translation: The Guru's Instruction is the Word (about Remembrance of God), by which the wandering mind is restrained. Through the Guru's Teachings, we can endure pain and pleasure alike.

Grace is only given as a blessing alone. So, we can only pray to Almighty for the grace of meditation and His Darshan. The seeker becomes completely calm like the water in a deep aquifer in the bosom of earth –still, pure, pristine, and calm. The status of such a mind has been described in these words:

ਦਹ ਦਿਸ ਧਾਵਤ ਮਿਟਿ ਗਏ ਨਿਰਮਲ ਥਾਨਿ ਬਸਨਾ ॥੩॥

Dahh dis dhaavat mitt gae nirmal than basnaa. || 3 ||
(SGGS, Pg. No. 811)

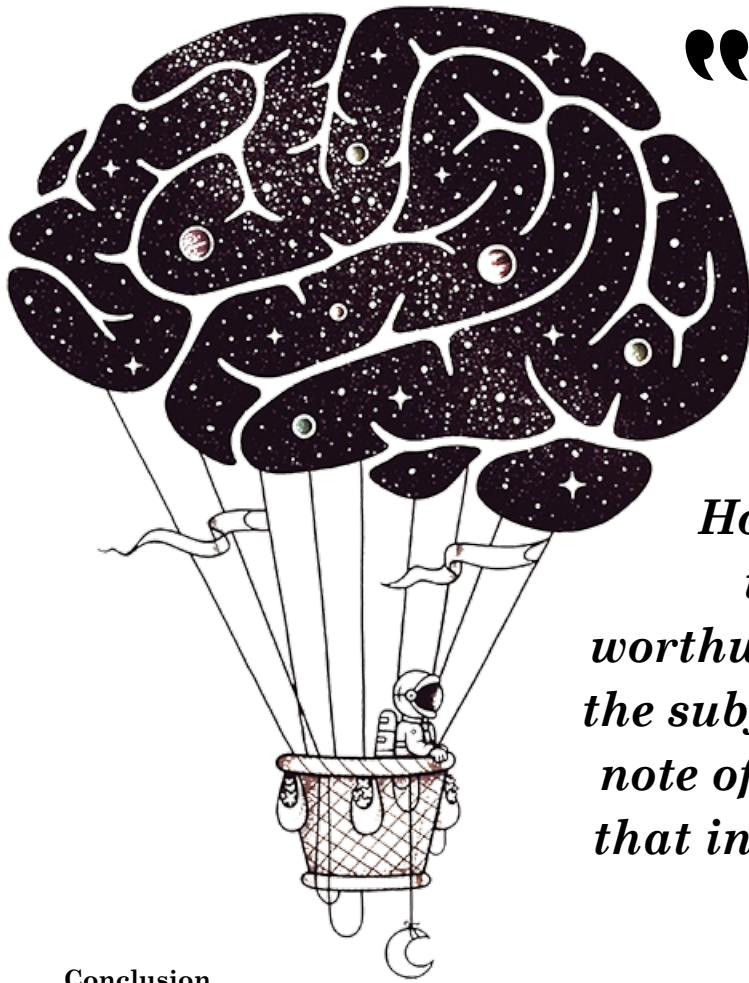
Translation: The mind's wandering in the ten (different) directions has stopped, and one dwells in the immaculate place (in peace). || 3 ||

And:

ਮਨੁ ਮੇਰੇ ਧਾਵਨ ਤੇ ਛੁਟਿਓ ਕਰਿ ਬੈਠੇ ਬਿਸਰਾਮੁ ॥੧॥ ਰਹਾਉ ॥

*Mun mero dhaavan te chhootio kar baiTho bisaraam
|| 1 || Rahaau ||* (SGGS, Pg. No. 1186)

Translation: My mind has stopped wandering, and now, it has come to complete rest becoming calm. || 1 || Pause ||



“Gurbani wants us to pay attention to our attention, chasing after the material wealth (Maya) of three qualities. As soon as its chase is observed, restrain it and redirect the attention. However, if the random thought was something important, worthwhile even if it is not related to the subject of attention, make a quick note of that thought so as not to lose that information, next step bring the attention back.”

Conclusion

Only upon realisation of the wandering and fickle nature of mind, the next phase of restraining its wandering nature, with an aim to get to the point of one thought alone, and then finally become free from thoughts starts. When the grace of Creator is received then the mind will become totally calm, steady, and ready to go to house of God. Such a blessed soul has been compared to a bride of God:

ਮਨੁ ਵਸਗਤਿ ਆਇਆ ਪਰਮ ਪਦੁ ਪਾਇਆ ਸਾ ਧਨ ਕੀਤਿ ਪਿਆਰੀ ॥

Mun vasagati aaiaa param padh paiaa saa dhan ka(n)t piaaree || (SGGS, Pg. No. 576)

Translation: The bride obtains supreme status, as her mind is brought under control; she is the beloved of her Husband God.

Now the negative trait of always wanting, full of desires becomes a thing of past, the new reality of becoming stress free in life will be experienced. There is a special term for it, which is Sahaj (ਸਹਜੁ). But its English translation of peace and poise, does not capture its complete essence, which is free of compulsive thoughts. It is a feeling of a natural state full of inner peace and tranquility which has to be experienced.

Let us all try not just to stop the wandering of the mind, instead experience Sahaj. When it is experienced then no

desires are left, and a feeling of fulfillment is experienced as Guru Ji shares:

ਸਾਂਤਿ ਸਹਜੁ ਆਨਦੁ ਘਨਾ ਪੂਰਨ ਭਈ ਆਸ ॥

Saant sahaj anand ghanaa pooran bhaee aas.

(SGGS, Pg. No. 819)

Translation: I have found peace, tranquility and great ecstasy; all my hopes have been fulfilled.

Guru Ji has also shared that when Sahaj comes within, then skepticism departs as the mind has climbed to the fourth quality above the three that saw earlier.

ਚਉਥੇ ਪਦ ਕਉ ਜੇ ਨਰੁ ਚੀਨੈ ਤਿਨ੍ਹ ਗੀ ਪਰਮ ਪਦੁ ਪਾਇਆ ॥੨॥

Chauthi pad kau jo nar cheenai tin hee param pad paaiaa || 2 ||

(SGGS, Pg. No. 1123)

Translation: The man who realises the Fourth Quality; he alone obtains the Supreme Status || 2 ||

Let's try to taste it, by working on the wandering nature of mind and asking for Guru Ji's grace to free us from it.

Bhupinder 'Bo' Singh is a Houston based businessman & an engineer by profession. He hails from Myanmar & was educated in India. He is passionate on Sikh history, motivation and spirituality and is an author of seven books.



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The Sacred Identity:

The Spiritual and Cultural Significance of Hair and Turban in Sikhism

This article delineates the spiritual and historical gravitas of kesh (unshorn hair) and the dastaar (turban) within the Sikh tradition. Kesh, rooted in the Gurus profound affirmation of the Creator's flawless design, becomes a quiet yet resolute testament to humility, discipline, and authenticity. Guru Gobind Singh Ji, in instituting the Khalsa, endowed this practice with an added aura of courage and spiritual sovereignty. The dastaar once the prerogative of royalty was democratised by the Guru, transforming it into a universal insignia of honour, dignity, and ethical responsibility. Together, these emblems constitute a visible, daily liturgy that moulds character and reinforces moral accountability. In the modern milieu, kesh and dastaar remain steadfast anchors of Sikh identity, conferring pride, a sense of belonging, and continuity. They stand as eloquent embodiments of the Sikh ideals of equality, devotion, and indomitable moral courage.

Sikhism, born in the rich spiritual landscape of fifteenth-century Punjab, is a tradition that harmonises inner devotion with outward identity. For Sikhs, the journey toward truth is not confined to the realm of the heart but expresses itself through visible symbols that embody discipline, courage, and humility. Among these, the two most sacred emblems are kesh, the practice of keeping unshorn hair, and the dastaar, or turban, which is tied daily with reverence. These are not merely markers of cultural heritage or religious affiliation; they form a profound spiritual language that speaks of a Sikhs relationship with the Divine, the Guru, and the larger community.

The Sikh reverence for unshorn hair (from head to toe of the body) kesh begins with the belief that the human body is fashioned in perfect wisdom by the Creator. Guru Nanak Dev Ji emphasised the beauty and completeness of human creation, urging people to live in a state of acceptance rather than modification.

Keeping it in its natural form becomes an act of spiritual surrender a quiet acknowledgement that the Creator has made no mistake. In maintaining uncut hair, a Sikh affirms this divine trust, choosing to live in harmony with nature rather than subjecting it to vanity or worldly trends.

Over centuries, kesh came to represent far more than personal devotion. It symbolised integrity, authenticity, and inner discipline. The decision to maintain one's hair requires commitment, attention, and self-respect. It shapes a Sikhs daily routine, encouraging mindfulness as the hair is carefully washed, combed, and tied. This simple act becomes a gentle reminder each morning of the values one must carry into the world. Through kesh, a Sikh embodies a quiet clarity: to live truthfully, humbly, and in alignment with the Guru's path.



The significance of hair was further deepened by Guru Gobind Singh Ji when he formalised the identity of Khalsa in 1699. By instructing Sikhs to keep their hair unshorn, he offered them a symbol of dignity and spiritual sovereignty. At a time when oppressive systems sought to erase identity and crush freedom, the Guru gave Sikhs a form of resistance that was both peaceful and powerful.



Hair became a symbol of fearlessness. To keep it uncut, even when persecution loomed, was to declare without speaking a word that one's faith could not be shaved away. The Sikh identity, therefore, grew not through coercion but through courage, not through conformity but through conviction. To protect this sacred gift, Sikhs began tying the turban the dastaar a crown of cloth that came to embody honour, responsibility, and inner nobility. Traditionally in South Asia, the turban was a sign of royalty or high social standing.

The Sikh Gurus, however, democratized this symbol, placing it not on the heads of kings alone but on the heads of all who walked the path of truth. The turban elevated ordinary men and women into bearers of extraordinary dignity. A farmer, a soldier, a merchant, a poet anyone who tied a dastaar took on a regal presence, not because of worldly power, but because of the moral authority it signified. The Sikh turban carries within its folds a deep ethical calling. It reminds its wearer that with honour comes responsibility. To tie the dastaar is to pledge oneself to truth, compassion, justice, and courage.

A Sikh walking in public with a turban is unmistakable, and this visibility is purposeful. It prevents anonymity and demands accountability. When you wear the Gurus crown, you must walk the Gurus path.

The combination of kesh and dastaar weaves together the spiritual and the worldly. On one hand, unshorn hair expresses a relationship with the Divine acceptance, humility, and harmony. On the other hand, the turban expresses ones relationship with society dignity, responsibility, and moral courage. Together, they form an identity that nurtures both inner purity and outer integrity. They remind Sikhs that true spirituality is not hidden in the mountains or cloistered in isolation; it is lived boldly, publicly, and with unwavering commitment.

In the contemporary world, hair and the turban continue to hold deep significance. For Sikh youth, the turban offers a sense of belonging and pride, especially in multicultural societies where identity can be fractured. It becomes a steady anchor in a rapidly changing world. The practice of keeping kesh fosters self-esteem and rootedness, teaching young Sikhs to honour their heritage with confidence. The turban, when tied each morning, becomes an intimate ritual that connects generations, binding a young Sikh to centuries of tradition, devotion, and sacrifice.

Ultimately, the importance of hair and turban in Sikhism cannot be reduced to external markers or cultural customs.



They form a living spiritual practice one that shapes character, strengthens resolve, and reflects the essence of Sikh teachings.

The Sikh Gurus envisioned a humanity marked not by caste or social status, but by equality, courage, and devotion. Kesh and dastaar stand as the physical embodiment of this vision, reminding every Sikh that they carry Divine dignity upon their heads and sacred responsibility upon their shoulders. And to walk through the world with both is to honour the timeless Sikh commitment to truth, service, and freedom.

Dr. Stuti Malhotra is a contributor to several national and international journals. She actively participates in conferences focusing on interfaith dialogue, peace, and environmental issues. email: stuti29malhotra@yahoo.com



Sardarji's Taxi in Calcutta

A legacy of integrity and trust

Kolkata has been the epicentre of countrywide protests in recent days over an issue that concerns us all — women's safety. In this hour of grief and anger, I can't help but reminisce, and with a sense of pride.

It was a standard instruction for family and friends, especially women, travelling at odds hours in Calcutta (as it was called then) that elderly Bengalis would insist on repeating, “*Sardarji er taxi tey jaabi... oonek raat hoe gaache*” (Always take a taxi driven by Sikh drivers at night). Such was the reputation that these drivers, sporting coloured turbans, in their yellow taxis had acquired for themselves.

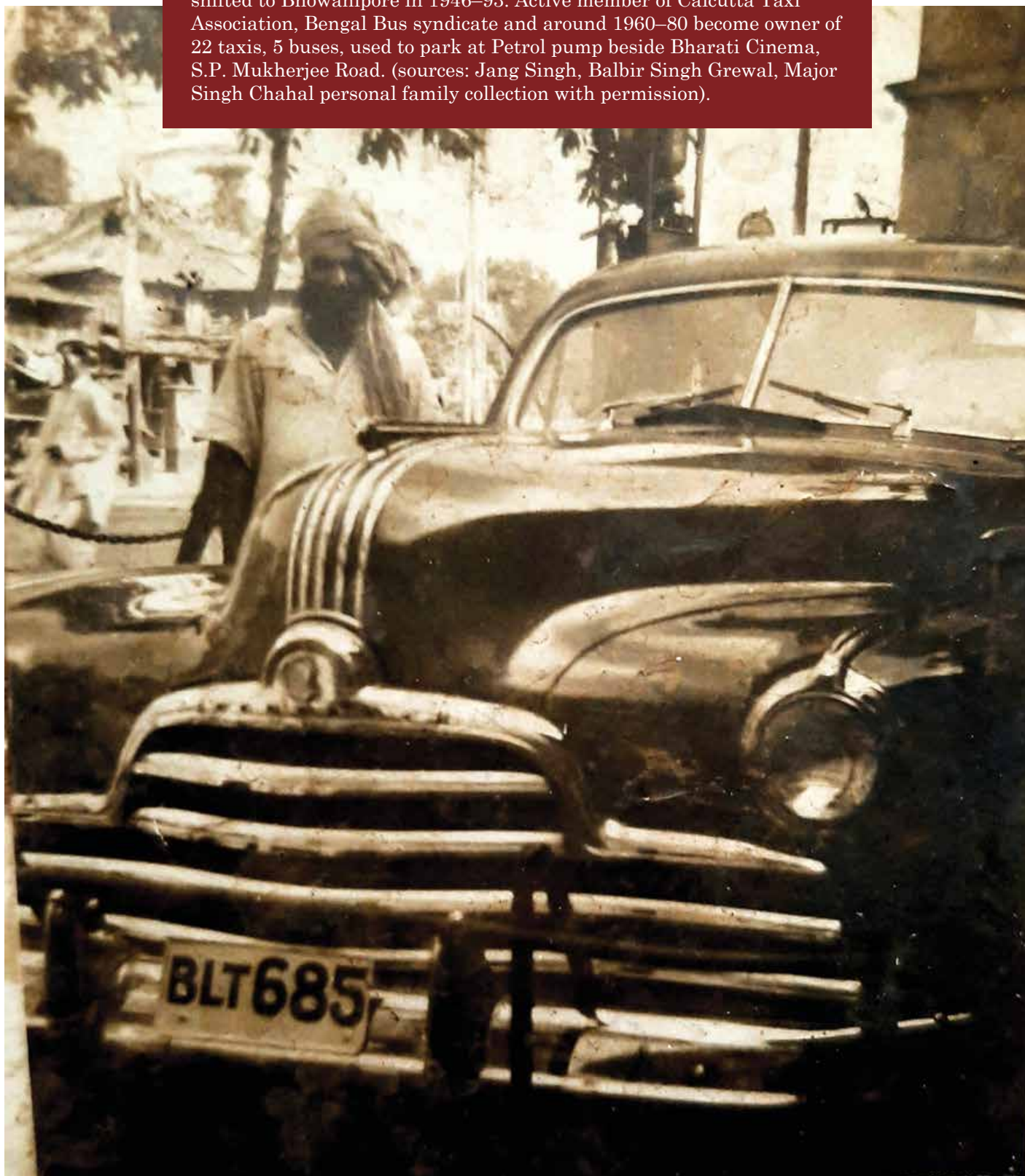
Calcutta resident Tuhin K Roy recently recalled her grandmother's pet travel fad: “*In front of our house on Lansdowne Road was a taxi stand, so to speak. If my grandmother availed of a cab, the driver had to be a Sikh. No, she would not get into a non-Sikh-driven taxi. Full stop. Why? They were renowned for their courtesy to an old lady — opening the door for her to get in and when she got out. Coincidentally, post-1947, her sister in New Delhi gave accommodation to a family of Sikh refugees. He took to driving taxis, forging a lifelong relationship.*”

In the introduction to her book ‘*Calcutta, a Cultural and Literary History*’, writer Krishna Dutta wrote in 2013 about “*the cosmopolitan nature of the city in whose labyrinthine lanes jostle turbaned Sikh taxi drivers from the Punjab*”.

Far away from home, the community of Sikh taxi drivers thrived in Bengal. They were known for their integrity, and being dependable, courteous, enterprising and, of course, brave. As ubiquitous yellow Ambassador taxis have given way to app-based models, the number of Sikh cab drivers in the city has dwindled. The Sikh population numbers have been sliding since the 1990s, too, but their remarkable story is hard to miss.

There are very few accounts available of the early migrants, particularly Sikhs, from North India. The primary reason for migration from 1860–1900 (and later) was the economic hardship faced by the people of undivided British Punjab. Recurring famines, poor harvests, small landholdings, rising prices of foodgrains and disease compelled many to seek better opportunities elsewhere, eventually leading them to Calcutta, then the capital of British India.

Taxi driver Major Singh with Pontiac Taxi Year 1935 Place Calcutta, Taxi No BLT-685 Model Pontiac Chieftain, Taxi owner Major Singh (Chahal) son of Bishan Singh of native village Bhaini Rora, Ludhiana and stayed at Grey Street Hatibagan North Calcutta in 1935-46, later shifted to Bhowanipore in 1946-93. Active member of Calcutta Taxi Association, Bengal Bus syndicate and around 1960-80 become owner of 22 taxis, 5 buses, used to park at Petrol pump beside Bharati Cinema, S.P. Mukherjee Road. (sources: Jang Singh, Balbir Singh Grewal, Major Singh Chahal personal family collection with permission).



The migrants were mostly distressed farmers, craftsmen and unskilled workers, as well as colonial ex-sepoys, underground *Ghadarites* and anti-imperialist *Babbar Akali* revolutionaries. Some ventured further to Burma, Southeast Asia, Hong Kong, China, Fiji, Australia, Canada, England and the US through the Calcutta port, known as King George's Port or Khidderpore Docks.

The Census of 1911 recorded at 932 the number of Sikhs in Bengal, 81 of them in Calcutta. In 1921, the Sikh population in Bengal was put at 1,571 males and 448 females, of which Calcutta was home to 1,077 males and 295 females. By 1941, the Census showed that Calcutta had 6,069–2,387 (male–female) Sikhs – Jorasanko 236–112, Bara Bazar 322–81, Colootola 262–126, Ballygunge 567–231, Bhowanipore 2,021–838, Tollygunge 880–334, and Budge Budge 534–178.

What worked in their favour was that they landed in Calcutta at the right time. With streetlights on paved roads, traffic rules enforced by the police to regulate the running of tram-cars, buses and taxi-cabs, the city called 'London of the East' appeared to be gaining momentum around 1920–1930. The Sikhs grabbed the opportunity for a prosperous life, and most of them joined the taxi, bus and truck transport business.

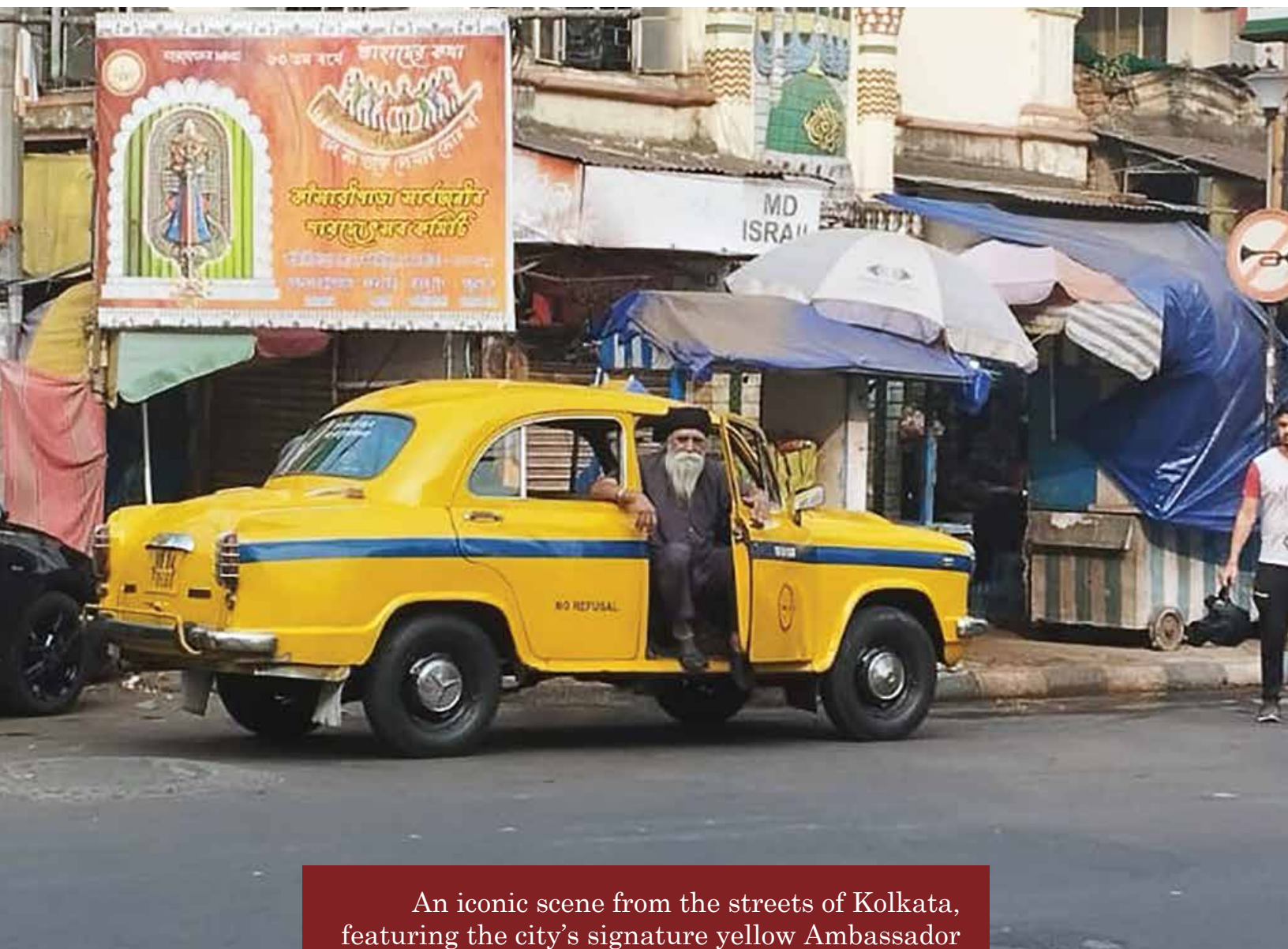
The Sikh taxi drivers mostly settled in *Bhowanipore*, *Hazra*, *Karaya* and *Tollygunge* in south Calcutta.



They were semi-literate, with knowledge of *Gurmukhi* (Punjabi) or Persian or Urdu. Socially, they were a close-knit community, but belonged to different castes. A majority of them were *Jats* from Ludhiana district. They founded Sri Guru Singh Sabha in 1930 and Khalsa English High School in 1950, but were quick to learn *Bangla*.

Initially, in the 1919–20s, they drove taxi-cabs operated by individuals and private companies — French Motor Company, Indian Motor Taxi Cab Company, Bengal Motor and Taxi Company and New Motors Limited. They gradually bought their own taxi-cabs and buses. The Khalsa Transport Company was set up in 1924 by brothers Fateh and Rajender Singh Benipal. Three years later, the Khalsa Motor Syndicate was established under Gurdit Singh, a leader of Komagata Maru. The Calcutta Taxi Association, which is still active, and the Bengal Bus Syndicate were set up in 1930.

In 1922, the weekly *Commerce* described the dominance of North Indians in Calcutta's taxi driving profession: "*The somewhat extensive usurpation of the different means of earning a livelihood in Bengal and particularly in Calcutta by non-Bengalees is exemplified by the number of Sikhs, Punjabis and up-country Mahomedans who are employed as taxi-drivers in the city... there are, roughly speaking, 7,500 licensed taxi-drivers in Calcutta, and about 50 per cent of these are Sikhs and other Punjabis.*"



An iconic scene from the streets of Kolkata, featuring the city's signature yellow Ambassador taxis, street-side stalls under colorful umbrellas, and a cyclist moving through the daily bustle.



In the initial days, media reports reflected an unfavourable assessment of the community. The Times of India dated March 30, 1921, carried the news of the mysterious disappearance of a body in a Sikh's taxi. Cases of rash and negligent driving also surfaced. A Sikh driver was beaten up in the Garpar area by a mob after rumours of child-kidnapping. The seizure of a consignment of kirpans — apparently for self-defence — at the Howrah railway station in 1924 created tense moments.

A change of attitude happened quickly. In 1927, a freedom fighter from Punjab, Kharak Singh, was given a grand public reception at the Howrah station by Calcutta Mayor JM Sengupta. The procession included Sikh taxi drivers. Newspapers reported umpteen incidents involving turbaned taxi drivers in Calcutta, describing them as “well mannered, courageous, attentive and honest”. Bengali films started having Sardarji taxi-driver characters.

During World War II (1940s), an American journalist, on way to Burma, mentioned the “barking bulb horns of the Sikh taxi men’s towering cars... in blackout Calcutta”. A photograph of a smiling Sikh driver (taxi number 727) with American pilot Bob Sherwood at Dum Dum Airport, Calcutta, in 1945 became famous. In his article ‘Drab Calcutta’s unchanging scene’, war correspondent Geoffrey Tebbutt of The Herald (Melbourne) wrote on August 31, 1944: *“Long lines of carts drawn by wide grey buffaloes; carts almost as heavy pulled and pushed by other narrow little men; horse-cabs, first-class and second-class; traffic policemen with umbrella hoisted from a slot in their Sam Browne belts; Bengalis gathering up their dhotis to dash across the streets in the rain; jeeps and armoured cars and trucks, and the taxis of the Sikhs, held together chiefly by their brilliant coats of paint... Nobody knows quite how many people there are in Calcutta, and its sprawling suburbs. Of these, the most cheerful seem to be Sikhs who monopolise the taxi-driving craft.”*

About their physical characteristics, he wrote: *“They are decorative fellows, the Sikhs, with their big beards, their big bare feet and the brilliant turbans which they try to match in conspicuousness when painting their cars.”*

A schoolteacher from Australia described her visit to India in 1947 and in particular the interaction with Sikh taxi drivers in The West Wyalong Advocate (NSW) dated October 20, 1947: *“Mrs FE Mitchell held her audience’s attention throughout. Mrs Mitchell told her listeners that she went to India to teach at the homes for Eurasian children near Darjeeling, at the foot of the Himalaya mountains.... the good manners and the efficiency of the Sikh taxi drivers impressed her, and she has a good opinion of these men.”*



Fresh Book 187 issued in 1925.

West Bengal Form No. 403 (O).
INDIA DRIVING LICENCE (WEST BENGAL)

FORM D.
(See Section 3 (1))

No. PL-3582/cal. 19 40

Name Gurnam Singh

son/daughter of (father's name) Karam Singh

of (permanent address) Rakhba, Sakha
Ludhiana.

(or) any address 25, Puddaputun Road
Calcutta.
1/A Muthab Chatterjee Street
Calcutta-20.

Date 26/10/63

Punjabis' role in revolutionary and anti-imperialist activities came to light too. A Calcutta Tramways Company driver named Genda Singh (native of Daudhar village in Ludhiana) was an organiser of the Communist Workers' Transport Union, while Inder Singh Grewal (listed in police CID records) was jailed from 1930–35.

After the Komagata Maru incident (1914) in Calcutta's Budge Budge area, some Ghadar revolutionaries settled in Calcutta, and tried to develop a network in eastern India through various means, including Punjabi literary writings. Intelligence reports from 1915–30 inferred that the Sikh taxi drivers had close connections with revolutionary groups, including Anushilan Samiti, and acted as their facilitators for transport of material.

With the introduction of diesel engines, increased running costs, taxes and high fuel prices, the transport sector started to decline, and many Sikhs shifted to Punjab. In the 1990s, several ventured out to foreign countries for new opportunities. This decline among Sikh population continues.

The end of the road for Ambassadors, the pandemic lockdown and the phase-out of 15-year-old commercial vehicles put thousands of cabbies out of business. Post-pandemic, the yellow cab count plunged to around 7,000. Many literary works celebrate the Sikh taxi drivers' contribution, but the community does not nurture a sense of abandonment.

Suchetna Chattopadhyay, a professor in the Department of History, Jadavpur University, Kolkata, fills the gap in a way. Asked recently about her experience about Sikh drivers in Kolkata, she wrote — “My late father always recalled that during his childhood, all the taxi drivers were Sikhs. As for me, I clearly remember two Sikh drivers. They

were both elderly gentlemen who spoke in flawless Bangla. I met one of them while returning home from college one evening and he told me of his love of Bangla literature, the fact that his children were taught in Bangla medium schools and the poems he wrote in Bangla on Rabindranath and others. He showed me photocopies of his writings.

I met the other elderly gentleman on a memorable evening. It was November 2018. I had just received copies of my newly printed book on Komagata Maru and Punjabi workers in Bengal from my publisher in Delhi. I was in a happy mood and had celebrated the occasion with colleagues and friends. When heading home, a friend and I hailed a taxi at the corner of Jodhpur Park. A Sikh was driving it. The coincidence struck us and we just stared at him while he kept complaining that no one followed traffic rules anymore! We were so amazed that we could not bring ourselves to tell him that I was carrying in my bag a book which was on those who had preceded him.”

My own grandfather, Major Singh Chahal, a native of Bhaini Rora village in Ludhiana, used to drive Bengali film actor Chhabi Biswas to film studios and clubs around Calcutta during 1940–55 in his Pontiac taxi. The actor was quite friendly with him. “Aae Major,” he would call him, a broad smile on his face and grandad’s. Wonderful memories!

Manjit Singh Chahal is a commerce and law graduate from Goenka College of Commerce and Business Administration and University of Calcutta. He is an advocate, tax consultant, editor, and author focused on Sikh history and Calcutta Sikh heritage research. His work was featured by BBC Punjabi in 2024. He also actively supports Gurdwara and NGO initiatives. Email: sonamanjit@gmail.com

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nishaan.nagaara@gmail.com website: <https://nishaannagaara.com>

Vaisakhi in Sikh Tradition:

Scriptural Roots and Historical Transformations

Vaisakhi occupies a distinctive and evolving position within Sikh religious history, theology, and collective identity. While popularly associated with the formation of the Khalsa in 1699 under Guru Gobind Singh, Vaisakhi's significance predates this event and is deeply rooted in Guru Nanak's teachings. The earliest scriptural reference to Vaisakhi appears in the Aad Guru Granth Sahib, where Guru Nanak reinterprets the seasonal festival as an inner spiritual awakening grounded in divine consciousness and the Shabad. This article examines the layered evolution of Vaisakhi through three pivotal Sikh Gurus: Guru Nanak, Guru Amar Das, and Guru Gobind Singh, highlighting its transformation from a spiritual metaphor to an institutional milestone and, finally, a revolutionary milestone. Using textual analysis of Gurbani and a historical examination of Sikh institutions, such as the Masand system, the study demonstrates how Vaisakhi served as a unifying mechanism for spiritual instruction, social cohesion, and ethical reform. The article further explores the theological distinction between Guru Nanak's birth in Vaisakh and his Prakash Purab in Katak, emphasizing the Sikh tradition's prioritisation of spiritual commissioning over biological birth. By situating Vaisakhi within scriptural, institutional, and political contexts, the article argues that Vaisakhi represents a continuous process of Sikh self-definition rather than a single historical event.

Introduction

Vaisakhi is widely recognised today as one of the most significant festivals in Sikhism, primarily commemorating the creation of the Khalsa by Guru Gobind Singh in 1699 (Singh, 2002; Noor, 2011; Singh & Mandair, 2023; Singh, 2024). However, such a singular association risks oversimplifying a festival whose roots extend deeply into Sikh scripture, early community organisation, and evolving theological meaning. The provided Sikh textual and historical sources reveal that Vaisakhi was neither incidental nor merely seasonal in Sikh tradition, but rather a consciously cultivated spiritual and communal moment that has been shaped across successive Guruships (Jain, 2003; Noor, 2011).

The earliest Sikh engagement with Vaisakhi emerges in the hymns of Guru Nanak, where the festival is reinterpreted not merely as an agrarian celebration, but as an opportunity for inner attunement to the Divine through the Shabad. Guru Nanak's hymns, composed in *Rāg Tukhārī*, as preserved in the Aad Guru Granth Sahib,

enunciate a spiritual reframing that challenges ritualistic observance and emphasises ethical consciousness and divine awareness as the true markers of celebration. Subsequently, Guru Amar Das institutionalised Vaisakhi as an annual congregational gathering, transforming it into a structured occasion for initiation, instruction, and inter-regional unity through the Masand system. (Noor, 2011; Chawla et al., n.d.; Manji, n.d.) This development laid the organisational foundation for Sikh collective identity (Singh & Mandair, 2023; Singh & Fenech, 2014).

Finally, Guru Gobind Singh employed the already established sanctity and mass gathering of Vaisakhi to inaugurate a radical transformation of Sikh society through the formation of the Khalsa (Singh, 2002). This act not only abolished intermediated religious authority but also redefined Sikh identity as sovereign, disciplined, and collectively responsible. Thus, Vaisakhi represents a continuum, spiritual, institutional, and revolutionary, rather than a single historical rupture.

Research Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative, text-based research methodology combining scriptural hermeneutics with historical analysis. Primary data are drawn from the Aad Guru Granth, particularly hymns attributed to Guru Nanak and Guru Arjan that explicitly reference the month of Vaisakh. These scriptural verses are examined using contextual and thematic interpretation to understand their theological and symbolic significance. The transliterations and translations in the source document serve as the basis for exegetical analysis, ensuring fidelity to Sikh doctrinal perspectives.

Secondary historical data includes descriptions of Sikh institutional practices under Guru Amar Das, notably the Masand system and the establishment of Goindval as a congregational center. These are analysed to assess the socio-organisational role of Vaisakhi in the early formation of the Sikh community. The study also employs historical contextualisation to examine Guru Gobind Singh's 1699 Vaisakhi event as both a culmination and a transformation of earlier traditions.

Rather than relying on speculative historiography, the methodology emphasises internal Sikh sources and historically grounded interpretations. Comparative chronological analysis is used to trace continuity and

change across the three Gurus, allowing Vaisakhi to be understood as a dynamic tradition shaped by evolving spiritual, ethical, and political needs of the Sikh Panth.

Results and Discussion

1. Vaisakhi in the Thought of Guru Nanak: Spiritual Reinterpretation

The earliest Sikh articulation of Vaisakhi appears in the hymns of Guru Nanak, making him the first religious figure within Sikh tradition to explicitly redefine the festival's meaning. While referring to the celebration of *Vaisakhi*, Guru Nanak outlined aspects of its spirit that is greeted and cherished by God. Guru Nanak's sermon is given in raag *tukhari* as below. Guru Nanak says:

ਵੈਸਾਖੁ ਭਲਾ ਸਾਖਾ ਵੇਸ ਕਰੇ ॥ ਧਨ ਦੇਖੈ ਹਰਿ ਦੁਆਰਿ ਆਵਹੁ ਦਇਆ ਕਰੇ ॥

vaisakh bhalaa saakhaa ves kare. dhan dekhai har duaar aavahu deaa kare.

The month of Vaisakh is beautiful; the branches adorn themselves with new attire. Seeing this beauty, the soul-bride longs and prays: 'O Lord, come to Your door and bless me with Your grace. (M. 1, SGGS, p. 1108).

This verse uses seasonal imagery to convey a spiritual truth. Vaisakh is the month of renewal, harvest, and vitality. Trees and branches become lush and green, adorned with blossoms (Singh, n.d.). Witnessing this renewal, the soul-bride is inspired to approach the Divine. When the soul sincerely turns toward God, Divine compassion flows naturally. Nature becomes a teacher, reminding the human soul to seek its Source.

Guru Nanak associates Vaisakhi not with external celebration but with the internal realisation of divine presence:

ਨਾਨਕ ਵੈਸਾਖੀ ਪ੍ਰਭੁ ਪਾਵੈ ਸੁਰਤਿ ਸਬਦਿ ਮਨੁ ਮਾਨਾ ॥

Naanak vāesaakheen parabh paavæ surat sabad man maanaa.

O Nanak, in the month of Vaisakh, one attains the Divine; through awareness (surat) attuned to the Shabad, the mind becomes fulfilled. (M. 1, AGGS, p. 1108)

Guru Nanak says that Vaisakh, the season of ripening and fulfillment, symbolises the time when a seeker can truly realise God. This realisation does not occur through rituals or outward acts; rather, when Surat (conscious awareness) is focused, Shabad (Divine Word / cosmic wisdom) becomes the guiding force, and the mind (man) accepts, rests, and finds contentment. When awareness merges with Shabad, the restless mind becomes peaceful and satisfied.

Guru Nanak's verses reflect a radical theological move. Vaisakhi becomes meaningful only when human consciousness aligns with the Shabad, rejecting ritualism in favour of spiritual authenticity. Guru Nanak's use of seasonal imagery, blossoming branches and renewal serves as a metaphor rather than a mandate, symbolizing inner transformation. Thus, Vaisakhi is not merely commemorated; it is realised.

2. Guru Nanak's Birth and Prakash Purab: Theological Distinction

The document highlights a critical yet often misunderstood distinction: Guru Nanak was born on 14 April 1469 in Vaisakh (Singh, 2021; Dhillon, 2021), yet Sikh tradition predominantly celebrates his Prakash Purab in Katak (Purewal, 2021; Historian, 1932; Dhillon, 2024a–b). This shift reflects Sikh theology's emphasis on divine commissioning over biological birth. The Katak Puranmashi marks the moment Guru Nanak emerged from the Bein rivulet, having received his divine mandate to proclaim the oneness of humanity and the Divine (Lal, 2018a–b, 2019).

This distinction underscores Sikhism's rejection of natal sanctity in favour of spiritual awakening. Theologically, the Guru's authority is derived not from birth but from divine illumination. Consequently, Vaisakhi retains spiritual importance without becoming a biographical focal point, preserving its broader ethical and communal significance (Lal, 2018a–b).

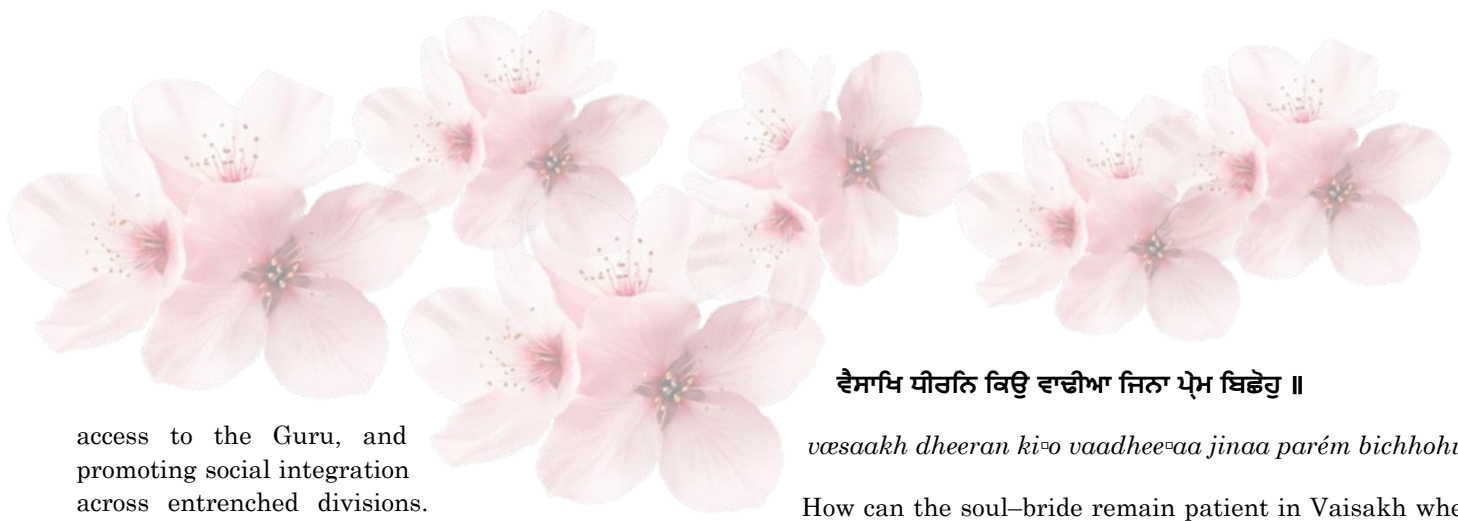
3. Institutionalisation under Guru Amar Das

A major transformation of Vaisakhi occurred in 1561 when Guru Amar Das formally institutionalised it as an annual Sikh gathering at Goindval. This decision, influenced by the Masand Bhai Paro Julka, strategically designated Vaisakhi as a unifying national congregation (Noor, 2011). Guru Amar Das had already established 22 dioceses and appointed trained male and female Masands to guide Sikh communities across Mughal territories (Singh & Mandair, 2023a; Manji, n.d.).

Vaisakhi thus became an administrative and pedagogical platform where Sikhs from diverse regions, castes, and backgrounds gathered for initiation, instruction, and collective worship. The Masands ensured ethical conduct, humility, and service, preventing exploitation of religious devotion. This structure transformed Vaisakhi into a mechanism for social integration and religious accountability (Singh, 2002; Chawla et al., n.d.).

4. Social Integration and Ethical Community Formation

Until 1699, Vaisakhi served four major functions: fostering congregational unity, initiating new Sikhs, providing direct



access to the Guru, and promoting social integration across entrenched divisions.

Noor (2011) reports that this practice enhanced how people from antagonistic backgrounds experienced kinship through shared spirituality. This was a radical social experiment in early modern South Asia that challenged caste hierarchy, religious exclusivism, and ethnic segregation.

The Masand-led organization ensured that Vaisakhi was not a chaotic festivity but a disciplined spiritual assembly. This model illustrates Sikhism's early success in combining mysticism with social reform, a synthesis that distinguished it from both ascetic withdrawal and ritual orthodoxy.

5. The Khalsa and the Revolutionary Transformation of Vaisakhi

Guru Gobind Singh's decision to inaugurate the Khalsa on Vaisakhi in 1699 was neither accidental nor purely symbolic. By this time, Vaisakhi had accumulated spiritual authority, institutional legitimacy, and mass participation. The abolition of the Masand system and the introduction of Khande-di-Pahul marked a decisive shift from mediated to direct initiation (Singh & Fenech, 2014).

Declaring the Khalsa Panth as the Guru's corporal successor fundamentally restructured Sikh authority. Vaisakhi henceforth symbolized collective sovereignty, ethical discipline, and resistance to oppression. This moment transformed Vaisakhi from a congregational festival into a revolutionary anniversary, embedding courage, equality, and responsibility into Sikh identity (Singh, 2002).

6. Poetic and Devotional Continuities

Later Gurus, particularly Guru Arjan, continued to employ Vaisakhi imagery to express longing for divine union. In the hymns of Guru Arjan, Vaisakh emerges not merely as a spring month but as a profound spiritual state. Outwardly, Vaisakh is a time of renewal, fields ripen, nature adorns itself, and life appears abundant. Yet the Guru introduces a deeper paradox by saying:

ਵੈਸਾਖਿ ਧੀਰਨਿ ਕਿਉ ਵਾਢੀਆ ਜਿਨਾ ਪ੍ਰੇਮ ਬਿਛੋਹੁ ॥

væsaakh dheeran ki'o vaadheeªaa jinaa parém bichhohu.

How can the soul-bride remain patient in Vaisakh when she is separated from her Beloved? (M. 5, AGGS, p. 133)

Vaisakh is traditionally a month of joy, abundance, and renewal in the Indian subcontinent. Nature is at its most vibrant, fields ripen, flowers bloom, and life feels celebratory. Guru Arjan Dev deliberately places this verse in such a season to highlight a spiritual contrast. While the external world rejoices, the soul-bride (the human soul) experiences restlessness if she is separated from her Beloved (the Divine). The imagery of the bride and Beloved recurs in Gurbani, expressing the intimate, loving relationship between the soul and Waheguru. Separation (bichhoh) here is not physical, but spiritual, caused by ego, forgetfulness, or lack of divine awareness. The verse gently reminds seekers that true fulfillment arises not from seasons, rituals, or circumstances, but from union with the Eternal Beloved.

Guru Arjan Dev Ji teaches that the true beauty of Vaisakh dawns only when the Saint (True Guru) enters one's life, symbolizing the Guru, divine wisdom, and holy companionship. Through such grace, the meeting with the Lord becomes possible.

ਵੈਸਾਖੁ ਸੁਹਾਵਾ ਤਾਂ ਲਗੈ ਜਾ ਸੰਤੁ ਭੇਟੈ ਹਰਿ ਸੋਇ ॥

væsaakh suhaavaa taan lagæ jaa sant bhétæ har soé.

The month of Vaisakh appears beautiful and pleasant only when the Saint enables the meeting with that Lord. (M. 5, AGGS, p. 134)

Thus, Vaisakh transforms from a season of separation into one of fulfillment. It becomes pleasant and auspicious when the ego dissolves, guidance is received, and divine love is realized. Guru Arjan Dev Ji reminds us that spiritual spring does not arrive with the calendar; it blossoms within, when the soul finally encounters its Beloved through grace, devotion, and enlightened company. In this way, the verse gently reminds us that true auspiciousness is not seasonal but spiritual. Time becomes beautiful when guided by wisdom, humility, and divine grace, leading the soul into living communion with the Eternal Beloved.



These Verses describing the bride's impatience and joy upon meeting the Beloved reinforce Vaisakhi's enduring metaphorical richness. These hymns demonstrate that even after institutional and political transformations, Vaisakhi retained its mystical core, union with the Divine through grace and guidance.

7. Vaisakhi in Sikh History

Vaisakhi holds profound significance in Sikh history beyond its momentous 1699 establishment of the Khalsa by Guru Gobind Singh (Noor, 2011; Singh & Mandair, 2023). After 1708, when the Guru passed away, Vaisakhi evolved into a cornerstone of Sikh identity and resistance during turbulent times.

Throughout the 18th century, as Sikhs faced severe persecution under Mughal and Afghan rulers, Vaisakhi gatherings became crucial organizing moments. The tradition of Sarbat Khalsa, collective decision-making assemblies, often convened during Vaisakhi, where Sikhs would gather at Amritsar's Golden Temple to discuss community affairs and military strategies. These assemblies transformed Vaisakhi from purely spiritual observance into a platform for political and social mobilization.

During Maharaja Ranjit Singh's reign (1799–1839), Vaisakhi celebrations gained renewed splendour. The Sikh Empire marked the festival with grand processions and military displays, reinforcing both religious devotion and political sovereignty. The day became intertwined with Punjabi identity, celebrating both the spring harvest and Sikh martial traditions.

The colonial period saw Vaisakhi take on new dimensions. The tragic Jallianwala Bagh massacre occurred on April 13, 1919, during Vaisakhi celebrations, when British troops killed hundreds of peaceful gatherers (Pletcher, 2025). This atrocity transformed Vaisakhi into a symbol of resistance against oppression and strengthened its association with justice and sacrifice.

Post-independence, Vaisakhi has remained central to Sikh religious life while expanding globally. Sikhs worldwide mark the day with processions (nagar kirtans), community service, and renewal of Khalsa vows through Amrit Sanskar ceremonies. The festival continues to embody the principles Guru Gobind Singh established: courage, equality, and devotion, while adapting to contemporary contexts, serving as both spiritual renewal and cultural celebration for the global Sikh diaspora.

Conclusion

The evolution of Vaisakhi within Sikh tradition reflects a remarkable synthesis of spirituality, institution-building, and ethical revolution. Far from being a static festival, Vaisakhi emerged as a dynamic process shaped by successive Gurus to meet the evolving needs of the Sikh community.

Guru Nanak's reinterpretation transformed Vaisakhi into an inner spiritual awakening grounded in Shabad-consciousness. Guru Amar Das institutionalized this vision, using Vaisakhi as a tool for social cohesion, ethical instruction, and organized religious life. Guru Gobind Singh, in turn, elevated Vaisakhi into a defining moment of collective sovereignty by creating the Khalsa.

The theological distinction between Guru Nanak's birth in Vaisakh and his Prakash Purab in Katak further underscores Sikhism's prioritization of divine mission over biological event. Vaisakhi thus transcends commemoration and becomes a living principle, renewal of faith, discipline, and communal responsibility.

By tracing Vaisakhi's layered development, this article demonstrates that its enduring relevance lies in its capacity to integrate spiritual realization with social transformation. Vaisakhi stands not merely as a historical anniversary, but as a continuing call to embody Sikh ideals of equality, courage, humility, and divine awareness in collective life.

Devinder Pal Singh, Ph.D., is a distinguished teacher-researcher and a profound scholar of Sikhism. Currently, he serves as a Professor of Religious Studies at the Arihanta Institute in San Jose, California, USA. His work explores themes such as Gurbani interpretation, Sikh philosophy, interfaith dialogue, spirituality and the relevance of Sikh teachings in modern scientific and societal contexts. He has contributed extensively to academic and popular journals.

Harbans Lal was awarded a D.Litt. degree by Guru Nanak Dev University after earning his Ph.D. from University of Chicago. Before leaving for the USA in 1956 for higher education, he served as the President of the All India Sikh Students Federation. He was active in Sikh politics, serving as the Joint Secretary of Shiromani Akali Dal. The Shiromani Gurdwara Committee honoured him with the "Bhai Sahib" title, and the Akal Takhat honored him with the Siropa. He received the Nishan-e-Khalsa Award from the Anandpur Foundation in 1999.

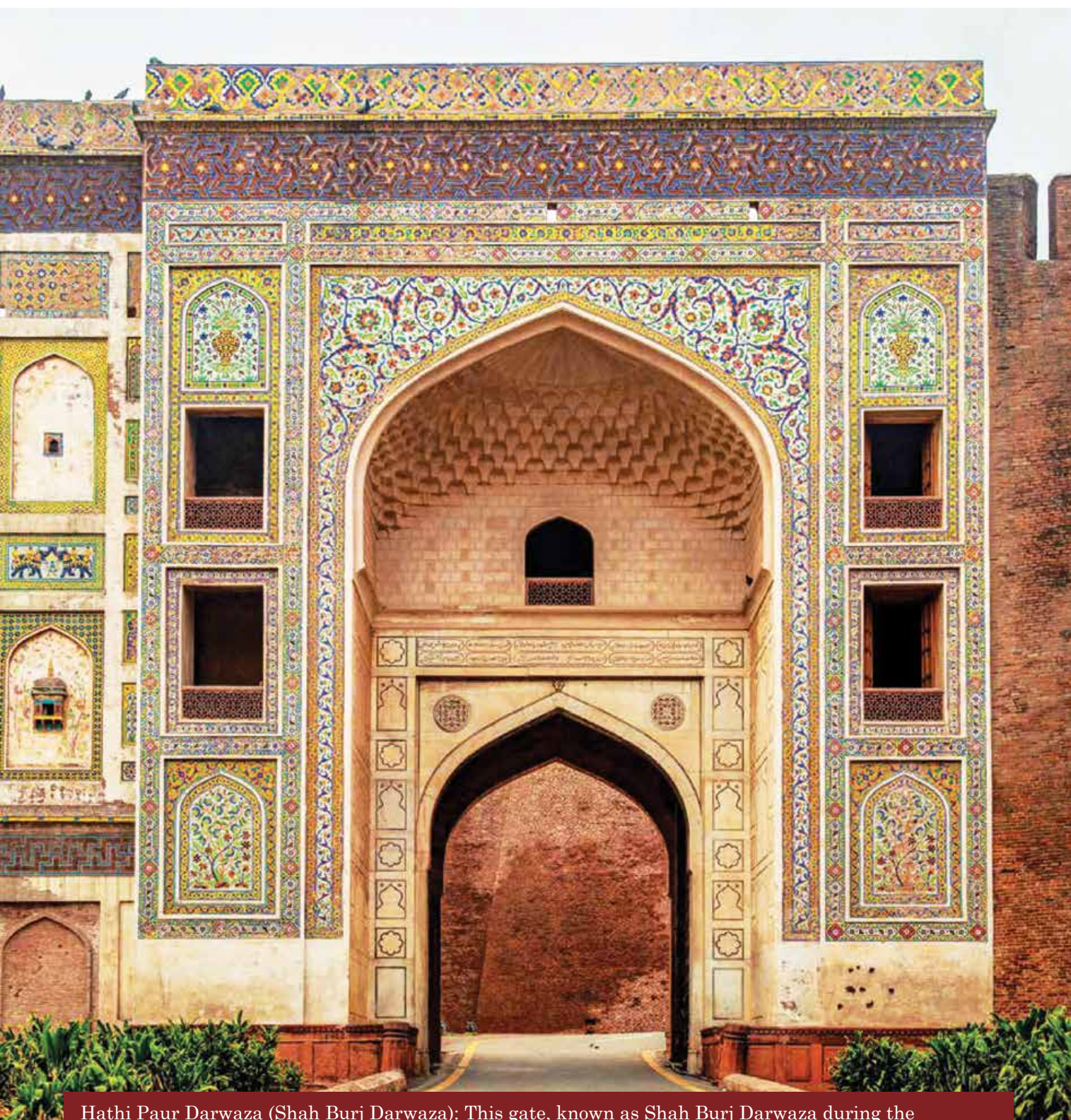
The Lahore Fort and its Sikh History

The Lahore Fort, also known as Shahi Qila, is a historic fortress in Lahore that played an important role during the period of the Sikh Empire. Although the fort was originally developed and expanded under the Mughal Empire, it gained new political significance when Maharaja Ranjit Singh captured Lahore in 1799. After taking control of the city, Ranjit Singh made Lahore the capital of the Sikh Empire and used Lahore Fort as a royal residence, military headquarters, and administrative center. In 1801, he was proclaimed Maharaja in Lahore, marking the formal beginning of Sikh imperial rule in the region. During Sikh rule, the fort remained a symbol of power and authority. Several Mughal structures within the complex were repaired, reused, or adapted for new purposes, while nearby areas were developed to support royal ceremonies and governance.

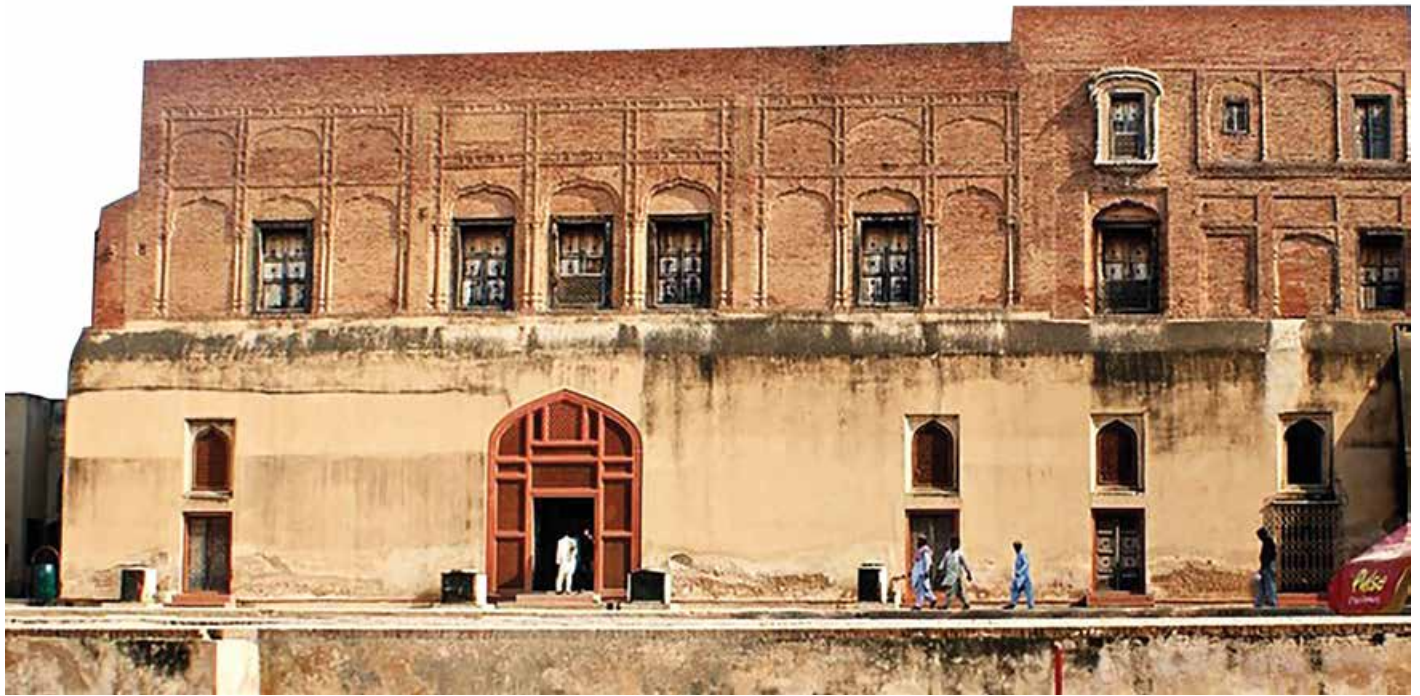
Athdara

Historically, Athdara sits near the famous Sheesh Mahal within Lahore Fort. It has eight arched openings, which is why it is called Athdara. It was used as Maharaja Ranjit Singh's court during Sikh rule in Lahore and the pavilion is built mainly of white marble with red sandstone details. Maharaja Ranjit Singh separated the Athdara lower courtyard into his Kachehri, leaving the Samman Burj upper courtyard as the zananakhana. He also provided an entrance from the lower to the upper court through a ramp located at the southwest end of the lower Athdara court. The ceilings and interiors include decorative mirror work and frescoes, blending Mughal and Sikh architectural styles.





Hathi Paur Darwaza (Shah Burj Darwaza): This gate, known as Shah Burj Darwaza during the Mughal era, served as a private entrance to the fort, particularly for the royal women. Jahangir laid the foundation in 1624, and Shah Jahan redesigned it between 1631 and 1632. Elephants could travel directly to the fort, as the current road leading up to it did not exist during the Sikh era. The Bhangi (Zamzama) cannon was placed outside this gate by Bhangi Sardars – from where Charhat Singh Sukerchakia (1721 – 1774), grandfather of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, took it to Gujranwala in 1765. In the Sikh era, it was called Hathi Paur Darwaza (Door of Elephant Feet).



Haveli Maharani Jindan: The ground floor of this haveli was constructed by Akbar as his Diwan Khana. A large Haveli was built on the first floor for Maharani Jind Kaur (1817 – 1863) by Maharaja Ranjit Singh. She was the youngest wife of Maharaja Ranjit Singh and the Regent of the Sikh Kingdom from 1843 to 1847, at the end of which the British exiled her from the Lahore Fort. Today, the ground floor of this haveli houses the Sikh Armory Gallery, while the first floor exhibits the splendors of the Princess Bamba Sutherland collection that she inherited from her father, Maharaja Duleep Singh – most of the paintings in this collection were done by August Schoefft based on pencil sketches he made at the Lahore Darbar from 1841 to 1842 and then colour-painted on return to Europe. A beautiful painting of Maharani Jindan (see painting below) is now on display in the Princess Bamba Collection’s first floor museum in her haveli.



Maharani Jind Kaur was the last queen of the Sikh Empire and the wife of Maharaja Ranjit Singh. After her husband’s death in 1839, she became the regent for her young son, Duleep Singh. Known for her courage and political skill, she strongly opposed British interference in Punjab’s affairs. During the period leading up to the First Anglo–Sikh War, she played an important role in rallying the Sikh army. However, after the Sikh defeat, the British saw her as a threat. She was imprisoned and later exiled from Punjab. Despite these hardships, she continued to resist British authority and eventually escaped to Nepal.

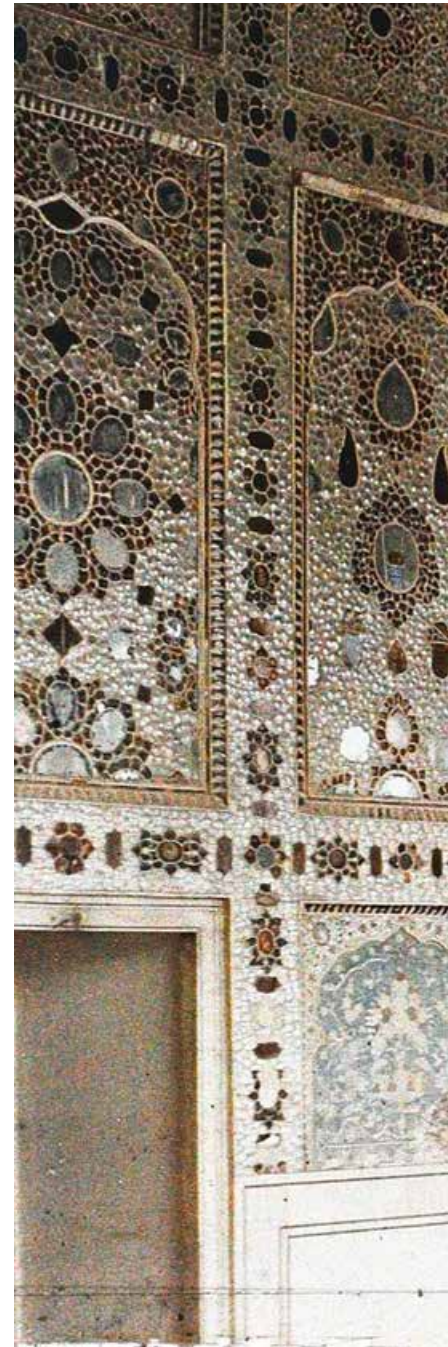
Maharani Jind Kaur is remembered as a symbol of resistance and bravery. Her life reflects determination, leadership, and a strong will to defend her kingdom against colonial rule.

Samman Burj Badshahi (Shah Burj, Sheesh Mahal)

Akbar built the basements of the Sheesh Mahal, and Jahangir laid the foundations of the buildings on top of the cellars in 1624. Shah Jahan continued Jahangir's design until 1631 but then abruptly changed it. Shah Jahan completed the new design and its upper storey in 1632 as the residence of his Empress Mumtaz Mahal, but she died before it could be completed. It was known as Shah Burj during the Mughal era. In the Sikh era, it was known as Samman and Musamman (Octagonal) Burj Badshahi, while the British referred to it as Sheesh Mahal.

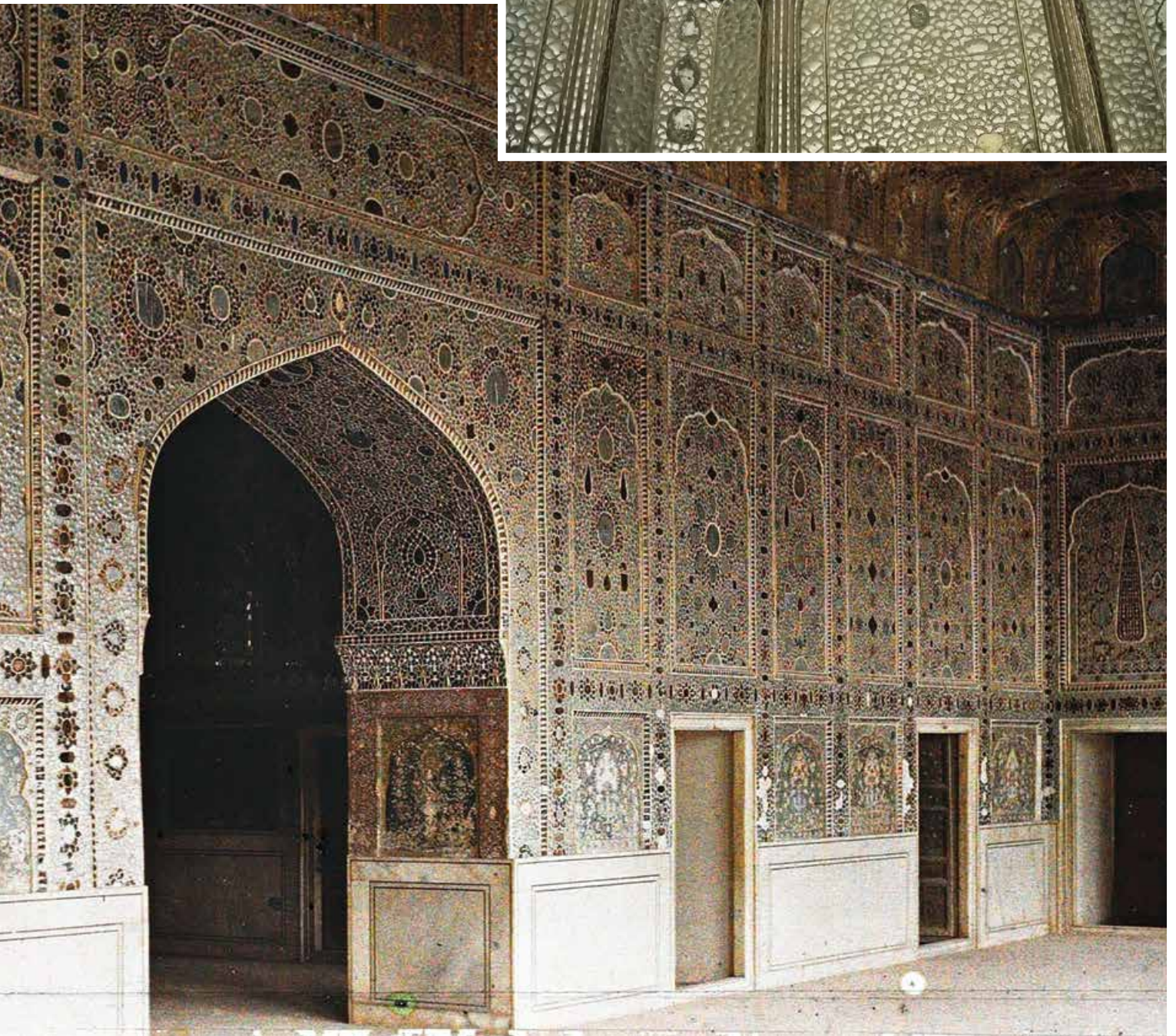
The installation ceremonies of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, Maharaja Sher Singh, and Maharaja Duleep Singh were held here, as well as the 1849 transfer of power from the Sikh Kingdom to the British Empire.

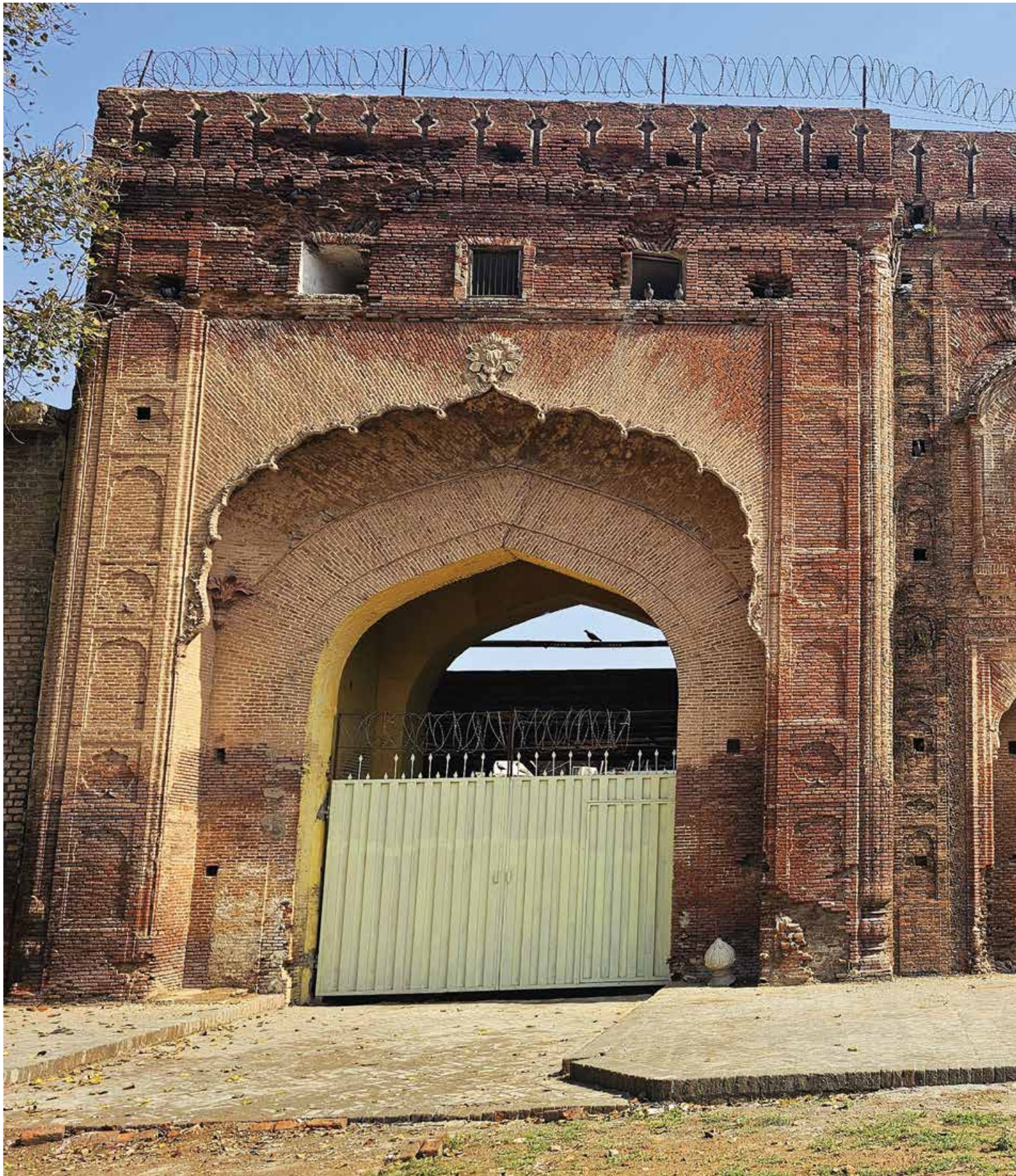
This is also where Maharaja Ranjit Singh died in 1839. Its floor is higher than the adjoining Athdhara courtyard. This semi-octagonal structure was the primary day residence of Maharaja Ranjit Singh and was part of the zananakhana, even though he mainly slept at night in

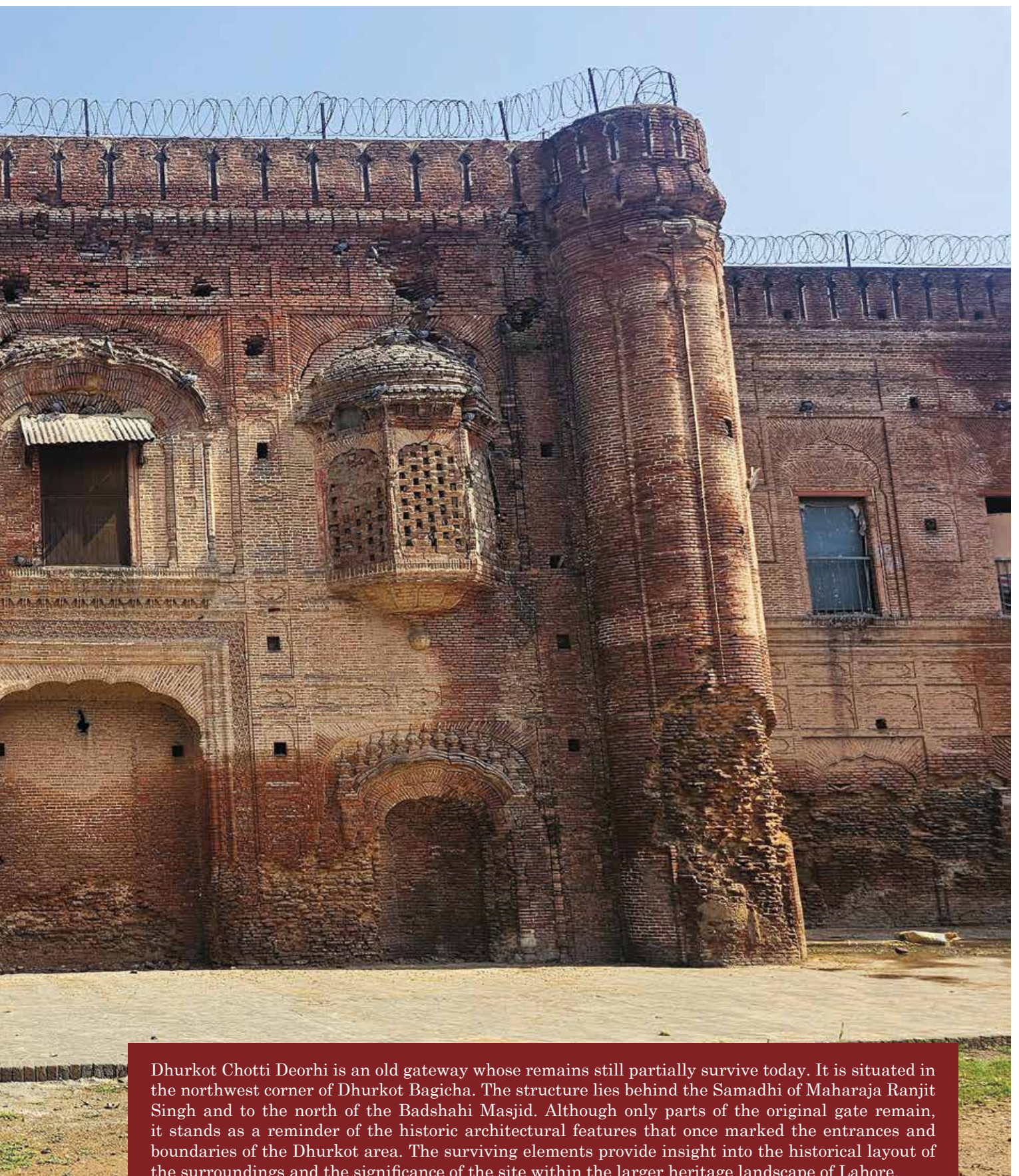


the Vaddi Khwabgah. The Kangra school murals at its front, covering the entrance courtyard, date back to the Sikh era. The roof mirror work, featuring Aleppo glass, dates back to the Shah Jahan era and underwent repairs at various points during the Sikh era.

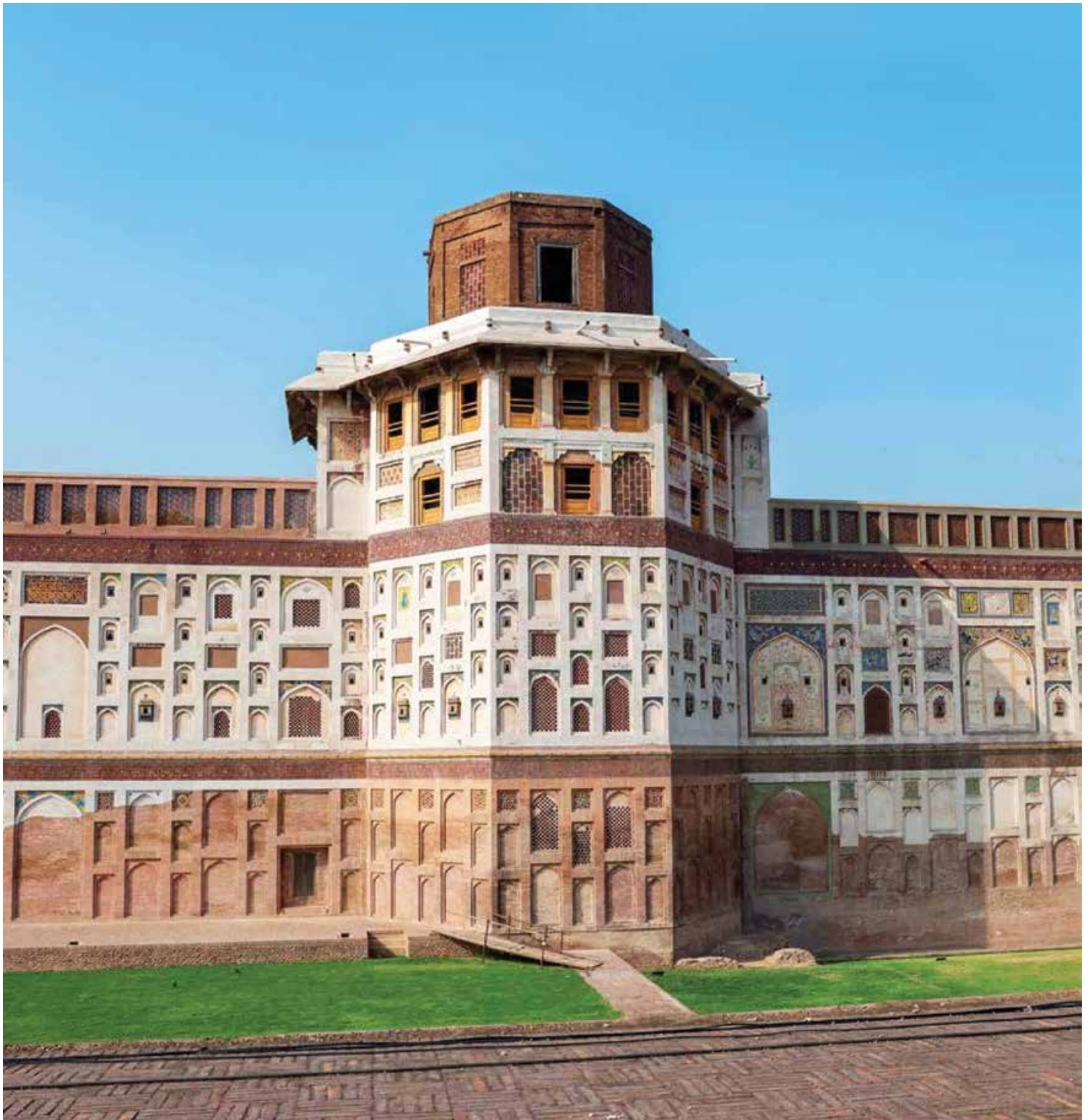
The water for the fountains in the Sheesh Mahal complex came from the well just south of the Makhtab Khan, the well west of Paen Bagh, and the well in the Athdhara courtyard.





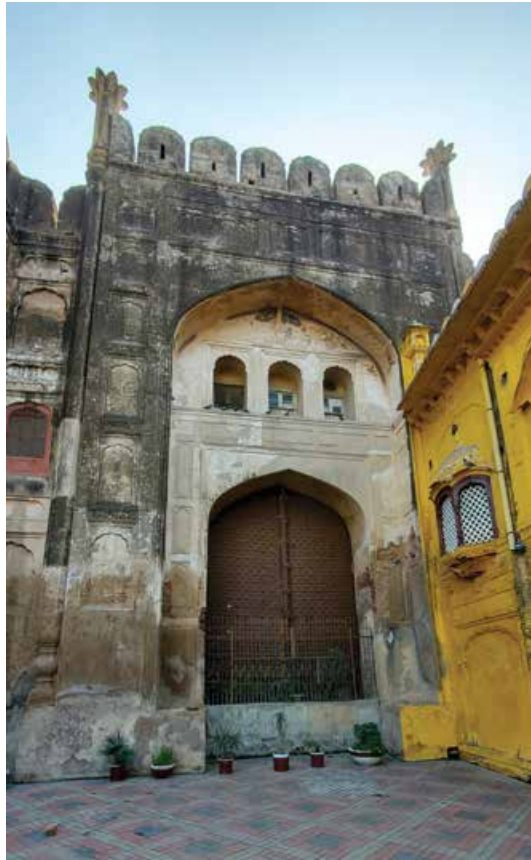


Dhurkot Chotti Deorhi is an old gateway whose remains still partially survive today. It is situated in the northwest corner of Dhurkot Bagicha. The structure lies behind the Samadhi of Maharaja Ranjit Singh and to the north of the Badshahi Masjid. Although only parts of the original gate remain, it stands as a reminder of the historic architectural features that once marked the entrances and boundaries of the Dhurkot area. The surviving elements provide insight into the historical layout of the surroundings and the significance of the site within the larger heritage landscape of Lahore.



Burj Siah (Kala Burj)

This semi-octagonal tower is located at the northwest corner of the Khilwat Khana quadrangle. Akbar initially built its basement, and Jahangir completed the tower in the early 1600s, just before the construction of the Begum Shahi mosque in 1611, just east of the fort complex. It was the most significant building constructed by Jahangir within the Lahore Fort. Its top storey is believed to have been constructed during the Sikh era and was called Burj Siah (also known as Kala Burj). The frescos are from the early Mughal (1605 – 1611) and Sikh periods. The ceiling of the tower area features some of the finest frescoes from the time of Jahangir, including depictions of birds and Christian angels. The third Jesuit mission of 1595 stayed in this tower, and William Finch vividly describes the frescos in it in his 1611 account published in Foster (1921).



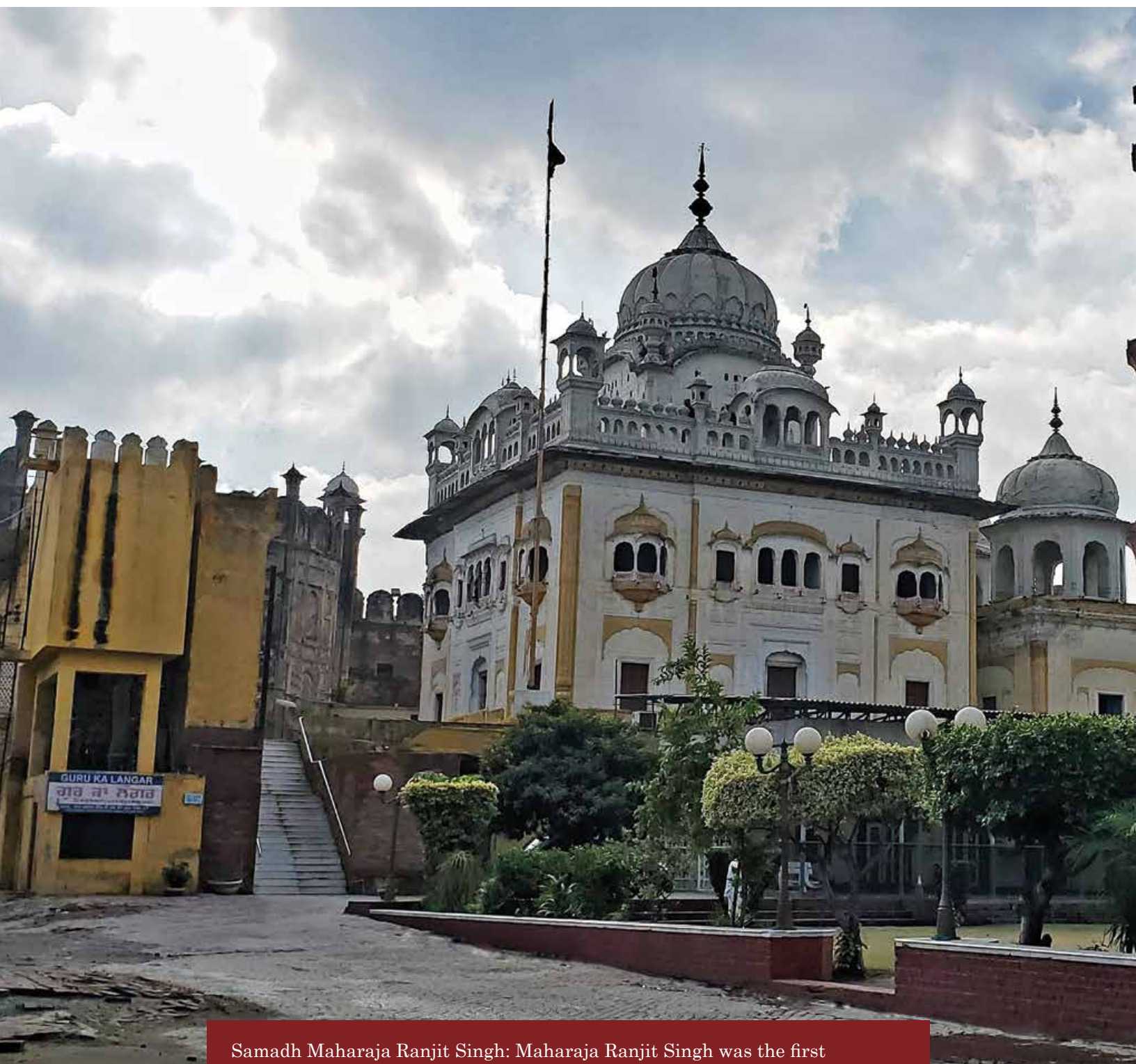
Roshnai Darwaza

This gate, meaning the Gate of Light, connects Hazuri Bagh with Dhurkot Bagicha and the Ravi River tributary that flowed by the minarets of the Badshahi Masjid. It was the main entrance to Hazuri Bagh and was considered the portico of the fort. Kanwar Naunihal Singh (1821 – 1840), eldest son of Maharaja Kharak Singh, died while returning from his father's funeral when the Samadhwala Darwaza fell on him as per Umdat ut Tawarikh (Daftar IV–1840, pp 121 to 125). Other accounts indicate it happened under this Roshnai gate.

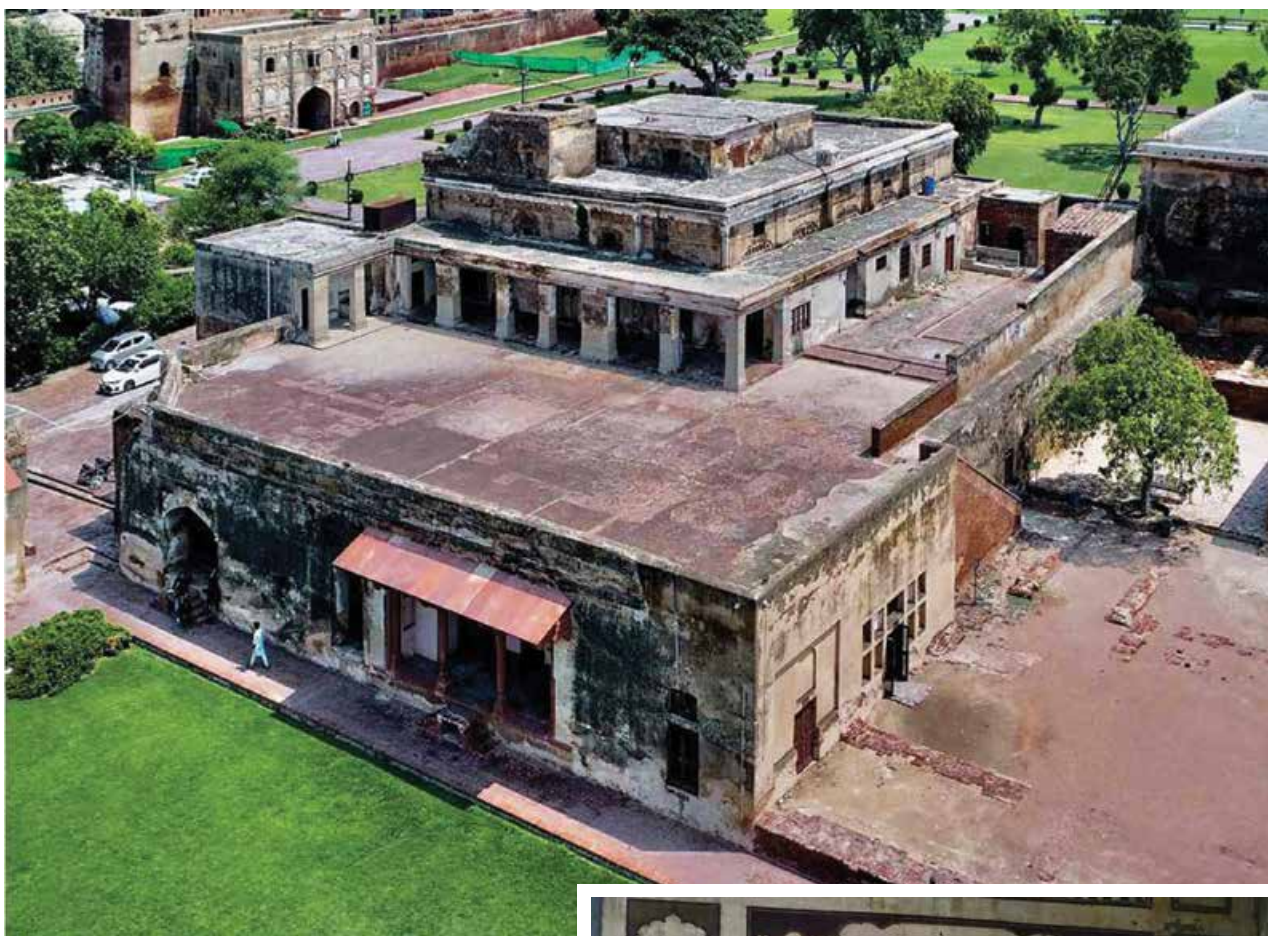


Gurdwara Dera Sahib

Gurdwara Dera Sahib (Dharamsal Panjvin Patshahi): Martyrdom place of Siri Guru Arjan Sahib (1563–1606), the Fifth Sikh Guru, after imprisonment and torture at Lal Khoo (inside Mochi Darwaza in Lahore) by Chandu Shah at the order of Jahangir. He disappeared in the Ravi river, which flowed past the fort at that time.



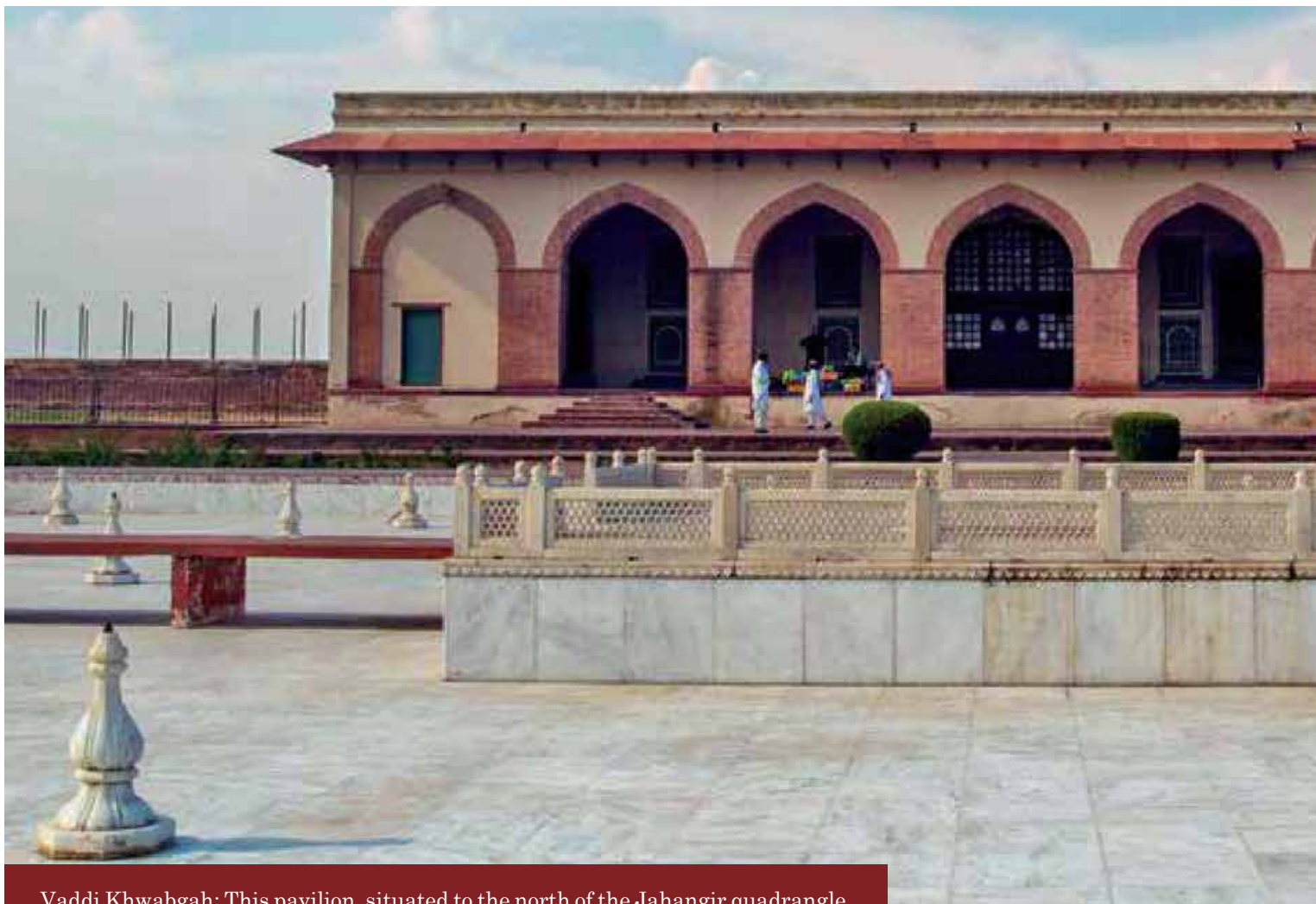
Samadh Maharaja Ranjit Singh: Maharaja Ranjit Singh was the first Sikh Maharaja (1780 – 1839). He ruled Punjab from 1801 to 1839 and was cremated here in Dhurkot Bagicha. His Samadh was built between 1839 and 1849. He transformed Punjab into a global superpower in the 19th century.



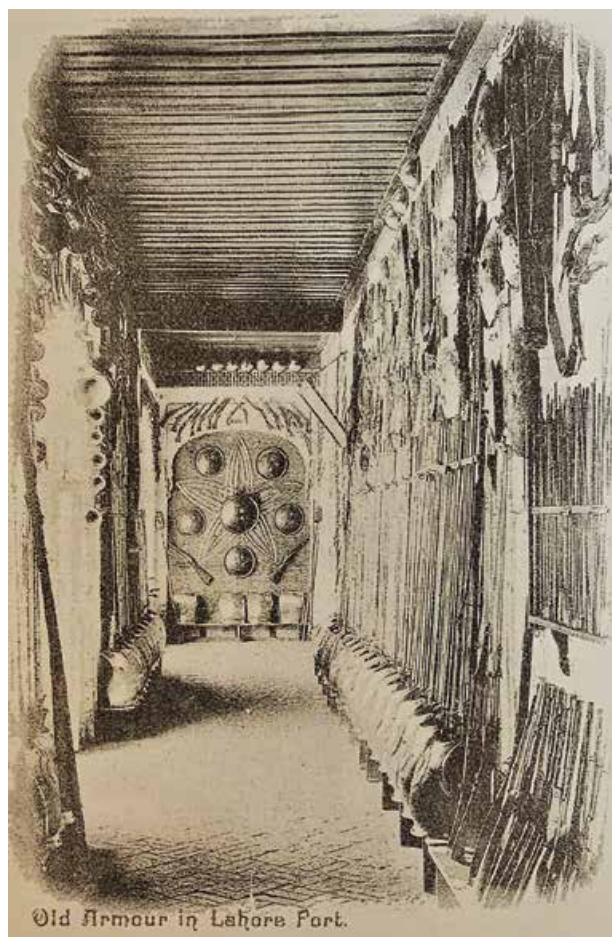
Sikh Era Haveli on top of Akbari Building:

Sikh Era Haveli on top of Akbari Building: This haveli is located just east of the Diwan-e-Aam Burj and is connected to the Takhat Gah at its rear. Its ground floor dates back to the Akbari period – it was used in the Sikh era for Daftar Fakir Azizuddin. The first floor dates back to the Sikh era and features a hammam in its southeast corner. The small second floor was also built in the Sikh era. The first floor Haveli appears to be designed for pleasure rather than as a residence. On a Sikh-era painting, it is marked as Haveli Sarkaran Kashmir. It is a Sikh era haveli, but its association with Maharaja Kharak Singh is doubtful other than the speculation that since Maharaja Kharak Singh lived in the Takhat Gah for only a short period (before moving to his home in Lohari Mandi), he may have built the hammam in this building as it was connected to the Takhat Gah. The structure also reflects a blend of Mughal and Sikh architectural traditions, visible in its spatial arrangement, decorative features, and functional adaptation over successive historical periods.





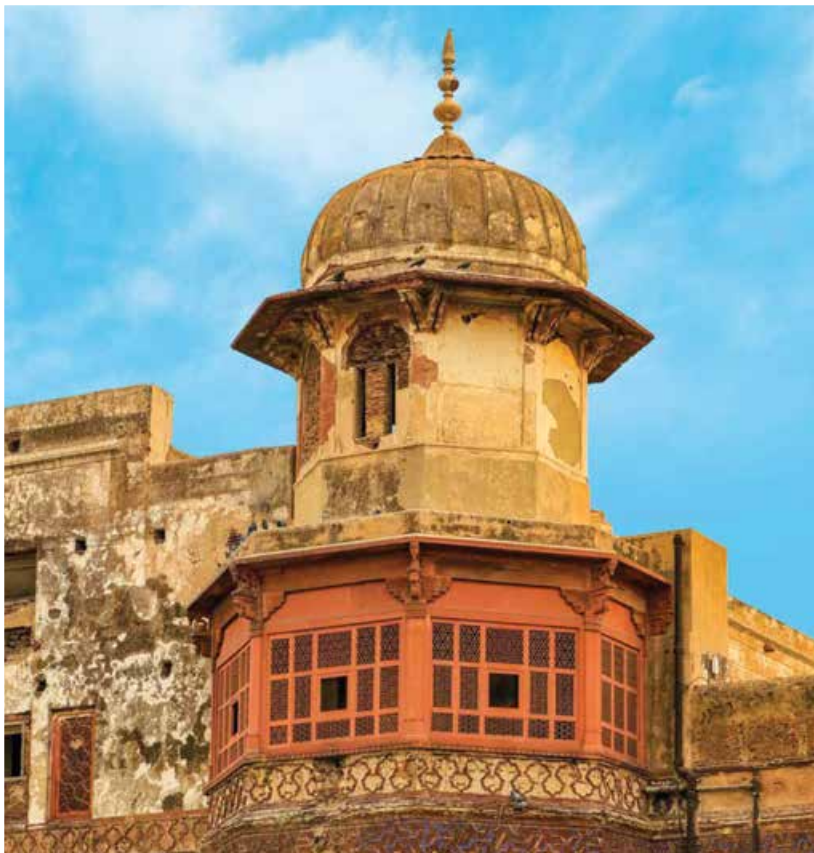
Vaddi Khwabgah: This pavilion, situated to the north of the Jahangir quadrangle, was first constructed by Akbar for his son, Prince Salim, as his sleeping chamber. During Jahangir's time, it was likely a hall for private audiences, also known as the Diwan-e-Khas. It was used as the primary sleeping chamber by Maharaja Ranjit Singh. Ajit Singh Sandhewalia, in 1843, after murdering Maharaja Sher Singh at Shah Bilawal Baradari in the vicinity of Lahore, unsuccessfully tried to jump from this place over the fort wall with a rope to escape from the Sikh army, which had in anger at the murder of the Maharaja raided the fort – he injured himself in the process. He was caught by the Khalsa army soldiers at the bottom of the fort's wall. The British rebuilt the front porch. In the past, it served as the Sikh Armory Museum (now shifted to the ground floor of Maharani Jindan Haveli) and currently houses the Mughal Museum.



Old Sikh Armory

When the British took control of the fort in 1846, they relocated the captured Sikh armory to this long corridor on the southern side of the Sheesh Mahal courtyard. The photograph on the top right is from 1860, published by Thornton and Kipling (1876), while the picture below it was taken by the author in 2024 – note that it is the same corridor and the same balcony at the west end of the corridor. Thornton and Kipling also published an inventory of the Sikh armory. Most of these arms and accompaniments (except the battle axe of Siri Guru Gobind Singh Sahib) are now on display at the Sikh Armory Gallery on the ground floor of Haveli Maharani Jindan. Vogel (1911) believes that the current long corridor was built during the Sikh era in place of the then dilapidated seven sleeping apartments constructed originally by Shah Jahan, which had views of the walled city and Shahi Bagicha.





Burj Sarkan

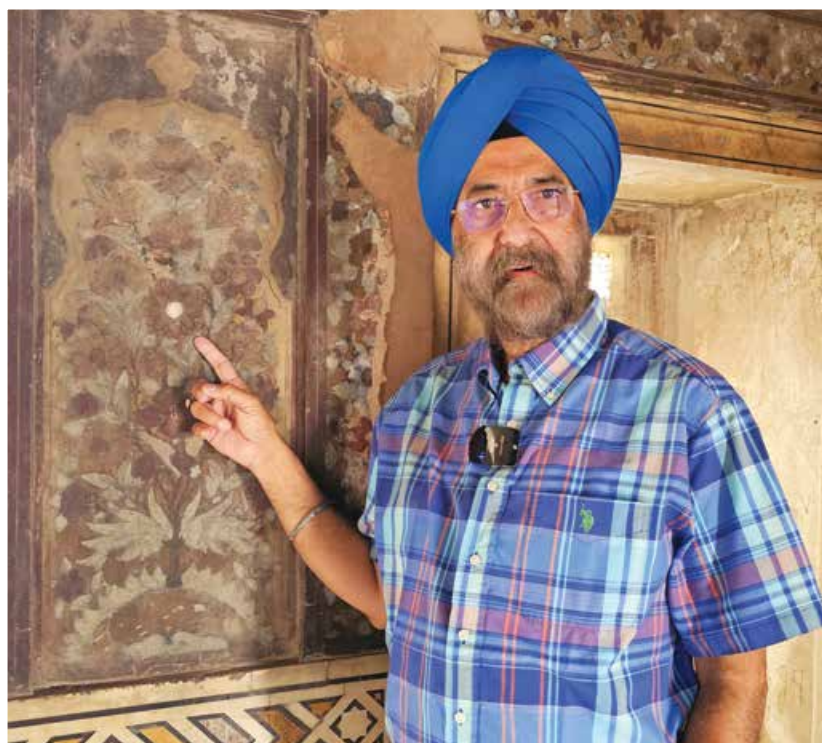
Burj Sarkan (alternatively referred to as Lal Burj, or the Red Pavilion/Tower) built during the Mughal period and later adapted during the Sikh era, the Burj Sarkan reflects the layered history of the fort complex. It is a three-story octagonal pavilion featuring tile mosaic and fresco work.

The topmost story was added later during the Sikh Empire. Its elevated position offered privacy and strategic views of the surrounding courtyard. The structure is believed to have been modified to suit Moran Sarkan's residence, combining defensive architecture with domestic use.

Today, it stands as an important reminder of the cultural blending that occurred under Maharaja Ranjit Singh's patronage within the Lahore Fort complex in historic Lahore. It remains a symbol of architectural continuity, artistic evolution, and imperial transformation over centuries today.



Baradari Sangmarmar (Shah Jahan Khwabgah): is located south of the Charbagh in the Shah Jahan Quadrangle, originally featured a marble façade. It is the oldest of all the buildings from the Shah Jahan era in the fort. Shah Jahan built it in 1633 as a royal residence called Shah Jahan Khwabgah, and it was used in a similar manner during the Sikh era. It has 11 openings on its north side facing the Charbagh of Shah Jahan Quadrangle. Nearly all the surviving fresco work in this pavilion dates back to the Sikh period. A huge fresco of a Sikh prince sitting opposite a girl, possibly framed on the upper terrace of the Shalimar Garden, still exists on the western wall. The British stripped the building of most of its marble façade, but some remnants of the marble facade can be seen at the front near the top of the east and west chambers.



Flower said to be painted by Maharaja Duleep Singh at Sheesh Mehal: The last decorated room towards the east end of the central archway of the Sheesh Mahal still has a flower on the back wall painted by Maharaja Duleep Singh (1838 – 1893) before he left the Lahore Fort in 1849. The photographs show the flower that he probably drew. It is bigger and more elegant than any other flower drawn in the room, & has a shiny metallic center. There may have been a gem placed at the flower's center but is now replaced with a shiny metal, possibly silver. This rare surviving motif reflects the young Maharaja's artistic exposure at Lahore Court, combining delicate craftsmanship, symbolic floral aesthetics, and subtle European influences visible in its composition and detailing finishing.

Samadh Maharani Jind Kaur: Maharani Jind Kaur (1817–1863), the youngest wife of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, served as Regent of the Sikh Kingdom, before the British exiled her from the Lahore Fort. She was the mother of Maharaja Duleep Singh. Her granddaughter, Princess Bamba Sutherland, interred her grandmother's ashes here in 1924, across the Samadh of Kanwar Naunihal Singh. She built a small, 18-inch-high octagonal platform to mark the Samadh. The Samadh was inadvertently demolished around 2016 to make way for rooms for pilgrims. The now demolished Samadh has been geolocated to a room.



Dr. Tarunjit Singh Butalia is the author of the acclaimed travel memoir book "My Journey Home: Going Back to Lehnda Punjab" and has deep roots in Charda and Lehnda Punjab. He is a faculty member at The Ohio State University in the US, & is a Director of Jeevay Sanjha Punjab.

Indian independence came with a hefty price: a bloody partition in which a million people were killed, and many millions more were displaced from their homes. Partition led to an unprecedented mass migration and refugee crisis. Muslim refugees crowd into train compartments and even cling to the roof as they travel from the New Delhi region toward Pakistan on September 26, 1947, in the aftermath of India's independence and partition on August 15.

(courtesy: Associated Press)





Savage Partition

1947 was a cataclysmic year for India but particularly for the two provinces in the West and East which were savagely partitioned by cynical politicians both from Britain and India. While the Bengals had been briefly separated earlier in the century, the Punjab had been an irrevocable single entity for aeons. The artificial partition line between West and East Punjab zig-zagged through farms and open fields and plunged India into its greatest and worst communal crises, raising new barriers of fear, and hostility between the major communities in India, which has tragically persisted ever since.

The following extract is from the book '1947: A Soldier's Story', which was published in 1997, from the records of Maj Gen Mohindar Singh Chopra, Commander 123 Infantry Brigade, charged with the responsibility of securing a (hostile) frontier, protecting millions of refugees fleeing West to East and vice versa, establishing the new border crossing (at Wagah) and rehabilitating victims of the tragedy.

That the Sikhs were utterly opposed to partition of the Punjab is well-recorded history, the Panthic Pratinidhi board fully supporting Sir Khizr Hyat Khan's Unionist Party, which had rallied against the Muslim League's relentless pressures for creating Pakistan. The British Cabinet Mission, which visited India in the spring of 1946 were impressed by the arguments marshalled by the Sikh leaders but could not reconcile these with the extremist stance of the Muslim League and duplicity of the Congress Party. The Sikh leader, Master Tara Singh stated that he was for a united India but if Pakistan was conceded he was for a separate Sikh state with the right to federate with either India or Pakistan. The Sikh state would comprise the entire Jullundur and Lahore divisions, together with Hissar, Karnal and Simla districts of the Ambala division, as also the districts of Montgomery and Lyallpur, with an approximate boundary along the River Chenab.

On 22 March 1946, the Shiromani Akali Dal passed a resolution stating Sikhistan to be its political objective. It said: "Whereas the Sikhs being attached to the Punjab by intimate bonds of holy shrines, property,

language traditions and history claim it as their homeland and holy land, which the British took as a trust from the last Sikh ruler during his minority and whereas the entity of the Sikhs is being threatened on account of the persistent demand of Pakistan by the Muslims on the one hand and of absorption of the Hindus on the other, the executive committee of the Shiromani Akali Dal demands the preservation and protection of the religious, cultural, economic and political rights of the Sikh population and their important sacred shrines and historical gurdwaras with provision for the transfer and exchange of population and property."

The British Cabinet Mission had at first presented a tentative plan which envisaged a three-tiered constitution consisting of a Union (empowered to deal with foreign affairs, defence and communication) with groups of Provinces dealing with such subjects as may be delegated to them and if individual provinces, vested with residency powers. The proposals were cautiously received by the Congress and Muslim League but rejected by the Sikhs who described these as "dexterous manouevring". Master Tara Singh wrote to the Secretary of State for India of the "wave of dejection,

resentment and indignation” that had run throughout the Sikh community. He asked: “If the first consideration of the Cabinet Mission’s recommendation is to give protection to the Muslims, why should the same consideration not be shown for the Sikhs?”

Sir Stafford Cripps made a lengthy statement to the British Parliament on the Cabinet Mission’s work in India. Regarding the Sikhs he said: “It was a matter of great distress to us that the Sikhs should feel they had not received the treatment which they deserved as an important section. The difficulty arises, not from anyone’s underestimation of the importance of the Sikh community, but from the inescapable geographical facts of the situation. What the Sikhs demand is some special treatment analogous to that given to the Muslims.”

Even as the Congress appeared willing to work on the Cabinet Mission’s proposals, the Muslim League rejected the plan in toto and called for “direct action”, this being the immediate cause for outbreak of violence in different parts of India. In September 1946, massive Hindu-Muslim riots flared up and six months later, in February 1947, the Attlee Government announced that it would relinquish power in India by June 1948 at the latest. Lord Louis Mountbatten was to replace.

Lord Wavell as Viceroy and arrange for the speedy transfer of power, the British hoping that a sense of urgency would engender responsibility and compel the rival parties to come to some sort of understanding. Even while these political games were being played out, the communal violence that had been unleashed in mid-1946 blew up into the proportion of a civil war. The earlier sporadic communal

riots had been goondadominated and localised affairs but the mass Hindu Muslim killings of 1946–47 were master-minded by scheming politicians and executed by organised gangs with automatic weapons and explosives. The Sikhs initially tried to remain neutral, often succeeding in providing succor and safety to both Muslims and Hindus as in Calcutta 1946, but being the most prosperous people amongst the Punjab peasantry and having been nurtured in marital traditions, were considered by the Muslims as their main obstacle towards achieving their Pakistan. The Sikhs who owned the best agricultural lands in West Punjab “would have to be dispossessed”. The Muslim League-inspired killings in Noakhali and Tipperah in Eastern Bengal in October 1946 had repercussions in Bihar where the Hindus took their revenge. Inflamed by this, Muslims of Hazara District in the North West Frontier Province, wreaked their vengeance on the comparatively few Sikhs there and such killings soon spread to the districts of Rawalpindi, Cambellpur and Multan in the Punjab.

Sikhs became the main victims of the March 1947 riots, being easily identifiable, the Hindu and Muslim less easy to tell apart. Amongst many others similarly affected, the Sikh village of Kahuta in Rawalpindi District (now the centre of Pakistan’s Nuclear Weapon programme) was totally destroyed by ravaging Muslims, and Lord Louis Mountbatten, who visited it in April 1947 likened “the destruction as thorough as any produced by fire-bomb raids in the war.” The communal bent of the Punjab Police was another important factor in the programme, with nearly 75 per cent of them being Muslim. The March 1947 riots became a drastic challenge to the Sikhs,





The Governor of Punjab, Sir Chandulal Madhavlal Trivedi is escorted by Brigadier Mohindar Singh Chopra, Sardar Narinder Singh (DC Amritsar) and Choudhri Ram Singh (SSP Amritsar) on a visit to the Joint Check Post at Wagah Attari on the GT Road between Amritsar and Lahore.

whose own semi-organised Akal Fauj or Akal Sena were seen only as paper tigers.

The Sikh's humiliation, especially when their marital prowess was in question, steeled their hearts and their darkened mood to fight back and save the community from Muslim aggression. On Baisakhi Day (13 April 1947) Master Tara Singh and, 280 jathedars vowed at the Akal Takht (Amritsar) to sacrifice their lives if necessary for the community and only then began to organise self defence jathas in towns and villages, to arm them with swords and spears and some firearms if possible with help from the Sikh princely states. Members of the defunct Indian National Army were recruited to guard the Golden Temple and other historic gurdwaras. The Muslim League had, however, long begun to build up stocks of weapons and bombs, as early as from December 1946, with a secret fund raised for arms to be obtained mainly from the North West Frontier Province, as also the tribal areas and Bahawalpur. This secret fund (sandug) was also used to purchase jeeps, trucks, rifles, machine guns, ammunition, hand grenades, steel helmets, iron jackets, etc. The Sikhs, on the other hand, tried to get arms from the Princely States of Patiala, Kapurthala and Faridkot, so as to reinforce the jathas traditionally armed with only kirpans and spears and mounted on horses. The jatha's greatest asset however, was their organisation and very soon, an operational system was in place, with designated leaders, mobile headquarters and military-like tactics.

It was these Sikh jathas which, in the vacuum of a complete breakdown of law and order, steeled the defence of Sikhs (and Hindus) from murderous assaults of the Muslims. It was not a question of retaliation but survival even as the Punjab Governor, Sir Evan Jenkins, warned Mountbatten that division of the Punjab on communal lines was disastrous because in every district. Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs were totally mixed up. On 14 June 1947, Lord Mountbatten's press attache wrote: "We are in the heart of Sikh country here, and the prevailing atmosphere is one of tension and foreboding ... they [the Sikhs] see that the partition of India means substantially and irrevocably the partition of the Sikhs, and they feel themselves to be sacrificed on the altars of Muslim ambition and Hindu opportunism ... No juggling of the Boundary Commission can prevent their bisection.

They react accordingly and their leader's hopelessly outmaneuvered in the political struggle, begin to invoke more primitive methods ... rough weather lies ahead of us ... ". Sir Penderal Moon wrote to Lord Ismay from Bahawalpur on 27 June 1947 thus: "I write with reference to our conversation a few weeks ago regarding the Sikhs. Feroz Khan Noon made, I understand, a direct approach to them, indicating that the Muslims would grant them special concessions if they would throw in their lot with Pakistan, but he met with a rebuff. This was to be expected. The Sikhs are still smarting from the injuries inflicted on them by the Muslims in the Rawalpindi division. Temporarily they've been thrown off their balance. But an influential section of them (including Master Tara Singh and Gyani Kartar Singh) know, in their heart of hearts, that they must come to a settlement with the Muslims if the Punjab is to be spared disaster. Hence, though one must not look for any immediate results, there is yet hope that with patience and perservance the Sikhs will be brought to the view that Eastern Punjab – which must in any case be formed – should join Pakistan. If this is achieved, then the civil war, not to mention administrative complications, which must inevitably follow an attempt to draw a frontier between two National States somewhere in the middle of the Lahore Division, will be averted. Meanwhile what steps are to be taken? Certain Sikhs, in touch with both Baldev and Tara Singh, are going to formulate, informally and entirely privately, the Sikh conditions for joining Pakistan. If these offer, as I believe they will, a possible basis for negotiation, certain Muslim League leaders will be informally approached.

The Sikhs are anxious that it should not leak out that any such negotiations are afoot or contemplated. It will considerably facilitate matters if it can be arranged that the new Eastern Punjab has the strongest possible Sikh complexion and does not therefore, include Gurgaon, Hissar, Rohtak and Karnal. The Sikhs have already put this demand to Congress who hesitate to accept it. I would suggest that this Sikh demand should be encouraged and conceded. You can doubtless be of assistance in this regard. If the Sikhs are taken out of Hindu clutches—they want to be—put in a more or less independent position on their own, they are much more likely to gravitate in the end towards their natural alignment with the rest of the Punjab and Pakistan.



The next step would be to indicate that it is optional for this Sikh Eastern Punjab to join either Hindustan or Pakistan and thus there is no presumption that it must join one rather than the other. The Sikhs will probably make this clear themselves, but if they ask for some pronouncements to this effect from HMG, It will probably be available to accede to their request. Please forgive this unasked for effusion. My excuse is that without a Sikh-Muslim pact there will be chaos in northern India". A "just and equitable" division of the Punjab on the basis of number and property was mooted and the continuing dilemma of the Sikhs aroused the sympathy of many British parliamentarians. As stated on 15 July, in the House of Commons: "The British have had the happiest possible relations with the Sikh community and, of all the martial races of the world, the Sikhs probably had built up the greatest reputation. The only situation which could mitigate the plight of the Sikhs was that the Boundary Commission should so define the boundary that the maximum portion of the Sikhs should be included within

one conglomerate whole". However, the partisan attitude of some other Britishers, particularly Sir Francis Mudie, Governor of West Punjab (now Pakistan) was to the contrary and was revealed in his note of 5 September 1947, regarding the desirability of evicting Sikh colonists from Lyallpur: "I am telling everyone that I don't care how the Sikhs get across the border; the great thing is to get rid of them as soon as possible. There is still little sign of three lakh Sikhs in Lyallpur moving, but in the end they too will have to." When on 15 August 1947, India celebrated its independence and Pakistan was born, millions of Punjabis had been displaced, hundreds of thousands were murdered. Horrible atrocities were committed, gaunt and starving foot convoys of refugees were mercilessly attacked, trains stopped and passengers slaughtered.

"Never in the history of the world was there a bigger exchange of population, attended with so much bloodshed". The final tally: Hindus and Sikhs who had left West Punjab, and the NWFP totalled 4,351,477 against the 4,286,755 Muslims who left East Punjab. The new Dominions were bewildered and no one knew about the exact nature and extent of the problem, whether the migrations were permanent or whether the refugees were eventually to return to their ancestral homes. However, by the winter of 1947, it had become apparent that the migration was, in reality, a permanent transfer of population, the largest in history.

Sir Cyril John Radcliffe, 'the man who divided the sub-continent by the stroke of a pen', was appointed Chairman of the Punjab and Bengal Boundary Commissions in June 1947, with instructions to devise, and hand over to Lord Louis Mountbatten, the Viceroy of India, the boundary-maps which would divide 400 million people along religious lines, abruptly breaking the millennia of bonds. "His unpractised cartography would precipitate the greatest movement of populations in human history, a migration stupendous in its scale" : Some 10 million Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs crossed



the hypothetical border, west to east while nearly a million lost their lives, most murdered in the savage butchery of partition. Radcliffe's last-minute recruitment to this impossible task was yet another instance of the British Government's profound confusion, escalating throughout the 1940s over what to do with India. Equally, it was symptomatic of the vagueness surrounding the idea of Pakistan, and what exactly it would, in practice, amount to. Radcliffe's credentials, for the job of dividing India did not arise from special knowledge of the country: it was precisely lack of this that was seen as an initial guarantee of impartiality". Cyril Radcliffe had served as Britain's Director General at the Ministry of Information during the critical War years (1941–45), responsible for Government propaganda and censorship.

"So manifest was his commitment to protecting the name and authority of His Majesty's Government that by 1945 he was acknowledged as the most reliable and formidable doorkeeper of

the Establishment". Called to the Bar in 1924, Radcliffe had displayed a forensic brilliance and after the War, became Vice Chairman, General Council of Bar from 1946. What clinched his appointment for India in June 1947 was his age: at 48 he was considered the most likely of his peers to be able to function in the heat and dust of an Indian summer.

"On 10 June 1947, on representation from the Viceroy of India, the Secretary of State for India, the Earl of Listowel, made enquiry of the Lord Chancellor, Lord Jowitt, who took soundings and learned that Sir Cyril Radcliffe was prepared, subject to the fulfilment of certain conditions to undertake the task". As it later transpired, Radcliffe had accepted this appointment under the mistaken impression that he would simply have to adjudicate disputes arising over the definition of boundaries in Bengal and the Punjab. The claims on both sides were extravagant and member-judges of the Punjab and Bengal tribunals were so aligned themselves to politics that they simply undermined the judicial terms. However, on his arrival in India, Radcliffe

discovered that the responsibility for actually drawing the borders would be his – on the basis of Muslim and non-Muslim ‘contiguous majority areas’. He was also asked to take into account ‘other factors’, but neither these nor the actual unit to be partitioned were ever specified. To compound his difficulties, Radcliffe discovered that, although he had been led to believe that he would have at least six months in which to complete his job, in fact he was given exactly 36 days! Even more stressing for Radcliffe was his having to work “to the rhythms and pressures of Mountbatten”, with whom he possessed ‘reverse virtues’. While Mountbatten “luxuriated in phosphorescent selfpublicity”, Radcliffe cultivated reticence and secrecy. Mountbatten was forever in pursuit of the thrill of action; Radcliffe was a fastidious intellectual. Mountbatten was also a man in a hurry, had his tryst with destiny to keep (later paraphrased by Nehru) : he gave just ten weeks for India to become independent, for India to be carved out and Pakistan created, for India’s finances to be divided between two claimants, for the Indian Army to

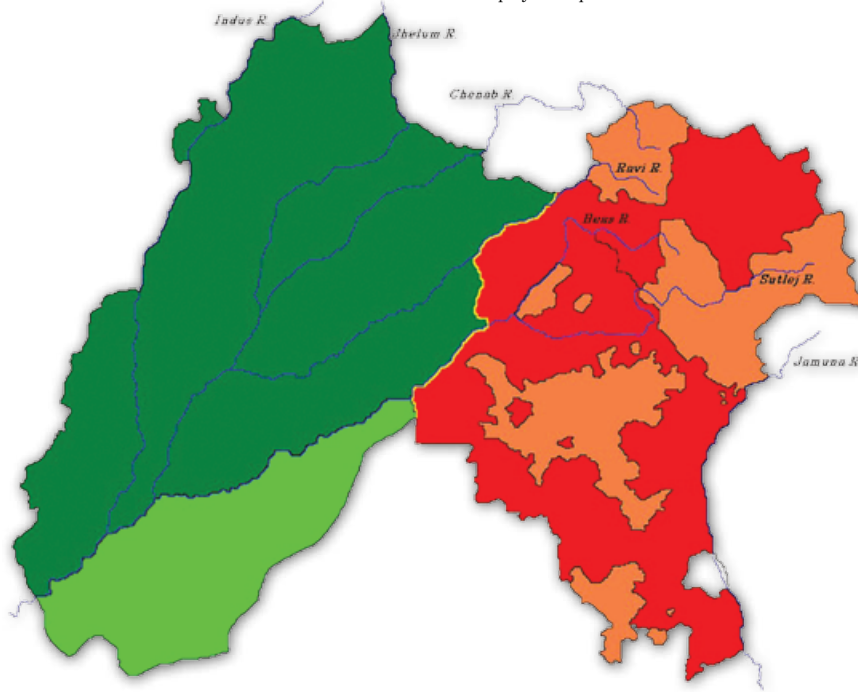
be dismantled and two new Armies to be created, for the provinces of Punjab and Bengal to be divided. This last issue was the most devastating: a manmade frontier had to be demarcated among the mixed Muslim–Hindu–Sikh population and the delineation had to satisfy both the countries. Clearly impossible, hence the need for a man of Radcliffe’s skills, possessing a legal “ice–cold intelligence”.

Radcliffe got together the maps and volumes of the 1941 Census of India (regarded by most as totally inadequate, prepared as they were during the worst years of World War II, these random maps were even lacking the required scale). He mapped out the boundary at the pace of 50 kilometres (30 miles) a day, to meet Mountbatten’s deadline, and thus created Pakistan with insufficient and incorrect data. Radcliffe submitted his plans for the division of India to Mountbatten on 13 August, 1947 but the Viceroy deliberately kept them under wraps, not just fearing for its consequences but most conscious of ceremonial protocol, not wanting any dispute to mar the grand celebrations he had planned for the 14–15 August.



Punjab 1947

Map by: Tariq Amir



Population(1941)

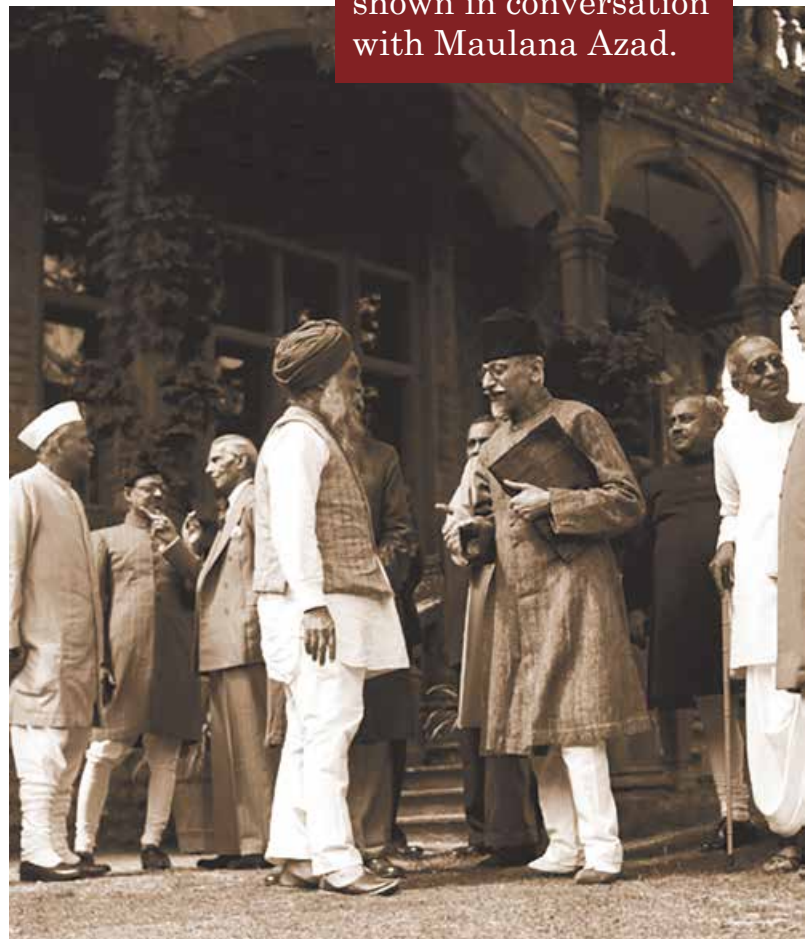
	Punjab Total Population: 36,953,554
	Punjab Province (Allotted To Pakistan): 18,800,000 (59.77 %)
	Punjab Province (Allotted To India) 12,650,000 (40.22 %)
	Punjab State (Only Bahawalpur Joined Pakistan): 1,341,209 (24.37 %)
	Punjab States (33 States Joined India): 4,162,345 (76.63 %)
	Total Population Of Punjab (Pakistan): 20,141,209 (54.50 %)
	Total Population Of Punjab (India): 16,812,345 (45.50 %)

Master Tara Singh is shown in conversation with Maulana Azad.

More diabolically, the cynical delay conveniently shifted responsibility for the consequences of partition from the departing Britons to the bewildered, incoming local self-Governments.

Partition came on 15 August 1947; the actual line of the boundary was announced on the 17th. "The Punjab exploded – it was no case of isolated incidents, it was civil war, accompanied by complete breakdown of the civil administration. Armed bands made for the lines of refugees and slaughtered, raped and robbed ... ". The Trauma of August 1947 Even as most other parts of the Indian sub-continent marked 15 August 1947 as the coming of Independence and end of the British Raj, the Punjab was plunged into a horrific and terrible situation as it went through the traumatic amputation of its land partition. As Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, first Prime Minister of independent India and himself a key player in the events that brought about such tragedy then said "Nearly the whole of India celebrated the coming of independence but no so the unhappy land of the five rivers. In the Punjab, both in the East and the West, there was disaster and sorrow. There was mass murder and arson and looting in many places streams of refugees poured out from one place to another".

The Government of India, with Mountbatten as the Viceroy, were clearly unable to understand





the passions and fury unleashed by their policies which was to result in the killings of nearly a million, loot, arson and rape and the forced migration of some ten million human beings, almost entirely Punjabis, both Muslim and non-Muslim. But it was not in the Punjab where all this began. The catalyst was in Bengal where, almost exactly a year earlier, on 16 August, 1946, the great Calcutta killings took place, followed by equally horrific communal mass murders and arson in Noakhali which then spread to Bihar. Each disaster produced a reaction in different parts of the country. Spreading north-westwards, for a time Rawalpindi in the Punjab became the worst affected area in the country. And all this, very much during the British Raj, long before the question of partition had been decided.

A year was to pass but even as 15 August, 1947 loomed near, there still was uncertainty about the exact line of demarcation which resulted in further deterioration in the situation. The capital of undivided Punjab, Lahore, was to pay a heavy price in the madness with citizens and residents killed in large numbers, entire areas burn down with an almost complete breakdown in civilization. Its twin city of Amritsar, less than 40

miles away on the Grand Trunk Road was to suffer in similar manner.

After 15 August 1947 the situation deteriorated even further and the mass migration, in both directions, began. Millions of men, women and children left their ancestral homes, fleeing for their very lives, from towns and villages first all over the Western Punjab, then the North West Frontier and eventually from Sind.

The Just established Central Government of India hardly possessed the means of administrative machinery to tackle the situation, itself under re-organisation, the Armed Forces under division and communications in disarray. There was an ominous absence of news, with virtually no contact with West Punjab and spreading disturbances in East Punjab.

Eventually, All India Radio began broadcast messages for refugees and a special news bulletin for East Punjab. Major cities were cut off and even vital centres such as Amritsar and Jullundur had telephone and telegraph lines down. The railways had a preponderance of Muslim drivers who had left for West Pakistan.

Restoration of communications in East Punjab was given high priority, important towns linked with Delhi by telegraph and telephone while 'hot lines' were established between Delhi and Lahore. Governments of the two Dominions slowly realised the imperative need to establish direct liaison, the Punjab Boundary Force now having been wound up.

The Prime Ministers & other Ministers paid frequent visits to towns of East Punjab, & Lahore, to review the situation at first hand and set the machinery of evacuation into motion.

The Joint Defence Council was established to take over responsibility from the PBF even while arrangements for the evacuation of refugees from West to East and vice versa was being worked out.

On 29 August, the Joint Defence Council meeting at Lahore decided to abolish the Punjab Boundary Force from the midnight of 31 August even as Prime Ministers of India and Pakistan, the Defence Minister of India and a Minister of Pakistan began to tour the disturbed areas in both West and East Punjab.

Sehra – A Joyous Poetic Tradition

“Kudiyon, chheti ao! It’s getting late and we need to reach in time for the laavans!”

“Hanji Buaji, just collecting them all and coming straight to Virji.” Soon, a burst of colour and playful energy filled the room as the groom’s sisters arrived in vibrant silks, with breathless giggles and jingling anklets announcing their presence. They surrounded Joginder to carefully and lovingly pin the auspicious Sehra onto his turban. As the first pin was placed, the room burst into song. One which was specially created for this very occasion – a Sehra.

The quintessential Punjabi wedding celebrations are a kaleidoscope of colour, music, dance, textiles, flavours, aromas, and traditions. Among them all, those performed on the day of the nuptial ceremony (Anand Kaaraj, *Pheras*, or *Nikah*) are particularly special, and in many ways, sacred. The *Sehrabandi* is one such tradition that is performed on the morning of the wedding, before the *Baraat* leaves for the bride’s home. It entails the tying of a decorative fringe/veil, called the *Sehra*, on the head of the groom. This covers the groom’s face and is usually made of strings of flowers, tinsel, beads, and more recently, artificial pearls.

The *Sehra* is traditionally tied by the sisters of the groom and is affixed on to his turban with pins and strings, and in the case of no turban, simply tied around his head. Acting as a veil to protect the admiring and harmful gases around, drive negative energy away, and decorate the groom, the *Sehra* has numerous purposes. The tradition of a *Sehra* and the *Sehrabandi* is said to have its roots in Vedic culture, as well as in other ancient South Asian cultures. Over the centuries, the act of tying the veil was influenced by Mughal and courtly culture.

By the 19th century, with the elevation of the groom’s appearance as a king, the *Sehra* became an integral part of his attire. The word ‘sehra’ has been derived from Sanskrit and other regional languages which point to its meaning as a garland for the head – *sir* (head) + *har* (garland). Having witnessed the weddings of many brothers, I have long been familiar with the *Sehra* and *Sehrabandi*. Yet, it was only recently, while delving into my family’s archives, that I discovered a fascinating new dimension of this ceremony – the poetic tradition called *Sehra*. This refers to the poem that is specially written for the occasion of the *Sehrabandi* ceremony. It is often written by a family member and is personalised for the bride and groom-to-be.

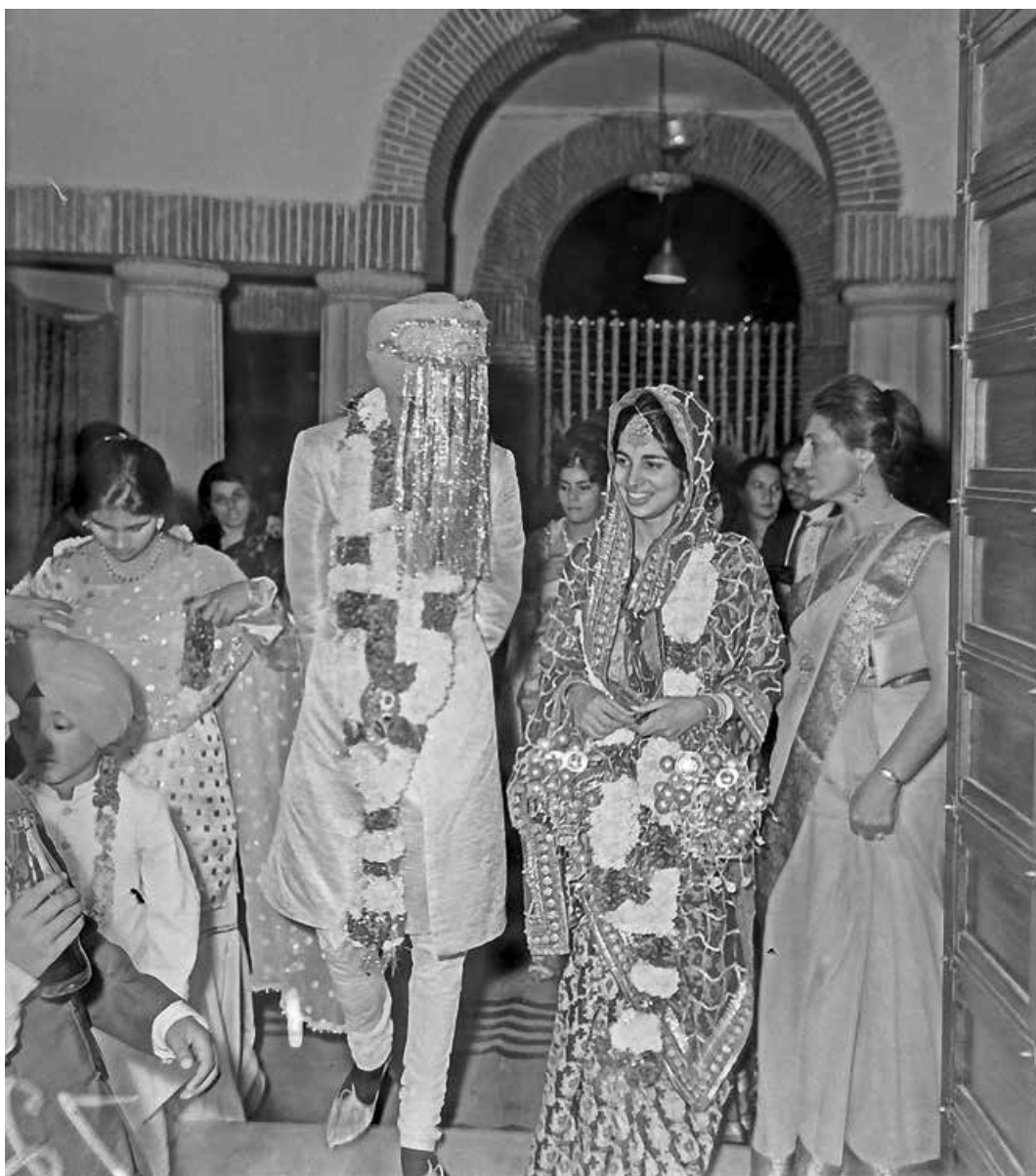
The lyrics of the poem mention various close family members on both sides, blessings for the new couple, and sometimes even descriptions of the couple (physical traits, profession, and family roles). The last word of every couplet in this poem is generally ‘sehra’. This poem is then written

in beautiful calligraphy on a decorated piece of thin paper, after which, copies of it are made and distributed among the ladies of the household. At the time of the *Sehrabandi*, this piece is then recited or sung, adding another layer of celebration to the joyous occasion.

Pictured here is the sehra I found which was written for my *Dadi’s* (paternal grandmother) father’s *Sehrabandi*. His name was Joginder Singh and he grew up in Lahore, British India. After attaining his law degree from Government College Lahore in 1945, he met Manjeet Kaur from Delhi, whose beauty and incredible grace captured his heart in no time. They both got married in 1946 on the 11th of April, which was when this sehra was written and sung. This *sehra* was written by Mool Singh Ramgarh, whose name can be seen on the bottom-right of this document. The headnote of the sehra reads – “This *Sehra*, dedicated by Sardar Gurbachan Singh ‘Kamla’ ji on 11th April 1946 while tying the *Sehra* for the auspicious occasion of the Anand Kaaraj of Sardar Joginder Singh (B.A. L.L.B), son of Shri Man Sardar Sahib Sardar Pratap Singh ji (Advocate, Lahore).” When reading the sehra, one realises how carefully it has been personalised for the couple and their families. Lines mentioning names combine them with related vocabulary to bring out playful yet emotional connections. For example – “*Ghar Amrit de amrit di hoi barkha, putt banniya jinna de haar sehra*” refers to the groom’s mother Amrit Kaur in whose house arrives a ‘shower of nectar’ i.e. the new daughter-in-law.

The line “*Ajj Pratap da chamak pratap uthiya*” refers to the ‘*pratap*’ (glory) of Pratap Singh shining on this day i.e. as his son Joginder was getting married. Replete with evocative imagery and flowery language, it brings to life the colours, textures, and fragrances of the occasion in the mind’s eye. For example – “*Phul malann di jholi nu bharan digge, kita gund ke sohna tiyar sehra*” provides a wonderful imagery of how the various fragrant and vibrant flowers, overflowing from the pouch of the gardener, are strung together to create the sehra of the groom. Through





lines such as “*Kehende Devte surgh ton bajh ke daudhe, dekhan layi ih navan itbaar sehra*” (it is said that even the Gods rushed from Heaven to witness this new promise), the poet has placed the *Sehrabandi* and *Anand Kaaraj* of this beautiful couple on a divine pedestal. The *sehra* also describes what an ideal marriage should look like, advising the groom and bride how to live their lives as one soul in two bodies, and loving each other dearly – “*Jeevan Saathi ‘Joginder’ ‘Manjeet’ dono, kathhe langhange bann darbar sehra. Jot ikk murtan do hovan, karna sachi preet sansaar sehra. Jot ikk murtan do hovan, karna sachi preet sansaar sehra*”. The line “*Jimevaari da pave sir bhaar sehra*” reiterates the importance of being responsible for each other in a marriage.

Finally, through lines such as “*Hove jeevan mubarak Joginder tenu*”, the *sehra* congratulates the groom and

blesses him with a happy married life. This *Sehra* is not merely an object for me or my family. It serves as a time-machine through which my *Dadi* and I are able to go back in time in our minds to the very day her parents were married. It helps us imagine the merriment, the happiness, and the love that surrounded the gathering at that very moment. I suppose for my *Dadi* it is even more meaningful, as it was only a little over a year after this moment that she was born in Shimla, India (by this time her parents had migrated from Lahore due to the Partition of the subcontinent).

Although writing and reciting a *sehra* during the *Sehrabandi* was a common practice in undivided Punjab, this tradition has seen a drastic decline over the decades, particularly among the former Punjabi refugee families settled across India. A call for revival of this tradition in

its original format, though noble, may not be completely successful due to various reasons. However, it would be interesting to see how modern sensibilities and vocabulary are integrating into a *sehra*, as one sees in numerous modern versions of *tappes* (folk poetry and music) sung during weddings. As we bring our creative minds to crafting modern-day *sehras*, it is equally vital to seek out, document, and preserve the archival *sehras* within our families for posterity.

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

The Art of Sovereignty

A Conversation on Guru Gobind Singh Sahib: Life, Vision & Wisdom

On 7 January 2026, in New Delhi, thinker, author, and educator Harinder Singh, co-founder of the Sikh Research Institute, joined publisher Yogi Suri of Milap Publications for a public conversation on *Guru Gobind Singh Sahib: Life, Vision & Wisdom*. The event marked 350 years since Guru Gobind Singh Sahib's *Gurgaddi*, his coronation as the Tenth Sovereign, and created a space to reflect on devotion, justice, and sovereignty in contemporary life.

Suri opened by situating the book not merely as a research undertaking, but as an offering. Some books, he observed, are written primarily with the mind; some with the heart; and some are written at the feet of the Guru. This volume, he suggested, belongs to the third category. It is not designed for quick consumption, but invites attentive engagement.

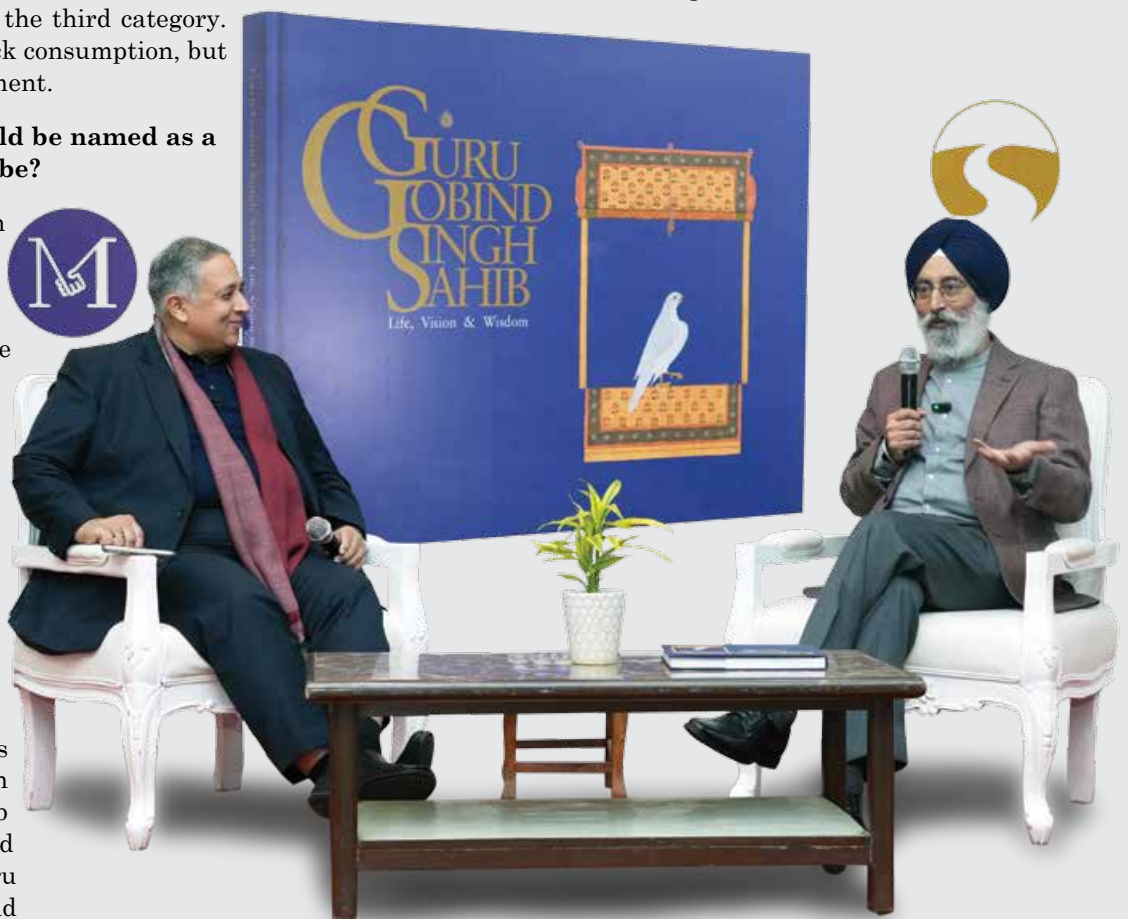
If the book's heart could be named as a feeling, what would it be?

Harinder began with music rather than history. The book is anchored in ten *Sabads* (popularly *Shabads*), nine of which are set in *Rag*. In the Indian (Hindustani and Carnatic) classical music traditions, *rag* is inseparable from *ras*, the emotional sentiment that shapes the experience of sound. Form and feeling are not separate. The sentiment he sought to evoke is awe.

He described how his own relationship with Guru Gobind Singh Sahib evolved. In childhood memory, the Guru appeared as a heroic and

expansive presence. Later, that image matured into a model of conduct and leadership. Over time, the figure became the Guru in a deeper sense, representing wisdom itself and serving as illumination in an era that often feels fractured.

The book's structure attempts to mirror that progression. Through *Sabad*, commentary, and reflection, it encourages readers to move from admiration toward encounter. In explaining this movement, Harinder turned to the word *sangat*. He described it as coming together with purpose rather than simple assembly. True gathering, in this sense, implies shared orientation. The book aims to create that orientation through sound, word, and context.



He also referred to *Hajare* (erroneously *Hazare*), which he read through hijr, or separation. Modern life is marked by fragmentation, whether spiritual or political, and interior or exterior. The book speaks to that condition by attempting to reduce the distance between the reader and the source. Awe, as he framed it, is not passive reverence. It is the beginning of a relationship.

What compelled you to undertake such an extensive research project?

Harinder identified reduction as the central concern. In public discourse, Guru Gobind Singh Sahib is frequently compressed into simplified characterizations shaped by contemporary politics or ideological convenience. In a culture that privileges speed and summary, complexity is often flattened.

The concern, he explained, is not disagreement but oversimplification. Who is explaining the Guru, and from what lens? In response to what he described as a battle of narratives, his approach was methodological rather than argumentative. He chose to return to primary compositions and to early witnesses who lived within the Guru's presence.

The book draws on *Sabads* attributed to Guru Gobind Singh Sahib, as well as on the Guru's court-poets, Bhai Nand Lal Goya and Chandra Sain Sainapati, whose writings provide proximity rather than retrospective interpretation. Rather than attempt an exhaustive chronological biography, he selected ten *Sabads* as focused entry points.

Within Sikh tradition, *Sabad* is central. It is not merely written text but a revelation transmitted through word and sound. When early tradition asks Guru Nanak Sahib, "Who is your Guru?" the answer given is *Sabad*.

Why structure the book non-chronologically?

The question arises naturally because modern biography typically follows a sequence. Harinder challenged the assumption that sequence alone provides understanding.

Across the 238 years of the Gurus' lived presence in ten embodiments, early Sikh sources did not commission or prioritize linear biography in the modern sense. The emphasis lay on principles and domain rather than on trivial matters like dates.

The structure of the book reflects this distinction. By

organizing the material around *Sabad* and thematic inquiry rather than timeline, the work aligns itself more closely with the internal logic of early sources.

He referenced Bhai Nand Lal's *Ganjanama*, in which Guru Gobind Singh Sahib is described as *Saltanat-i-Daham*, the Tenth Sultanate. The emphasis is on the Guru's grandeur and on the embodied domain. Similarly, Chandra Sain Sainapati's *Sri Gur Sobha* presents episodes that illuminate character and decision-making in volatile circumstances, including negotiations, betrayals, and shifting allegiances.

Life, Harinder noted, is rarely experienced as an orderly sequence. It unfolds amid instability and moral complexity. The deeper question, therefore, concerns how one remains anchored when conditions shift. The book seeks to engage that question through evergreen thematic

exploration rather than ever-contested chronological reconstruction.



Why is your name not on the cover?

Before posing the question, Suri reflected on the book's form. He described it as resisting easy categorization. It is not simply a coffee table volume, though it is visually striking. Nor is it solely an academic study, though it is rigorously sourced. The research and visual language function in dialogue. The artwork creates intervals that allow reflection rather than decoration.

Harinder responded directly to the authorship question. The work, he said, is not his. The inside pages carry the Guru's signature. His role is interpretive, rendering insights from primary and early secondary sources into language accessible to contemporary readers.

The project was collaborative. Kiran Kaur created the ten paintings that accompany the selected *Sabads*, while the book's broader design and visual architecture were developed by Praveen Kumar. From the outset, the visual direction emphasized restraint, including the decision not to include a portrait of the Guru.

Instead, presence is conveyed through atmosphere. Deep blues suggest introspection, muted gold signals illumination, and expanses of space create a visual pause. Recurring motifs such as the hawk, the blue steed, the unfolding numeral "ੴ" of Gurmukhi script, and the *Sabads* rendered in gold function symbolically rather than illustratively. A subtle circular mark following commentary sections signals interpretive humility.

In Sikh thought, the deeper concern is not physical likeness but the mind's projections. By declining portraiture, the book encourages engagement without reducing the Guru to an image.

How did you approach translation?

Harinder expressed hesitation about the word translation itself. Tightly structured compositions embedded in devotional and linguistic traditions cannot be transferred without interpretive choice. Every translation carries emphasis and omission. For that reason, he explains why he included commentary alongside a tight translation that carries both the letter and spirit of the original text, rather than a definitive translation.

His approach is transparent. The commentary reflects what Guru Gobind Singh Sahib's *Sabad* conveys to him at this stage of his life. If it resonates with readers, the space becomes shared. If it does not, the limitation rests with the interpreter rather than with the source. This stance reflects both methodological clarity and devotional humility.

What does the book convey about justice and sovereignty today?

The word sovereignty often evokes political authority. Harinder reframed it. In the Sikh vision he articulated, sovereignty begins with interior freedom. Before it

manifests in governance, it must be realized within the individual as *azad*, free. Without self-sovereignty, outward claims to freedom lack substance.

He referred to early accounts describing how Banda Singh Bahadur was accompanied by five Sikhs characterized as *azad*, for they were independent and sovereign in conviction. Freedom was not rhetorical. It required individuals already inwardly anchored.

In this framework, sovereignty is not dominance but steadiness in the Guru's sovereignty. Justice is not vengeance but disciplined pursuit, especially in defense of dignity or protection of honor.

He also noted the instability of regional alliances during the Guru's time. Allegiances shifted frequently according to convenience or expedience. Against this volatility, the Guru's position remained consistent. Sovereignty, in this sense, is principled rather than opportunistic.

Underlying the discussion of justice and sovereignty is devotional love, described not as sentiment but as orientation. Devotional love remains patient even in longing. It does not collapse into self-concern during a crisis.

In moments of profound loss and separation, the voice of the *Sabad* remains directed toward responsibility and relationship rather than self-pity. Sovereignty without love risks becoming control. Love without discipline risks becoming sentimentality. Held together, they form moral and ethical clarity rooted in devotion.

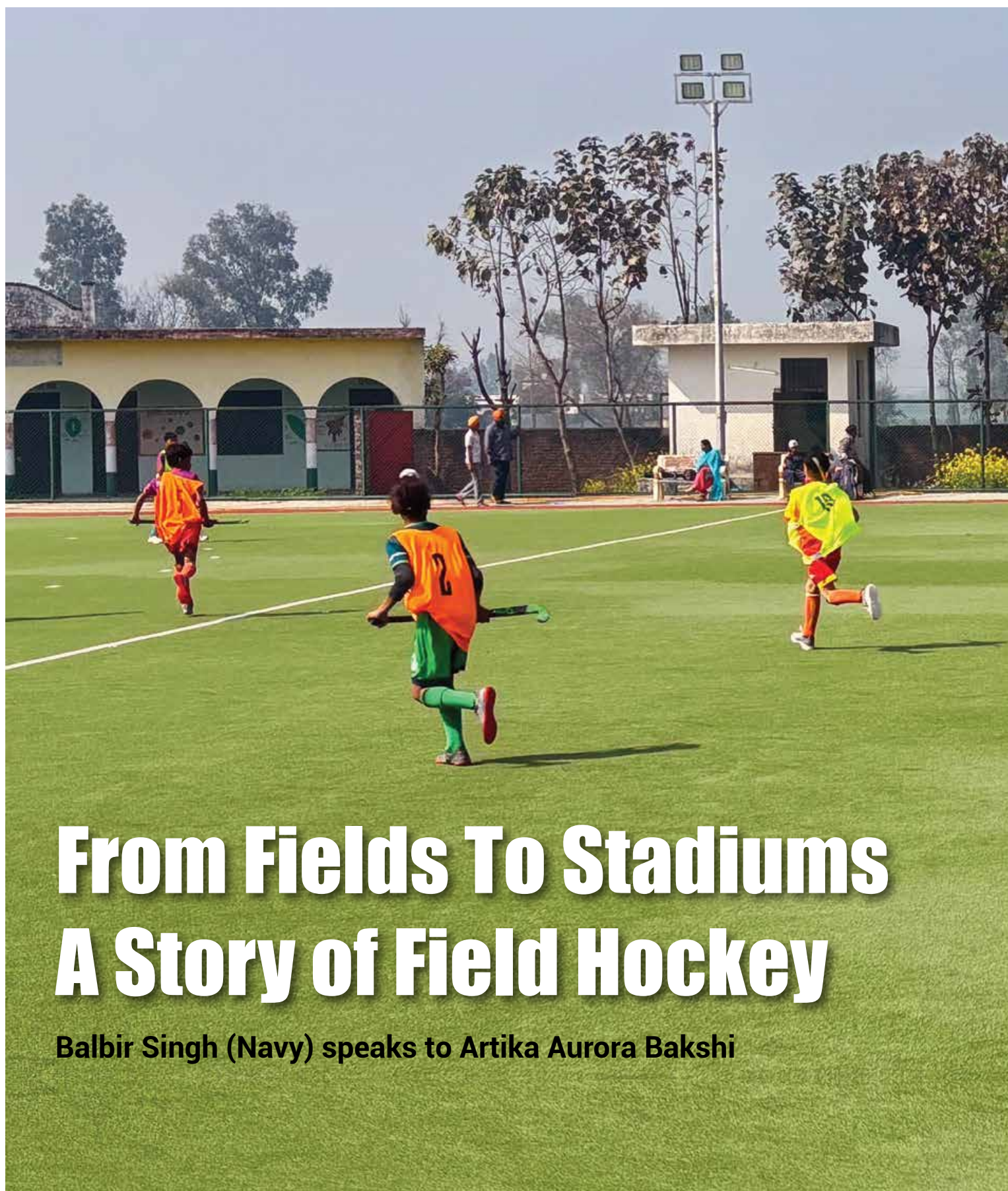
A Book for an Anniversary and an Era

Published in commemoration of 350 years since Guru Gobind Singh Sahib's coronation as the Tenth Sovereign, *Life, Vision & Wisdom* does not attempt to produce a definitive biography. Instead, it offers ten *Sabads* as portals, early historical witnesses as grounding context, and a carefully constructed visual language that creates space for reflection.

The conversation in New Delhi made clear that sovereignty, as articulated in the book, is neither a slogan nor a spectacle. It is first cultivated internally and then expressed outwardly through disciplined action. It demands steadiness rather than reaction, clarity rather than volume.

Rather than fixing Guru Gobind Singh Sahib within a single historical frame, the book asks a more pressing question: what does sovereignty require of us now? In that sense, the anniversary is not only commemorative. It becomes contemporary.

This article has been prepared by the Nishaan editorial team from the recorded conversation between Harinder Singh and Yogi Suri on Guru Gobind Singh Sahib: Life, Vision & Wisdom, held in New Delhi on 7 January 2026.



From Fields To Stadiums A Story of Field Hockey

Balbir Singh (Navy) speaks to Artika Aurora Bakshi



Field hockey, long regarded as India's national sport, has experienced periods of great glory and deep decline, especially amid the country's near-obsession with cricket. While stick-and-ball games existed in ancient civilizations, modern field hockey was introduced to India by British colonisers. Early clubs were largely restricted to civil servants of the Raj, much like cricket. As nationalist sentiment grew, Indian players embraced the sport with passion, artistry, and exceptional stick work, soon surpassing their British counterparts.

Indian hockey entered its golden era with Olympic gold medals at the 1928 Summer Olympics, 1932 Summer Olympics, 1936 Summer Olympics, 1948 Summer Olympics, 1952 Summer Olympics, 1956 Summer Olympics, 1964 Summer Olympics, and 1980 Summer Olympics, along with a silver at the 1960 Summer Olympics and bronze medals in 1968 Summer Olympics and 1972 Summer Olympics.

The decline began in the late 1970s and 1980s.

The introduction of AstroTurf, first used at the 1976 Summer Olympics, changed the nature of the game, favouring speed and physicality over artistry. However, this was not the only reason. Administrative inefficiencies within the Indian Hockey Federation, inadequate infrastructure, lack of funding for synthetic turf and modern equipment, and limited sports science and analytical support weakened the sport. Meanwhile, cricket's commercial rise under the Board of Control for Cricket in India shifted public attention and sponsorship away from hockey. Grassroots systems, particularly in states like Punjab and Haryana, also suffered disruptions, reducing youth engagement.

Revival efforts gained momentum after 2010 with structural reforms, corporate sponsorships, improved governance under Hockey India, and renewed focus on sports science. The bronze medal at the 2020 Summer Olympics ended a 41-year Olympic medal drought and symbolised India's resurgence.

Today, Indian hockey has regained much of its pride and structure, though increasing global competition means sustained effort is required to return to consistent world dominance.

Balbir Singh Randhawa, popularly known as Balbir Navy, remains committed to nurturing grassroots talent. Born in Gurdaspur district in 1942, he represented India internationally in 1967 and played for the Services team. His continued focus has been on promoting and strengthening the sport.

In conversation with Nishaan, he shares his journey and aspirations for Indian hockey...

How did you come to choose hockey as a sport? How was hockey viewed during that time? And what were the challenges you faced while playing hockey?

I began playing hockey during my school days. In those times, hockey was played in almost every school in Punjab. It was not just a sport, it was a way of life. Naturally, being surrounded by that atmosphere, I took to it with enthusiasm. We are three brothers, and I am proud to say that all of us went on to become international hockey players.



In 1958, I joined the Indian Navy, where I continued to play and gave my best years to the sport. I played for the Indian Navy Hockey Team for ten long years and represented the Services Hockey Team at the Nationals for a decade. I also had the honour of playing for the Indian Hockey Team at the Madrid Hockey Festival, where we won a gold medal. I represented India at the Pre-Olympic Hockey Tournament in London and toured Ceylon (Sri Lanka) in 1967.

During those years, hockey was played on natural grass fields, and such grounds were easily available. So in that sense, we did not face the kind of infrastructural challenges players face today. Hockey was respected, widely played, and deeply rooted in our culture, especially in Punjab.

How has field hockey changed over the years? As far as the sport is concerned, the training and facilities, and how people see it?

Field hockey has changed tremendously over the years, especially after the introduction of AstroTurf in 1976. That marked a turning point in the sport. India had won the World Cup in 1975, but we struggled badly at the 1976 Olympics. The shift from grass to artificial turf demanded a completely different style of play – more speed, different techniques, and a new training approach.

Beighton Cup: India's Hockey Heritage

- Founded: 1895, Calcutta
- Historic Significance: One of the world's oldest hockey tournaments
- Top Club: Mohun Bagan – 14-time winners
- Legacy: Launched careers of Olympians and national champions; still a symbol of India's hockey passion

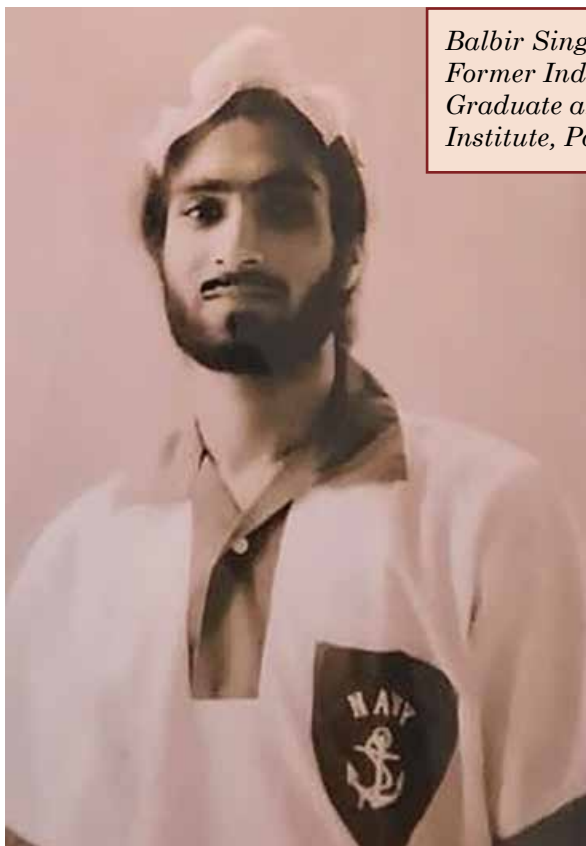
A trophy steeped in history, showcasing the game's roots and enduring spirit in India.

Today, the game is faster and more physically demanding. Facilities have improved in some areas, but they are not evenly distributed. The spirit of the game remains, but public attention has shifted significantly towards other sports, especially cricket. Hockey does not command the same universal enthusiasm it once did.

How important has Punjab been in the story of field hockey? Have players from Punjab always been on the world stage?



“Sport has the power to change the world. It has the power to inspire, the power to unite people in a way that little else does. It speaks to youth in a language they understand. Sport can create hope, where there was once only despair. It is more powerful than governments in breaking down racial barriers.” Nelson Mandela



*Balbir Singh Randhawa (born 1 June 1942)
Former Indian Navy Hockey Player and Indian Field Hockey International;
Graduate and Diploma holder in Hockey Coaching from the National
Institute, Patiala (1976).*

Punjab has always been an integral part of Indian hockey. Historically, it would have been rare to find an Indian team that did not include several Punjabi players. The contribution of Punjab to Indian hockey has been immense.

Even today, there are around ten players from Punjab in the Indian Hockey Team. The state has consistently produced world-class talent. From village fields to international stadiums, Punjabi players have represented India with pride and distinction.

How is hockey being played at the village level? How do sports authorities guide and motivate players today?

At present, hockey at the grassroots level is receiving support from private initiatives. One major contributor is the Round Glass Foundation, which has been playing a significant role in Punjab. I am also associated with this organisation.

Approximately fifty five academies are being run with their support, and they provide facilities, training, and infrastructure. Such initiatives are vital for nurturing young talent at the village level. Without this kind of structured support, it would be difficult to sustain the sport in rural areas.

What are the challenges that hockey faces today, at the district, state, national, and international levels?

The challenges today are considerable. There is a lack of funds, inadequate playing kits, and limited financial incentives compared to sports like cricket. This economic imbalance discourages the younger generation from choosing hockey as a career.

At district and state levels, infrastructure and sustained funding remain concerns. Nationally and internationally, the game has become highly competitive, requiring advanced facilities and consistent investment.

It is rather sad that despite our rich legacy in hockey, the younger generation is not opting for the sport in large numbers. With proper support, encouragement, and recognition, hockey can reclaim its rightful place in the hearts of the people.

Hockey Legends from Punjab (Wikipedia)

Men

- Dhyan Chand – Though born in Allahabad, he played extensively for Punjab-based regiments and remains central to Punjab's hockey legacy.
- Balbir Singh Sr. (Haripur, Punjab) – Three-time Olympic gold medallist.
- Ajit Pal Singh (Sansarpur, Punjab) – Captain of India's 1975 World Cup-winning team.
- Prithipal Singh (Nankana Sahib, undivided Punjab) – Olympic medallist and legendary drag-flicker.
- Pargat Singh (Jalandhar, Punjab) – Former India captain and Olympian.
- Sandeep Singh (Shahabad, Haryana; Punjab hockey circuit) – Renowned drag-flick specialist.
- Harmanpreet Singh (Timmowal, Amritsar, Punjab) – Defender and captain; led India to bronze at the Paris 2024 Olympics.
- Manpreet Singh (Jalandhar, Punjab) – Midfielder; four-time Olympian including 2024.
- Jarmanpreet Singh (Amritsar, Punjab) – Defender; Olympic debut at Paris 2024.
- Sukhjeet Singh (Jalandhar/Tarn Taran, Punjab) – Forward; Olympic debut at Paris 2024.

Women

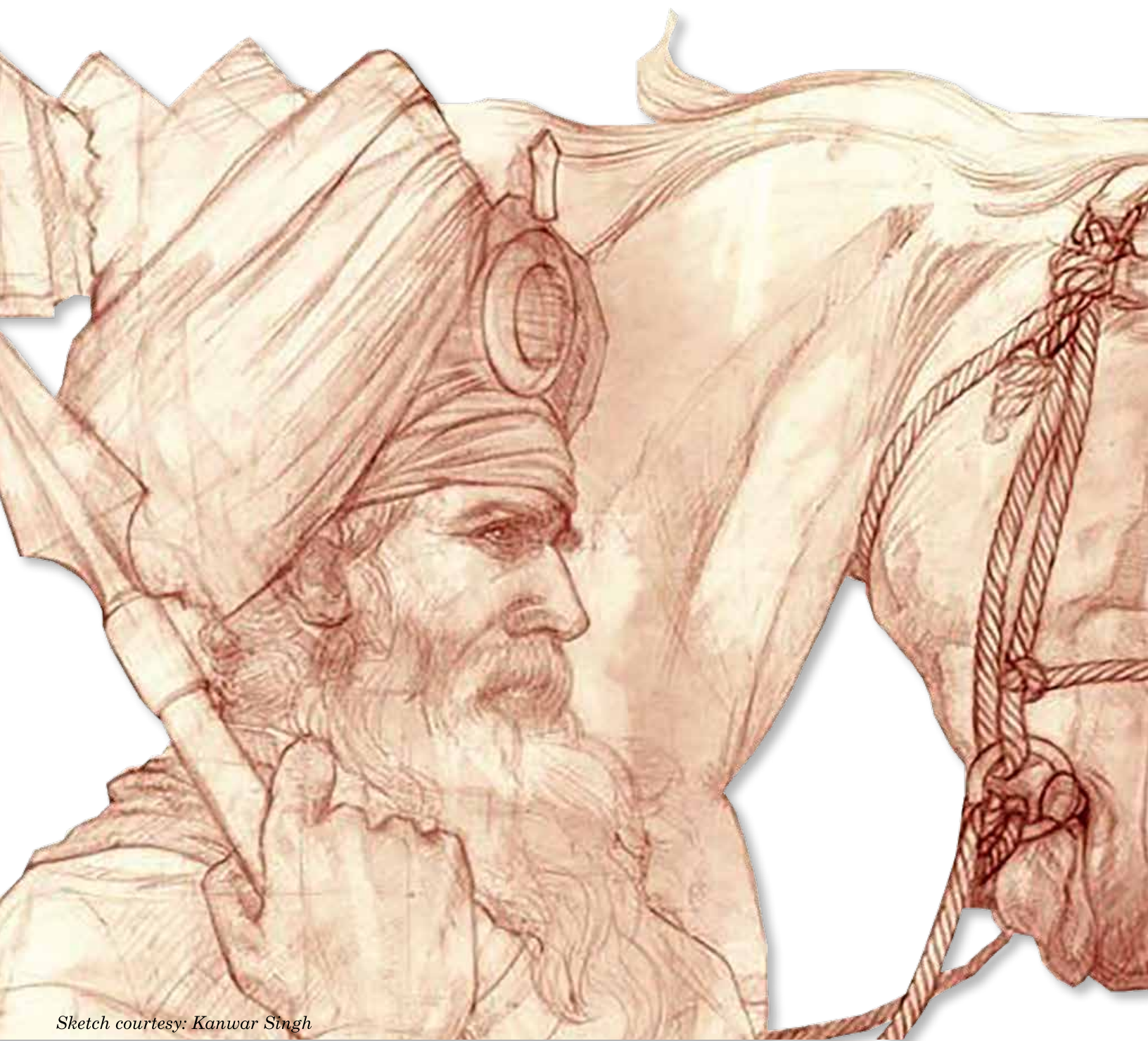
- Rajbir Kaur (Punjab) – Former India captain; Arjuna Awardee.
- Reena Khokhar (Punjab) – Member of India's national team in the 2010s.
- Kuljeet Kaur (Punjab) – International player nurtured by Punjab's strong grassroots system.
- Manpreet Kaur (Punjab) – Represented India at the international level.
- Baljeet Kaur (Tarn Taran, Punjab) – Midfielder; part of India's Olympic qualifying squad for 2024.



Akali Baba Phula Singh

**The Fearless Guardian of the Khalsa Spirit and
the Sacred Manuscripts of Sri Guru Granth Sahib
Preserved at Shaheed Ganj, Srinagar**

Akali Baba Phula Singh (1761–1823), one of the most venerated figures in Sikh history, stands as a luminous symbol of courage, piety, and unyielding devotion to the Khalsa ideals. A towering personality, his name evokes awe and reverence, not merely for his martial prowess, but for his uncompromising adherence to righteousness and discipline. His life was an embodiment of the Sikh virtues of seva, simran, and shaurya—service, meditation, and valour. Born in the village of Sarinh in the Malwa region (present-day Sangrur district), Akali Baba Phula Singh's father, Bhai Ishar Singh, fell a martyr during the Wadda Ghallughara, the Great Holocaust of 1762, when the Durrani forces carried out a massacre of Sikhs. Bereft of his father at the tender age of two, the young Phula Singh was brought up under the guidance of the saintly Baba Naina Singh, who nurtured him in the principles of Gurmat and the martial traditions of the Khalsa. At the age of fourteen, his mother, Mata Har Kaur, died leaving him spiritually orphaned but inwardly fortified. He took amrit at Anandpur Sahib, the birthplace of the Khalsa, and pledged himself to the service of the Guru and Panth. His years of training under Baba Naina Singh transformed him into a consummate warrior and scholar, equally proficient in swordsmanship, horsemanship, and the exegesis of Gurbani.



Sketch courtesy: Kanwar Singh

The Rise of a Saint-Soldier

By the turn of the century, Akali Phula Singh had become a prominent leader of the Buddha Dal, the oldest order of Nihang Singhs, who were the defenders of Sikh shrines and upholders of Khalsa sovereignty. His fame for fearlessness and fairness spread rapidly across Punjab. Maharaja Ranjit Singh, then consolidating the Sikh Empire, heard of his exploits and sent Diwan Moti Ram from Phillaur with an invitation to join the royal forces at Lahore. Akali Phula

Singh arrived with his blue-clad Nihang army, a sight of unbending dignity and martial splendour, which deeply impressed the Maharaja. Unlike courtiers or mercenaries, Akali Phula Singh was not swayed by worldly honours. He served as the conscience of the Khalsa Raj, often reminding the Maharaja of the ethical obligations of Sikh sovereignty. As Jathedar of the Akal Takht Sahib, he held the supreme moral authority of the Sikh community. His historic decision to summon Maharaja Ranjit Singh to the

Takht and sentence him to public chastisement for moral transgression remains a singular example of fearless rectitude in political history. The Maharaja, humbled before the spiritual authority of the Panth, accepted the verdict, thereby reaffirming the supremacy of the Guru's discipline over temporal power.

Defender of the Faith Akali Phula Singh's service to the Panth extended far beyond the political sphere. He dedicated his energies to the restoration and maintenance of historic Gurdwaras, including Anandpur Sahib and Damdama Sahib. His permanent base in Amritsar, known as the Burj of Akali Baba Phula Singh, became a centre of spiritual and military training, where the Nihangs practised martial arts, gatka, and weaponry alongside nitnem and kirtan. A devout yet disciplined ascetic, Akali Ji embodied the dual spirit of miri-piri—the temporal and the spiritual—so central to Sikh philosophy. His army was a moving Gurdwara, their daily routine structured around prayer, service, and readiness for battle.

The Warrior of the Khalsa Raj

Akali Baba Phula Singh's battlefield exploits were legendary. He participated in numerous campaigns under the Khalsa banner—the battle of Kasur (1807), the siege of Multan (1818), the capture of Kashmir (1819), and finally, the battle of Naushehra (1823), where he attained martyrdom. In 1808, he had confronted Hussaini Sadhai at Amritsar and a year later, in 1809, led a daring assault against Captain Patton White's troops who were surveying the cis-Sutlej region. His conquest of Mohammadpur Khangarh remains an enduring testimony to his strategic brilliance and audacity. Perhaps his most remarkable campaign was the conquest of Kashmir in 1819, where he led the Nihang contingent of the Sikh army under General Diwan Chand.

The Shergarhi Fort witnessed fierce combat; Akali Phula Singh's leadership turned the tide in favour of the Khalsa. After victory, he established the Shaheedganj quarter in Srinagar, where fallen Singhs were cremated and Nihang soldiers performed daily simran. The Shaheedganj Gurdwara, near which his contingent resided, became a sanctified space in Kashmir's Sikh heritage. Though later rumours alleged that Akali Phula Singh had sought to demolish the Khankah-e-Mualla mosque of Shah-e-Hamdan, contemporary accounts and internal evidence reveal this to be a fabrication of anti-Sikh elements. His faith in the One Supreme Being, and his respect for all places of worship, were in keeping with Guru Nanak's universal message of harmony. Diwan Chand Zafar Jang himself persuaded him that the preservation of communal peace was the higher path—and Akali Ji, true to his spiritual wisdom, desisted from any act that might hurt religious sentiments.

The Flame of Shaheedganj : After Akali Ji's departure from Kashmir on 23 September 1819, the Gurdwara at Shaheedganj fell into neglect. During the Dogra rule, attempts were made to convert the site into a mosque, but a devout Sikh, Bhai Kahan Singh, revived the sanctity of the place in 1884, establishing a morcha (front) to safeguard it. His descendants, notably Bhai Chatter Singh and his sons, continued the seva of the Gurdwara.

The sacred well, the ancient mulberry tree, and the tall Nishan Sahib standing there today remain mute witnesses to the spiritual legacy of Akali Baba Phula Singh in Kashmir.

The Martyrdom at Naushehra : The final chapter of his life unfolded on 14 March 1823 at the Battle of Naushehra, fought on the banks of the Kabul River. Facing the formidable Afghan forces of Azim Khan, the Sikh army faltered momentarily. It was then that Akali Baba Phula Singh, leading from the front with his blue-clad warriors, rallied the troops with cries of "Waheguru Ji Ka Khalsa, Waheguru Ji Ki Fateh!" In that fierce engagement, the Akali Jathedar was struck by enemy fire. Refusing to retreat, he pressed on until he fell, sword in hand, sanctifying the battlefield with his blood. His body was cremated near the Lunda River, six kilometres from Naushehra—today a site of solemn pilgrimage. His martyrdom, turning imminent defeat into resounding victory, became the immortal hymn of Khalsa bravery.

Manuscript No. 1:

A Rare Handwritten Volume of Sri Guru Granth Sahib Ji Preserved at Bunga Akali Phula Singh, Srinagar

— *A Testament of Devotion and Calligraphic Excellence*

Preserved with reverence in Bunga Akali Phula Singh, located within the sacred precincts of Shaheed Ganj, near Sher Garhi, Srinagar (Kashmir), this manuscript stands as a remarkable specimen of Sikh religious art and devotion. It is a two-hundred-year-old handwritten copy of Sri Guru Granth Sahib Ji, the eternal scripture of the Sikhs, edited and compiled under the divine guidance of Sri Guru Arjan Dev Ji, the Fifth Guru. The manuscript comprises 725 leaves of Gurbani text, supplemented by 21 leaves of introductory content, making a total of 746 leaves.

Each leaf measures approximately 16 inches by 13½ inches, with the written portion confined to 9½ inches by 10½ inches. The script is executed on fine Kashmiri handmade paper, known for its durability and subtle sheen. The black jet ink, still bold and distinct, reflects the care and mastery of the unknown scribe who dedicated his hand and heart to this sacred task. Every page bears 21 lines, written in clear and elegant Gurmukhi calligraphy. The four margins

are adorned with decorative color borders, enhancing the visual grace of the text. The opening six leaves, though devoid of Gurbani text, are embellished with the sacred symbols Ik Onkar, Swastik, and Om, written in saffron ink—a color traditionally associated with purity and spiritual ascension. Similarly, eight terminal leaves bear the same holy inscriptions, signifying the cyclical and eternal nature of divine remembrance. The opening folios of the manuscript are especially noteworthy for their ornamental calligraphy. The Mool Mantra—the primal statement of Sikh theology—is rendered with deep reverence: among eleven lines, six are written in gold ink, while the remaining five are in black jet ink. Another initial folio displays a similar aesthetic balance, with five lines in gold and six in black, creating a rhythmic interplay of color and devotion. These opening pages, richly ornamented and executed in multi-hued calligraphic flourishes, reflect the manuscript's ceremonial and artistic significance. The manuscript concludes with the Ragmala, preserving the traditional order of the Adi Granth and affirming its completeness. The entire volume remains in remarkably fine condition, its paper luminous and well-preserved, a testament to the climate of Kashmir and the meticulous custodianship at the Bunga. This manuscript not only embodies the spiritual spirit of Sikh devotion but also represents a rare confluence of Kashmiri craftsmanship and Sikh calligraphic tradition. Its presence in Srinagar underscores the historic reach of Sikh heritage in Kashmir, where centers like Shaheed Ganj once flourished as sanctuaries of faith, learning, and artistic expressions.

Manuscript No. 2:

Handwritten Volume of Sri Guru Granth Sahib Ji
Preserved in Srinagar, Kashmir

— *A Two-Century-Old Testament of Faith and
Calligraphic Devotion*

Among the sacred Sikh relics preserved in the valley of Kashmir, this exquisite two-hundred-year-old handwritten manuscript of Sri Guru Granth Sahib Ji stands as a shining monument of devotion, artistry, and meticulous craftsmanship. Compiled under the spiritual guidance of Sri Guru Arjan Dev Ji, the Fifth Guru of the Sikhs, this manuscript reflects both the devotional fervor and the refined aesthetic sensibilities of its anonymous scribe. The manuscript comprises 613 leaves of Gurbani text, preceded by 28 preliminary leaves, bringing the total to 641 leaves. Each leaf measures approximately 14½ inches by 13½ inches, while the written area spans 9½ inches by 10½ inches. The text is inscribed on fine Kashmiri handmade paper, a material known for its longevity and smooth texture. Although the paper exhibits slightly less sheen compared to the earlier (First) manuscript, it remains in remarkably sound condition, testifying to careful preservation and superior quality. Each page contains 21 neatly ruled lines, rendered in beautiful, clear, and uniform Gurmukhi script. The four margins of every folio are richly bordered with colored decorative lines, displaying a refined sense of symmetry and design. The

manuscript's calligraphy is both disciplined and graceful, demonstrating the scribe's mastery of proportion and rhythm—an essential feature of Sikh manuscript tradition.

The opening four leaves of the volume, though devoid of the main Gurbani text, are adorned with sacred inscriptions written in saffron ink—the holy symbols Ik Onkar, Swastik, and Om—expressing the manuscript's spiritual auspiciousness. A similar practice is observed at the close of the manuscript, where five concluding pages bear the same divine inscriptions in saffron ink, symbolizing spiritual completeness and continuity. The Mool Mantra, the fundamental declaration of Sikh theology, marks the beginning of the sacred text and is rendered with profound reverence. Though less ornamented than the first manuscript, its purity of execution and harmonious layout testify to an equally deep sense of devotion. The entire text is written in jet black ink, which remains dark and vivid even after two centuries—a testament to the fine quality of both ink and paper.

The manuscript concludes with the Ragmala, confirming its adherence to the canonical structure of the Adi Granth. Its overall condition is notably good, with no major damage, fading, or loss, suggesting it has been safeguarded with reverence and care over generations. This manuscript exemplifies the fusion of spiritual dedication and aesthetic discipline that characterises early Sikh scribal traditions. It bears witness to the spread of Sikh literary and artistic culture in Kashmir, where centers such as Shaheed Ganj, Srinagar, served not only as places of worship but also as repositories of sacred manuscripts, theological learning, and calligraphic art.

As a pair to the earlier manuscript, this second volume enriches our understanding of the Kashmiri tradition of Sikh manuscript production, where faith, beauty, and discipline coalesced into enduring works of spiritual and artistic heritage.

Legacy: Akali Baba Phula Singh's life and death illuminate the ideal of the Khalsa as saint and soldier, a spiritual warrior who upholds truth without fear or malice. In him, the temporal sword was guided by divine wisdom; his courage flowed from faith, not ambition.

As the Punjabi poet beautifully wrote:

*“He who offered his head to uphold the honour of the
Panth, His spirit still guards the Khalsa's path.”*

To this day, the name of Akali Baba Phula Singh is invoked with reverence wherever courage and devotion are celebrated. His Burj in Amritsar and his Shaheed Asthan in Naushehra stand not merely as memorials of a hero, but as sacred testaments to the undying flame of the Khalsa Panth.

Dr Jasbir Singh Sarna is a voracious writer in Punjabi, English and Urdu. He is a Poet, Scholar, Historian and has written about 70 books. Hailing from Kashmir, he remains founder-editor of the monthly Shamshir-e-Dast Amritsar.

What the World Holds Gently

A Poetic Conversation with Guru Teghbahadar Sahib

There are times when the world feels quieter, when something subtle invites us to listen more closely. In such moments, it becomes clear that the elements around us are not just background—they are gentle companions, each offering its own kind of wisdom. The wind, the river, the fire, the earth, even the stillness between them—each holds a truth that meets us exactly where we are. This piece emerged from sitting with that awareness, from allowing the natural world to speak in its own language. What the elements revealed was not instruction or command, but tenderness: a reminder that we, too, are held gently, and that guidance often arrives in ways we only notice when the heart is quiet enough to receive it.

They tell me

the world wept the day You left—
that the sky dimmed,
that the wind held its breath,
that even the earth trembled
under the weight of Your silence.
I believe them.
For when I close my eyes and listen deeply,
the elements still whisper
what they witnessed.

The Dawn Speaks

“Child,” the dawn says,
“I watched a quiet radiance walk the earth—
not claiming light, but becoming it.”
“Those who stood near that radiance
found their own shadows lifted.”
I bow my head, for I have felt that too.

The River Speaks

“I carried stories of liberation,”
the river murmurs.
“Where the Guru’s footsteps touched my banks,
I felt impurities loosen,
and lives—so heavy with sorrow—

begin to float again.”

I dip my hands in memory,
letting the water remind me
how grace moves without sound.
And just as the river softens what it touches,
another witness rises—
carrying the weight
of what no water could wash away.

The Wind Speaks

The wind circles me softly:
“I was there in Delhi
on the day the sword descended.”
“I watched serenity sit unshaken—
not resisting, not yielding,
simply resting in the Eternal.”
I tremble, not from fear, but from the magnitude
of what devotion becomes
when it stops needing a reason.

The Earth Speaks

The earth, ancient and aching,
whispers from its deepest layers—
“When the Guru’s head touched me,
a silence spread across creation.”

“It was not the silence of ending,
but of a door opening— a freedom so vast
that even I could not contain it.”
I press my palm to the ground
and feel that doorway still.

The Fire Speaks

Fire crackles gently,
as though remembering tenderness:
“I carried the warmth of that presence.
In the cremation flame,
there was no sorrow—
only a radiance returning home.”
“Even in my fiercest blaze,
I could not match
the fearlessness that lived in Him.”
I sit beside that imagined flame,
letting its light fold into mine.

The Sky Speaks

And then the sky—
wide, unbounded—
opens itself above me:
“Do not say the Guru left,” Guru breathes.
Light does not leave.
It expands.”
I look upward,
and the stars feel close enough to touch.

And I Speak

O Beloved Guru,
the elements have kept Your story
far better than my words ever could.

Yet something within me rises—
a small voice, trembling,

still wanting to speak:
You, who offered the self
so others may breathe free...
You, who became shelter
for those abandoned by kings...
You, whose stillness
outshone the cruelty of empires...
How does one write of such love
without falling silent?
Perhaps that is why,
even today,
the wind hushes when I remember You.

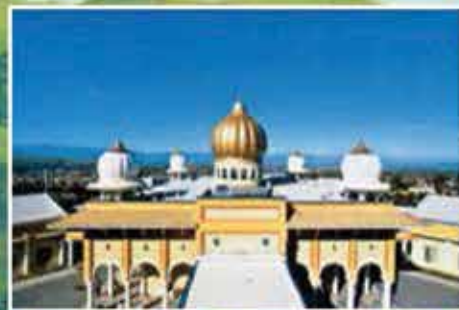
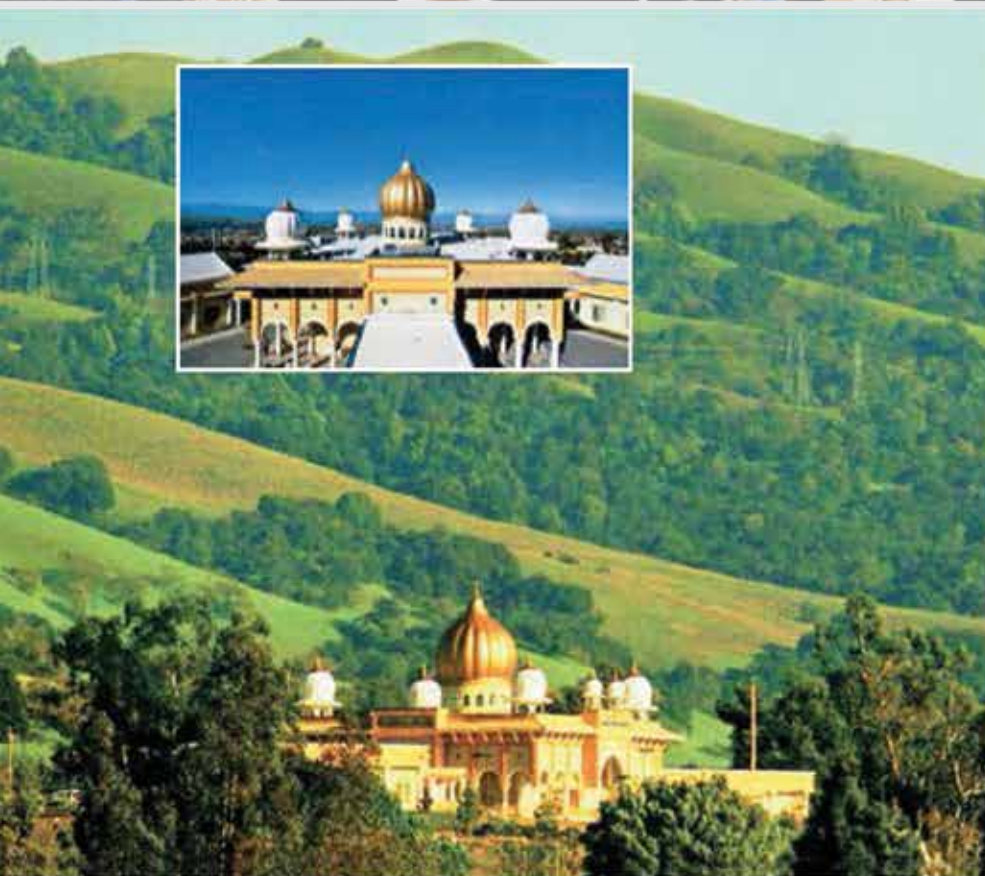
The water softens.
The dawn bows.
The fire grows gentle.
The earth becomes steady beneath my feet.
The sky opens like a blessing.

All of them saying,
in their own way:

**The Guru is not gone.
The Guru is everywhere.**

And I—
I sit inside that truth,
letting it settle
into every quiet place within,
until what is broken
learns to become whole again.

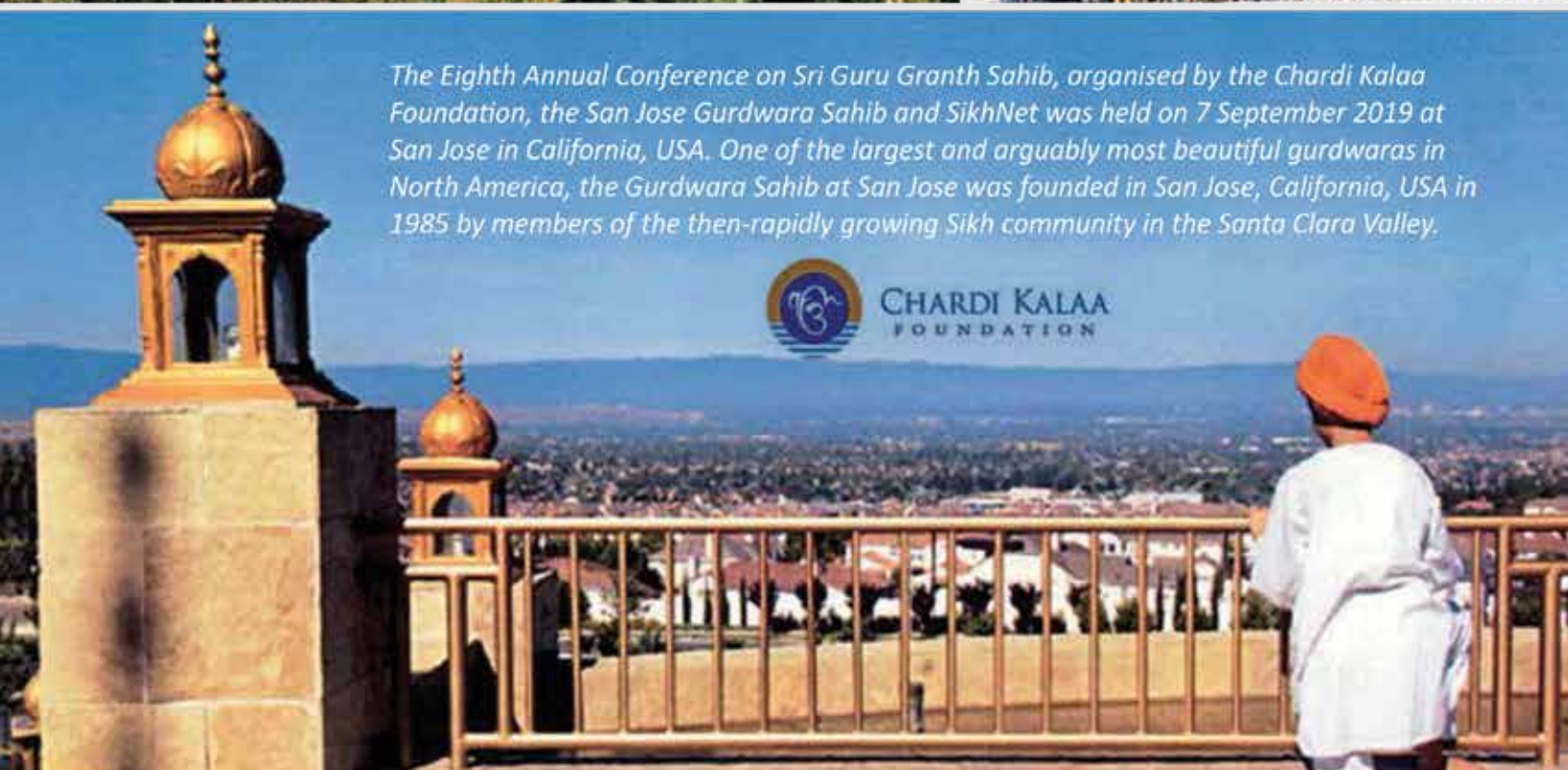
Inni Kaur is an author, poet, and artist whose work explores spirituality, Sikh thought, and the human search for meaning. Raised across Kuwait, New Zealand, Australia, Greece, and the United States, her writing reflects a contemplative voice shaped by diverse cultures and lived experience. She is engaged in trans-creating Sabad and the writings of Bhai Vir Singh, and frequently speaks at interfaith gatherings, universities, and civic institutions, including the U.S. Office of the Pentagon Chaplain, Yale, Fairfield, and Columbia universities. Inni remains affiliated with the Sikh Research Institute (SikhRI). More at InniKaur.com.



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



CHARDI KALAA
FOUNDATION





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