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ABSTRACTS OF SIKH STUDIES

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EDITORIAL

FROM THE EDITOR

It is heartening to find that a considerable number of young scholars are taking to Sikh Studies in our day. The noticable feature of this study is that it is embracing wider dimensions of Sikh religion. The only missing thing is the co-ordinated study by a group of scholars who discuss, interact and confront the emerging challenges from unexpected directions.

The challenges before the Sikh studies are diverse and manifold. Only last month a Sikh scholar from USA presented a paper at the department of Guru Nanak Sikh Studies in Panjab University and drew the attention of the audience to the Sikh studies in the western academia. The learned scholar Amandeep Singh placed the key findings of the western scholars before us which we must analyse, interpret and address to the benefit of readers.

Notable aspect of western studies, he pointed out is that it views Sikhism 'through the prism of history'. The secular outlook and not the ideological core of Sikh religion remains the focus of their study. Needless to say that it bypasses the concept of *Naam* which is central to Sikh studies in the Panjab region. The concerns and the outlook of the western angle is not in any way antagonistic per se, yet it is markedly different from the studies undertaken in our universities and colleges. The difference between the two tends to split the discourse in all its seriousness. One more aspect of its broader perspective is that the western academia takes the Sikh and Panjab studies in its togetherness, though it does not overlook the distinct identity of Sikh religion.

The characteristics which mark the Sikh identity have also been coloured by the regional sentiment and considerations. The casteism

as an embedded system is alien to the scholars of the west, whereas it is the racism and ethnicity which defines and distinguishes the society and the people in the eyes of the western man. The very question of the Sikh identity which forms the basis of Sikh religious study, becomes disputed between the two sets of scholars. Although the debate on it is never ill-intentioned, yet it generates a confusion in the absence of a serious interaction between exponents of the two schools. The scholars insist that it should not be seen as a binary and needs to be discussed in the spirit of a healthy debate.

The western mind looks at the welfare of man as central to its study of Sikh religion. The practices prevalent among the religious followers become the starting point of study for the western scholarship. We can say that the personal conduct was never away from the Sikh doctrine as laid down by the Sikh Gurus and the Sikh scripture.

The study of Sikh religion in the west has come to stay. The scholars of Sikh studies cannot dismiss this new phenomenon as sinister and motivated. Its sincerity and maturity cannot be questioned without any serious engagement by the scholars. An earlier challenge from western studies happened around the end of the past millennium when scholars like H. McLeod came out with findings on the face and identity of Sikh religion which emerged during, and due to the establishment of the colonial rule of the British in the Panjab after the fall of Sikh Empire.

The observance of the Sikhs settled in different parts of the western hemisphere and their concerns and outlook of their religion are more Euro-centric and differ sharply from our age-old traditional beliefs and practices. We have to reason out this new world-view of Sikh religion with a matching maturity, density of thought and argument. The scholars of the Panjab region should take it as an opportunity to take their own study to a higher level of scholarly debate.

Western study of our religion has offered us space to broaden the scope of our studies. The various Chairs have been established in different universities of the Panjab and quite a few in the neighbouring state of Haryana. Most of the Chairs have been created to accommodate the favourites of politicians and not with an academic urge to address the raging issues on the emerging interpretations of

Sikh religion.

The current issue has received fresh contributions from established scholars and political activists having deep academic pursuits. The heated debate on the issue of Sacrilege Act enacted by the ruling party has attracted multiple views and comments. Bibi Kiranjot Kaur has dissected the entire problem in finer details to point out the flaws and fallacies inherent in the proposed Act. Prof Shelley Walia, formerly of the Panjab University has drawn our attention to this redundancy of the political exercise of Panjab government in view of the status and salience of Guru Granth. An article sourced from the archives of Panjab Digital Library about Dr Honigberger as being the personal physician of Maharaja Ranjit Singh is being published as a commemorative write-up on the death anniversary of the Sikh sovereign which falls in June. Many young scholars have shown enthusiasm and marked interest in sending contributions to the journal.

I invite the scholars of the region to contribute to the Abstracts of Sikh Studies in the best service of the academic studies of Sikh religion and history. It will go a long way in reaching out to a wider readership and present the great universal face of Sikh philosophy to global audiences

THE POLITICS OF SACRILEGE IN PUNJAB: FROM FAITH TO FRAMEWORK

KIRANJOT KAUR*

Bibi Kiranjot Kaur is a scion of the illustrious Sikh leader Master Tara Singh. As a long-standing member of the SGPC she has been a relentless crusader in raising her voice against the moral and religious decline in the organizational affairs of the Sikh people. In the present article she has expressed her strong reservations on the law enacted by the State Government to deal with the incidents of sacrilege involving the Sikh scripture. Her views are always cogent and in line with the Sikh ethos and values enshrined in Guru Granth. - Editor

The issue of sacrilege has emerged as one of the most politically charged questions in contemporary Punjab. While the protection of Guru Granth Sahib commands universal support among Sikhs, the evolution of sacrilege from a matter of religious concern into a subject of legal intervention and electoral politics raises important questions. The passage of the *Jagat Jot Sri Guru Granth Sahib Satkar* (Amendment) Act, 2026 marks a significant shift in the relationship between faith, religious institutions, and the state. This article traces the evolution of the sacrilege discourse from the early 2000s to the present and examines how the new legal framework may affect Sikh religious autonomy, institutional authority, and the traditional relationship between the Sikh and the Guru.

* Member SGPC

Few issues evoke as much emotion in Punjab as sacrilege involving Guru Granth Sahib. During the past decade, particularly after the Bargari incidents of 2015, sacrilege has become a central feature of Punjab's political discourse. Political parties have repeatedly invoked the issue, promised justice, and proposed legislative remedies. Yet despite years of investigations and commissions, prosecutions are awaited and closure remains elusive.

The latest development is the Jagat Jot Sri Guru Granth Sahib Satkar (Amendment) Act, 2026. Supporters view the legislation as a necessary response to public anger and the perceived inadequacy of existing laws. Critics, however, fear that the amendment represents something more consequential: the transformation of a deeply personal and spiritual relationship into a state-regulated framework.

The debate therefore extends beyond punishment for sacrilege. It concerns the boundaries between faith and governance, religious autonomy and state authority.

To understand contemporary debates, it is necessary to revisit the foundations of Sikh doctrine. Guru Nanak Dev ji challenged ritualism and emphasised an inward spiritual journey centred on the Sabad. The Sikh tradition recognises the Guru not as a physical intermediary but as divine wisdom embodied in Gurbani, expressed as "Sabad Guru, Surt Dhun Chela."

Guru Gobind Singh ji institutionalised this understanding by bestowing Guruship upon Guru Granth Sahib. Consequently, the Sikh relationship with the Guru is direct and personal. Unlike traditions dependent upon priestly mediation, Sikh practice permits individual engagement with Gurbani without intermediaries.

This understanding has historically shaped domestic religious practice. Thousands of Sikh families maintain Prakash of Guru Granth Sahib in their homes. Although certain principles of Maryada remain constant, the observance of religious discipline in a private home has never been identical to that of a public Gurdwara. Historically, faith rather than administrative oversight governed this relationship.

The current debate emerges precisely because legal regulation is beginning to enter a space previously governed by personal

responsibility and religious conviction.

Interestingly, sacrilege was not always the dominant political issue it has become today. During Operation Bluestar, Guru Granth Sahib was struck by gunfire inside Darbar Sahib. In 1986, Birs of Guru Granth Sahib were burnt in Nakodar and four Sikh youths protesting peacefully were later killed by police. Yet these incidents did not generate the sustained political mobilisation witnessed in recent years.

A major turning point occurred in 2001 when followers of Piara Singh Bhanjarawala allegedly desecrated Birs of Guru Granth Sahib in Ropar and Fatehgarh Sahib. The widespread reaction to those incidents marked the beginning of a new phase in Sikh public consciousness. Sacrilege became not merely a religious concern but a collective political issue.

In subsequent years, public sensitivity to perceived disrespect towards Guru Granth Sahib intensified. At the same time, questions arose regarding who possessed the authority to define sacrilege and enforce standards of respect.

It was in this context that self-styled Satkar Committees emerged across Punjab. Initially presenting themselves as defenders of Guru Granth Sahib, many gradually developed into informal enforcement groups operating outside established religious institutions.

Recognising potential dangers, Akal Takht repeatedly intervened. Resolutions passed in 2006, 2008 and 2011 directed such groups to report concerns to recognised Sikh authority Sgpc rather than taking independent action. Nevertheless, the committees continued to expand their activities.

Over time, some acquired significant influence through social media and support from sections of the Sikh diaspora. The result was the emergence of parallel mechanisms of religious enforcement operating alongside established institutions.

The consequences became increasingly visible. Allegations of beadbi were sometimes based upon subjective interpretations of Maryada rather than deliberate acts of disrespect. Families found themselves subjected to scrutiny regarding private religious practices. In some cases, police officials appeared willing to cooperate with

vigilante groups, blurring the distinction between lawful authority and informal enforcement.

These developments reveal a broader challenge: once religious authority becomes fragmented, disputes over interpretation can easily become disputes over power.

The Bargari sacrilege incidents of 2015 transformed the political significance of the issue. The disappearance of a Bir of Guru Granth Sahib, the subsequent recovery of torn pages, and the police firing on protestors at Kotkapura and Behbal Kalan created a profound crisis of public confidence.

The Shiromani Akali Dal government faced severe criticism for its handling of the situation. The political consequences were far-reaching and continue to influence Punjab's electoral landscape.

When the Aam Aadmi Party came to power in 2022, it promised justice in the Bargari cases. Yet despite expectations generated by electoral commitments, many of the central questions surrounding the incidents remain unresolved. The slow pace of investigations and limited prosecutorial outcomes have sustained public frustration.

In this context, demands for stronger legal provisions gained momentum. Activists, religious organisations and sections of the public increasingly argued that existing laws were insufficient to deter sacrilege.

The Punjab government's response was not simply to strengthen criminal penalties but to amend the Jagat Jot Sri Guru Granth Sahib Satkar Act of 2008.

The original legislation focused primarily on the printing, storage and distribution of Guru Granth Sahib and recognised SGPC's authority in those areas. The 2026 amendment significantly expands this framework by introducing provisions concerning custody, protection and offences.

One of the most significant innovations is the creation of the legal category of "custodian." Individuals, institutions and Gurdwaras entrusted with a Bir may now bear legal responsibility for its protection and maintenance. While intended to ensure accountability, this provision raises difficult questions. Could ordinary Sikh families

become legally vulnerable in cases involving accidental damage? Could routine religious practice become subject to official scrutiny?

The amendment also expands the state's role in matters previously governed by religious guidance. Concepts rooted in Sikh Maryada may increasingly become matters of legal interpretation and enforcement.

Critics fear that such provisions may inadvertently legitimise forms of intervention previously associated with vigilante groups. Supporters, by contrast, argue that stronger legal oversight is necessary to prevent future sacrilege incidents.

The amendment has also generated debate over terminology. The increasing use of the word "Saroop" in place of the traditional term "Bir" is not merely linguistic. It reflects competing understandings of how Guru Granth Sahib should be conceptualised and represented within legal discourse.

Language matters because legal frameworks often shape public understanding. When theological concepts are translated into statutory language, meanings can shift. The resulting tension between religious vocabulary and legal terminology forms an important but often overlooked dimension of the current debate.

The central issue raised by the amendment is whether religious sanctity can be protected without expanding state authority into matters of faith.

Few Sikhs dispute the need for effective legal responses to deliberate sacrilege. The disagreement concerns the method. Some argue that strengthening existing criminal provisions would have been sufficient. Others maintain that a specialised legal framework is necessary because of the unique status of Guru Granth Sahib in Sikh tradition.

The challenge lies in balancing protection with autonomy. If the state assumes increasing responsibility for defining, monitoring and enforcing aspects of religious conduct, where should the boundary be drawn?

This question is particularly significant in a constitutional system committed to secular governance. The issue is therefore not simply about religion. It concerns the broader relationship between religious

communities and the modern state.

The debate surrounding the Jagat Jot Sri Guru Granth Sahib Satkar (Amendment) Act, 2026 extends far beyond the immediate issue of sacrilege. It raises fundamental questions about authority, accountability and the future of Sikh-state relations in Punjab.

The desire to protect Guru Granth Sahib is shared across the Sikh community. Yet protection and regulation are not identical concepts. As Punjab continues to grapple with the legacy of Bargari and the politics that followed, policymakers and religious institutions must carefully consider whether greater state involvement strengthens or weakens the traditions they seek to preserve.

Ultimately, the question is not whether sacrilege should be addressed. It is whether the sanctity of faith can be protected without transforming faith itself into an object of state administration.

SACRILEGE LEGISLATION: ITS PROPRIETY AND VALIDITY

PROF SHELLEY WALIA*

The article was originally written by the author for The Tribune. On my request, he consented it to be published in the *Abstracts of Sikh Studies* for the benefit of a wider audience. The writer invokes the deeper recesses of faith to conclude that Guru Granth remains beyond sacrilege and the parameters and scope of a codified law. – Editor

It is important, at the outset, to be precise about what the debate around sacrilege legislation in Punjab is all about. What is actually being legislated raises a question that liberal political philosophy has never satisfactorily resolved. Understandably, no one is legislating reverence, and as it is, reverence cannot be legislated. What is being necessitated by newly assertive religious voices in the state is a criminal law that seeks to impose imprisonment for acts of desecration or blasphemy against Guru Granth Sahib.

Clearly, reverence is a condition of the inner life, of what a childhood spent in intimate familiarity with Guru Granth Sahib imperceptibly and irrevocably instils. No law can produce that reverence and no law could have. The distinction matters enormously.

This is not an abstract question for me. Growing up, we as children were drawn into the world of Sikhism not through instruction or obligation but through something far more powerful. Our mother would gather us around her and read aloud stories of Guru Nanak

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from his Janamsakhis, pausing often to explain a relevant stanza, its meaning, its texture, its significance to the life we were living. The reverence that formed in us was entirely spontaneous, born of understanding rather than compulsion or fear.

The sacred stories were simply ours, along with Guru Granth Sahib that sat in our homes and gurdwaras the way a beloved elder sits with weight and sturdy authority. Our journeys through a landscape of gurdwaras became, over the years, a part of the architecture of our growing. Each visit deepened a familiarity that was never ceremonial, never anxious, never held in place by the shadow of legal consequence. Guru Granth Sahib was a living presence, encountered with fearless intimacy that comes only when a text has genuinely entered one's inner being. That fearlessness was itself a form of respect, deeper, I would argue, than anything a blasphemy law could produce. That reverence was unlegislated. It arose from somewhere interior.

Which is why laws criminalizing the desecration of Guru Granth Sahib trouble me in a way that is difficult to name at first, and then becomes very easy to spell out. The assumption is that desecration is possible. That a human hand, a careless or a cruel act, can diminish what is eternal. But if you believe in the sanctity of the Granth, then you must also believe it is beyond harm. The Word does not require the law's protection. It never did.

It is from this experience that my reflections arise. The demand for legislation on blasphemy conflates two things that must be kept distinct: the legitimate collective hurt caused by deliberate desecration, and the very different question of whether criminal penalty is the appropriate response to it. One can treat the former seriously without conceding the latter. And it is that distinction between honouring what is sacred and legislating against its violation through fear that the debate in Punjab requires us to examine.

The problem is not incidental. It goes to the heart of what religion essentially claims to be doing. Let us look at Sikhism and Buddhism, the two traditions that share a profound orientation towards and interiority emerge from premises that sit in a complex relationship with doctrinal coercion.

The Buddha's epistemological injunction, preserved in the Kalama Sutta, insists that truth cannot be inherited or imposed through institutional fiat. It must be tested against experience, verified through practice, realised in the depths of individual consciousness.

Tradition places the burden of understanding on the individual and refuses to sacralise any object or institution beyond the reach of inquiry.

Sikhism begins in a register that shares certain deep affinities with this orientation. The Gurus privilege Naam, ethical conduct and contemplative discipline over ritualism, formalism and the mere performance of belief. The divine in Sikh theology not external or remote, it is immanent and accessible through reflection and grace. The Shabad, the Word, is not simply an object to be defended but a living truth to be realized through sustained engagement. In this theological register, the relationship between external acts and inner spiritual reality is one that the tradition has asked its followers to reflect upon.

And yet, Sikhism does not remain within a purely contemplative frame, nor should one expect it to. Its historical evolution produced a distinct institutional and shared identity, anchored in Guru Granth Sahib as a living Guru, and not merely a repository of wisdom but the living focal point of collective devotion, authority and continuity. This is not incidental but constitutive of our Sikh tradition, in which the scripture is a symbol of collective survival, a condensation of historical memory and dignity accumulated through centuries of immense sacrifice and resistance. To treat acts of deliberate desecration as merely symbolic offences, without social or legal consequence, would be to misread both the phenomenology of religious community and the specific historical vulnerabilities of the Sikh experience.

To acknowledge this fully is not to settle the question of legislation. It is to understand the conditions that give rise to the demand for it. The push for stricter sacrilege laws in Punjab must emerge from history, from asking whether the lived experience of a community has found its most sacred symbols repeatedly targeted in contexts of political destabilization. What is being debated, therefore, is not theology in isolation. It is memory, collective dignity and the

question of whether certain forms of targeted desecration constitute a form of emotional hurt that the law has an obligation to address.

However, while nearly every religious tradition seeks legal protection against acts perceived as desecration, such laws cannot become instruments of securing favour with a religious community. Reverence can never be legislated into existence, nor can faith be placed under perpetual surveillance by the state or by self-appointed guardians of religious sentiment. The question of whether every individual possesses the “proper” degree of respect for Guru Granth Sahib cannot be adjudicated through punitive law without producing an atmosphere of fear, suspicion and vigilantism.

India’s legal framework contains provisions to address acts that deliberately inflame communal tensions or wound religious sentiments. To go beyond this and to encourage a politics of continuous vigilance around sacrilege risks transforming a deeply personal and spiritual relation of reverence into a public regime of coercion and fear.

This is precisely where the philosophical complexity becomes most demanding. Law operates through coercion. Reverence, by contrast, is at its most meaningful when it is freely given, arising from genuine understanding rather than external compulsion. The question that political philosophers and theologians have long grappled with is whether these two registers, the legal and the devotional, can be aligned without one compromising the other. It is a question without easy resolution, and one that the tradition itself, with its emphasis on inner realization, places before us with particular force. The question, thus, is how that tension is best handled, and whether criminal law is the appropriate instrument for doing so.

DR. HONIGBERGER – A HUNGARIAN COURTIER OF MAHARAJA RANJIT SINGH

Dr D.K. VERMA*

Dr D.K. Verma was from the earliest crop of teachers with a keen sense of history, who served at the Punjabi University Patiala. This article was earlier published in the weekly 'SPOKESMAN', which had then, former Lok Sabha speaker Sardar Hukam Singh as its Editor. The article has been retrieved from the archives of Panjab Digital Library and presented to readers as a tribute to the genius of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, who picked up Dr Honigberger to serve as his personal physician. The Hungarian doctor left for us a detailed account of Lahore Durbar in his book , "Thirty-five Years in the East". – Editor

Of the very limited number of Europeans employed in civil capacity in the Lahore Darbar, the names of Drs. Honigberger and Harlan and General Avitabile stand out prominently. Maharaja Ranjit Singh reposed much confidence in Honigberger.

John Martin Honigberger was born in 1795. He was a Transylvanian Saxon by birth from the town Kronstadt (now in Romania). He was a traveller of no mean calibre, for over 30 years he travelled to the principal parts of Europe, Asia, Egypt and India. He was a medical man and a great adventurer. The spirit of adventure took him away from his native country in 1815, while he was hardly of 20 years. He had a great fascination for the East which he regarded as the cradle of mankind and the birth-place of religion and science. From 1816 to 1829, Honigberger served in different capacities. (Prem Singh Hoti, *Khalsa Raj de Badeshi Karende*, p. 177-80).

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Hearing from Avitabile of Maharaja Ranjit Singh's generosity and of the welcome the Europeans received at his court, he made up his mind to visit Lahore. He arrived at Lahore in 1829. (Honigberger, *Thirty Five Years in the East*, p. 44.) As usual, the Maharaja kept him waiting for some months and more over he was out on a military expedition and did not return until the rainy season. Taking advantage of this interval Dr Honigberger visited Kashmir, where he treated Raja Suchet Singh and attained popularity as a physician.

The Maharaja appointed him as physician to the Lahore Court and, later on, at the insistence of the Maharaja he accepted the charge of gun-powder and gunstock manufactory also. (H.R. Gupta, *Punjab on the Eve of First Sikh War*, p. 20) . In the beginning his salary was fixed at Rs. 800/- per month which was later on raised to Rs. 3000/-.

Amongst the curious duties entrusted to him was the superintendence of the distillation of a very potent spirit, which he invented for Ranjit Singh's special delectation, for the Maharaja had lost his taste for ordinary spirit which, he alleged, had no bite.

Honigberger writes that the first patient I had to attend, after my arrival at Lahore, was Achilles, an adopted son of General Allard. This boy was afflicted with a fistula on the spine, of long duration, and which had been several times superficially headed by native surgeon. He was so reduced that one could truly say, he was but skin and bones..., which of course rendered the case most difficult...General Allard told me that the boy would die if not attended to, that he could no longer bear to see him in that pitiful state, and urgently solicited my aid... I ventured to perform an operation, and that by force, for the boy made an obstinate resistance, which I placed him on the sofa. General Allard holding his arms and General Ventura his feet, while I made a cut along the fistulous sore which caused him to be senseless for the following thirty six hours, and to suffer with a severe fever. My assiduous attendance accelerated the radical cure of the fistula, his strength visibly increased, and after a few months he regained his original plumpness. (Honig-berger, *op. cit.*, pp. 44-45).

He spent practically four years (1829-33) in the court of the Maharaja and was moderately honoured. Ranjit Singh came to trust him so much that one day he offered to him the choice of the

governorship of a province or the command of Artillery department.

In 1836 Honigberger received a message from Ventura that Maharaja Ranjit Singh wanted him to return to Lahore. On arrival, he found Ranjit Singh almost at the end of his life, quite dumb and almost paralysed—nearly in mortal disease. No doubt, Drs. Harvey and Banner were attending the Maharaja, but the latter had no faith in them. The Maharaja had a full faith in Honigberger and took medicine from him. Within a few minutes, the condition of the Maharaja considerably improved. He was able to sit up and speak and in gratitude he bestowed upon the doctor a pair of gold bangles and shawls of the value of about rupees 1000/-.

Honigberger and Lala Kishan Chand were sent to Shikarpur in 1838. The *Nazims* of Sindh spoke to the envoys of Lahore Darbar that they must prevent the Maharaja from proceeding towards Shikarpur. On their return the Maharaja, talking to Kishan Chand, said:

“Did not Honigberger reply at that time that Sahibs had firmly undertaken to keep to the otherside of the river Sutlej in the possession of the Maharaja ? Did he not further say that Shikarpur was in the Doaba of Lahore and the Maharaja had full authority to do whatever he liked with it to exact *Nazarana* from it or to keep it in the possession?” (Sohan Lai Suri, *Umdat-ut-Tawarikh* translated by V.S. Suri), Vol. III, p. 460.)

Kishan Chand replied that Honigberger had pleaded vigorously the cause of the Maharaja but out of short-sightedness and foolishness the Nazims of Sindh had stoned him and they had to run back for the safety of their lives. (*Ibid.*, p 461).

After Maharaja Ranjit Singh's death on 27 June, 1839, Honigberger practically sides with the Dogra brothers and became puppet in their hands. He remained at Lahore and witnessed many of the most stirring scenes, including death of Maharaja Kharak Singh and the murder of Kanwar Nau Nihal Singh. Even after the death of Kanwar Nau Nihal Singh, the soup was given to him, Honigberger, according to the wishes of Raja Dhian Singh, by fully knowing about the fact that he was no more (Honigberger, *op. cit.* 9 p. 13.)

Honigberger specifically mentions that there was no love lost

between the son and the father—Nau Nihal Singh and Maharaja Kharak Singh- The son showed great indifference in regard to the treatment of his father, or for his recovery; and during his father's illness he never saw him but once or twice, and then for a short time before his death.

He was also present in the garden of the Shah Bulawal, when Maharaja Sher Singh was assassinated on September 15, 1843, by Ajit Singh Sandhanwalia. He saved his life by jumping over the wall, otherwise he might also have been killed. He writes:

I was by accident no farther than ten steps from the place where the horrid crime was committed, and five minutes before his (Sher Singh) atrocious murder took place At the moment I heard the firing of the guns, and perceived people in motion taking their weapons. I was persuaded that the locality was not asylum for a tranquil man, so I looked about for a passage to make my escape from that scene of horror and betake myself to the spot where I had left my horse and servants. These were still waiting at a place close by. I hastened towards them, jumped over the low wall and narrow ditch and arrived safely at the spot. It was by a fortunate chance that I took to misdirection for my people afterwards told me that at the great entrance to the garden the bullets hissed and fied about, I was saved in a critical moment by taking a firm resolution without any hesitation. (Honigberger, op. cit., pp. 110-111).

Several Europeans had already retired from the Sikh service in consequence of disorder of troops which prevailed in the beginning of Sher Singh's reign. During the reign of Maharaja Sher Singh, there were about twenty Europeans left in the Sikh service (*Ibid*).

Hira Singh, in concert with Jalla, now took advantage of Pe anti-English temper of the army following Attar Singh's end, and dismissed the Europeans remaining in the Lahore service one after another. Only Honigberger and one Spaniard (Holmes) were allowed to continue. He was also later on dismissed ostensibly on grounds of economy.

Dr. Honigberger, the indefatigable traveller and untiring explorer-scientist, was a true son of the early 19th century who believed in the progress of science and the common cultural **heritage of mankind**.

During the Prime ministership of Jawahar Singh, Honigberger was reinstated to his former position of physician.

In India, Honigberger, married a Kashmiri woman by whom he had two daughters, who were sent to school at Mussoorie.

He claimed acquaintance with eleven separate languages, four of which were Asiatic, and many dialects. He spoke Italian, Turkish, and Persian fluently and his Latin was not bad. His mother-tongue was German.

He was an eminent scholar and wrote a well-documented book, entitled *Thirty Five Years in the East*. It is a very valuable contemporary source of information. In this book he has covered his adventures, discoveries, experiments and historical sketches relating to the Punjab and Kashmir in connection with medicine, botany, pharmacy and culture. He has also described several tropical diseases with remarkable notes on the possible mode of cure. During his stay in Palestine and in Syria, he introduced vaccination.

During the First Anglo Sikh War some of the British officers and soldiers were taken prisoner at Baddowal in January 1846 and they were placed under the charge of Honigberger and Brown and for the former's kindness to them he was afterwards thanked by the Government of India. He was rewarded with a high appointment in the British service after the fall of the Sikh Empire. He continued drawing Rs. 500 per month from the British Government till his death which occurred in 1865.

PERPETUAL CONFLICT AND SPIRITUAL CONTINUITY – THE SIKH PATH TO RESILIENCE

DR ISHMEET KAUR CHAUDHRY*

A concerted response of the Sikh people to the turmoils and tribulations is a standing testimony as witnessed in the annals of history. The author has rechristened this unique response as the 'resilience' — a peculiarity, which is unique and intrinsic to the Sikh spirit. - Editor

The history of Punjab is entwined with conflict, migration, violence, resilience, and a search for justice. Having witnessed the Partition of India, majorly partition of Punjab and Bengal; Punjab specifically continues to bleed from the ever-seeping wound of partition. Homeland, therefore cannot be understood, defined or experienced without journeying into the past history of migration, movement, forced displacement and the struggle for self-determination. The notions of homeland have never found a fixed and static definition or explanation. When asked about their roots, most Punjabi's return to the history of partition migration to explain that they hail from Pakistan erstwhile India. Similarly so, with the Muslim Punjabis who migrated to Pakistan from India. Many stories from the past refer to the landscape to offer a sensor feeling to the place of belonging. People would talk about rivers, mountainous terrains, seasons of certain fruits or even the trees. Therefore, the

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memory of homeland was located not just within their home but in the eco-system. Years before the partition, Punjab had witnessed several conflicts, incursions by invaders, perpetual movement and warfare. Moreover, in the present Punjab suffers from the voluntary migration to foreign lands. These migrations of Punjabi's to different places across different time periods needs to be understood in the context of historical ruptures. Even though the early movements of the nineteenth century were driven by British forces, both literally and metaphorically, it is the 1947 partition of Punjab (that was accompanied by communal violence) which forced millions of people to cross the border, thereby shattering the entire ethos of Punjab, the agrarian landscape and its sense of security. Home, therefore, became a contested category for the Sikh community. The generation that experienced partition, had hardly settled than they experienced the 1984 anti-Sikh violence- more than two decades of insurgency in Punjab and several thousand missing people and equally so killed. This period is collectively called "*Chaurasi*". *Chaurasi* also acted as a catalyst and accelerated the migration of Punjabis. Even though, those who migrated sought the diaspora as a space as a crucial and indispensable space to articulate their narrative for which the space back home was curbed. Ironically, they too lost the momentum as they were doubly alienated: one, exiled from their own homeland and two, othered as immigrants in the new land. Punjab continues to suffer from this pattern of migration followed by the modern migration, where the youth seeks its future only in migration abroad. This phenomenon is extremely complex even though it is driven by economic factors. Since the agricultural sector, the mainstay of Punjab's economy, is stagnated, the youth has limited opportunities. But, to consider this as a sole factor or reason for migration is not without merit and is oversimplification of a huge problem.

What is it that has allowed Punjab to remain a place where conflict never seems to end? The endless conflict in Punjab is rooted in the complicated and complex stacking of trauma, political grievances and socio-economic instability. The interplay of such factors has resulted into a state of collective distress and distrust for the establishments. Continuous conflict has been a recurring pattern for Punjab seen through 1947 partition violence, 1984 anti-Sikh violence and 90's- a

decade of insurgency, followed by economic grievances resulting from agricultural stagnation, soil exhaustion, depleting groundwater tables, wealth inequality, political marginalisation. These incidences have all been without closure and the community has been dealing with continual trauma and distress that it tries to resolve through migration. Interestingly, the community at the same time, despite endless conflict and traumatic conditions has survived and performed. Known for its valour, philanthropy and a state of ever optimism, the community thrives amidst all conflicts and turmoil. What is the reason for this? Is it just the militia spirit of the community or is it something beyond that? Many articles have pondered over the Sikh principals of *Chardikala* (ever-optimism), the three pillar of practice offered by Guru Nanak Dev ji *Naam Japo* (meditate), *Kirat Karo* (ethical labour) and *Vand Chako* (Share with others); the concept of *langar* (community kitchen) and selfless service (*seva*) that have contributed to the enduring spirit of the community. Along with these, a couple of more things that come from the Sikh faith that allows the community to face challenges is the idea of complete surrender and acceptance of life as it is. The keyword is surrender “*bhana manana*” meaning to accept what life has to offer and to live in gratitude of what is, rather than have a remorse over what is lost? The Sikh phrases *Hukam* (Divine Will/Command) and *Bhana* (Sweet acceptance of that Will) encapsulate the ideas of submission and acceptance of fate. These are an active, spiritual practice of bringing one’s own will into harmony with the cosmic order rather than passive resignation or defeat.

Being in *Bhana* entails accepting both joy and suffering with the same composure. More interestingly, sentiment has been visible in the modern day incidences faced by the community. It would be a good idea to site a few examples for this. A few examples come from the farmer’s movement when movement was organised on the principals of Sikhism, in its true spirit. The continuous *kirtan* (devotional music), path (prayers), *dhadhi jatha* (ballad singing) and protest songs are exemplary of the celebratory yet resilient nature of the movement. Which community has ever celebrated protests? The farmers remained in a state of *chardikala* (rising spirit) rather than despair, as they drew strength from Gurbani. It is the teachings from Gurbani that allowed the farmers to stay resolute and fight for the truth only because they

had learnt the spirit of surrender and accepted it as God's will. This is evident from the fact that the protestors never allowed the narrative of victimhood to surface rather they became an image of strength and positivity. The collective idos of the Sikh faith teaches endurance, and this is a very rare characteristic of any community.

A similar thing was visible during the floods in 2025 in Punjab. The famine that was expected to break the backbone of the farmers and the public of Punjab, once again proved wrong. The Punjabis emerged as ever content, braving all odds. While the resilience is not explained through the passive absence of suffering rather through an active- community-driven response that is a consequence of a deep-seated spiritual and social value system that was visible in the manner in which community mobilized itself and came forward for rescue operations rather than waiting for government aid. It will not be wrong to suggest that the very ability to brace such odds emerges from a culture that views hardship as a part of life, a test of character and service as a duty focusing on the welfare of other, no matter their lives may be disturbed or disrupted. This is possible only by accepting that life, time and self are a part of that larger Divinity, the Sikh is therefore free from the fear of loss, rather the energy that might have been wasted fearing the disaster is converted into using it for the welfare of others- the most focal point of Sikhism. This doesn't remain a religious principle alone but has been embedded as a socio-cultural aspect of the lives of Sikhs. Therefore, following the teachings of Gurbani, one sees how there is a transition from a life governed by fear, attachment, desire and selfishness to a life governed by trust in the Divine and a responsibility towards others over selfish desires.

In conclusion one understands that resilience for the Sikh community is not passive endurance, or victimhood, it is deeply rooted in the idea to resist tyranny and to uphold the dignity of all beings. The communities rising and the capacity to rebuild emerges from the examples from an opulent past of the Sikh history, when the Gurus themselves served an example of resilience and fought for the truth. In the modern times, the historical trauma of 1947 partition violence and the 1984 pogrom, were attempts to threaten the Sikh dignity and the sense of security. Nothing could bring that down as the resolute

commitment to fight for the truth remained central for the Sikhs. The community has turned collective mourning into a potent stimulant for advocacy, whether through the difficult process of relocating and starting new lives all over the world or the relentless, decades-long demand for truth and legal restitution following the horrors of 1984. Sikhs have shown that the pursuit of justice is a sacred duty—a persistent, defiant act of faith that insists on humanity and equality even when the world tries to deny them—by rooting their identity in these traumatic histories while refusing to be defined by them. The search for justice continues but not without hope and strength to continuously fight for the democratic rights. The judicial systems may have failed the Sikh community but the community continues to thrive and believes in Divine justice that surpasses human systems.



GURDWARA REFORMS MOVEMENT, SGPC, SRI AKAL TAKHT AND AKALI LEADERS

DR MADANJIT KAUR*

Dr Madanjit Kaur, a former professor at Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar, has long been an observer of Sikh political affairs. She has written extensively on Sikh history, religion and politics. This article traces the developments and events spread over the past nearly seven decades and lists the problems and failings of Sikh leaders for allowing their religious institutions to deteriorate all these years. - Editor

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The Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee, central religious organization of the Sikhs managing the central Shrine of the Sikhs, Shri Harimandir Sahib (Golden Temple), Sri Akal Takht Sahib (Temporal seat of the Sikh Panth) and other historical Gurdwaras of the Sikhs in Punjab was established after a long struggle for the Gurdwara Reforms Movement led by Singh Sabha Movement, Sikh intellectuals. Chief Khalsa Diwan at the initial stage and Sikh leaders of the erstwhile ruling houses. The Sikhs made great sacrifices in their fight against the hereditary Pujaris, and Mahants and British to get control of the management of their central shrines.

On the termination of the Sikh rule in the Punjab in 1849, the

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control of the Central Sikh shrines passed into British hands. The weakening of the Sikh hold bred inefficiency and mal-practices in the places of Sikh worship. Had the British exercised care in entrusting the central of the Golden temple and Akal Takht to the Sikh community itself, there would have been a smooth running of the management of the central Sikh shrines, and most of the anti-Sikh practices which crept into the affairs and unpleasant situations that arose later on, could have been avoided.

But the British Govt had different plans. The British colonial administration fully realized the significance of the Gurdwaras as centres of Sikh power and politics and therefore, wanted to control the Sikhs through a surreptitious hand in the management of the Sikh shrines. The British allowed the retention of land revenues to the Golden Temple. Sardar Lehna Singh Majithia was allowed to maintain his position as (Sarbarah) of Darbar Sahib. But the British Resident, Henry Lawrence supervised the management of the Temple. The motive of the British in providing the financial support to Darbar Sahib and other Sikh shrines was to earn the gratitude of the Sikh community in general and exercise an influence on the Sikh aristocracy in particular. But the control of the British in the central shrines was always resented by the Sikh, as the British failed to give the temple an efficient management. No rules for management were laid down, nor qualification for the appointment of the priests and caretakers were prescribed. All matters were left to be dealt with by the priests and Mahants themselves. Consequently, the priestly class lost all fear, neglected their duties and indulged in malpractices and misusing offerings to themselves. The Sikh community was highly offended at the negligence of the British control and pressed on the British to pay more attention to the management of the Golden Temple. Consequently a meeting of the prominent Sikhs was called by the Deputy Commissioner of Amritsar in September 1859. This committee framed rules and regulations for the proper administration of the Golden Temple and adjoining shrines and Bungahs (rest houses) in the Complex.

The Draft of the regulations of the rulers was called *Dastur-ul-Amal*. A new *Sarabrah* (manager) was appointed to look after the Temple. But *Sarabrah*s proved stooges of the British Govt and ignored

the affairs of the Temple. At this stage a lot of corruption set into the Golden Temple revenues. The British ignored the complaints of the Sikh devotees. The arrangements made by the *Dastur-ul-Amal* remained operative until the commencement of the Akali Movement in 1920. The further development in the history of the Golden Temple and Sikh affairs indicate that the British did not want to abandon the control over the central shrines of the Sikhs inspite of difficulties and involvement in its management and the rising dissentment of the Sikh community. Even the committee formed by *Dastur-ul-Amal* stopped functioning and the *Sarabrats* would not tolerate interference of the Panthic leaders. In such situation priesthood assumed more freedom and some Hindu priests were ushered in the Temple service, resulting in the observance of non-Sikh practices in the very precincts of the holy shrine. These practices posed a threat to the authentic religious procedure as well as to the distinct ideals and entity of the Sikh faith. The State of affairs deteriorated further when the area around the *parkarma* was rented out and it began to be used for commercial purposes. Unscrupulous persons began to sell dirty (pornographic) literature near the temple. This could not be tolerated by the devout Sikhs. The visitors to the Temple went back disgusted and aggrieved, The *Sarabrats* assumed more power and misappropriated the income funds of the Golden Temple. The protests made by the Sikh community proved futile. Consequent by a general agitation started. Frequent pamphlets and articles published by the Sikh intellectuals and organization appeared in the *Khalsa Akhbar* (a Punjabi Weekly) to protest against the sorry state of affairs. Luckily, the growth of journalism at that juncture offered an effective means for the purpose of reforms in the management of the Sikh shrines under British control. But the demands of the Sikh Panth remained ignored by the authorities.

The close of the 19th century was a period of communal revival in the Punjab. The Sikhs, Hindus, Muslims, Christian vied with each other for ascendancy. The anti-Sikh attitude of the Arya Samaj leaders who were propagating that *Sikhs Bhi Hindu Hain* and denying the separate identity of the Sikh faith; was strongly reflected in a counter Sikh movement with the slogan *Hum Hindu Nahin* (Bhai Kahan Singh Nabha).

The Sikh movement was pushed ahead with full publicity and a

strong religious zeal. The Singh Sabha Movement, heading the Gurdwara Reforms Movement was in full swing. The issues grappling the minds of the Sikh people were the power to control the Gurdwaras, restoration of genuine Sikh rites and practices, the problem of conversion by Christian Missionaries supported by the British Govt etc. Some leaders of the Singh Sabha Movement took a bold step and removed from the *Parkarama* of the Golden Temple all idols and relics which smacked of heresy against the Sikh tenets. The reactionary Hindus agitated against this and defamed the *Sudharak Jatha* (Sikh Reform Party) which was heading the movement. The Hindu propaganda could not cut any ice and the Sikh movement for reforms of the Gurdwara spread far and wide. The demand for the transfer of the management of the Sikh shrines to Sikh Panth was carried on with great zeal. But the British did not relent. The Sikhs made their demands through Press journalism and literature circulated at that time. They demanded that Mahants, Pujaris, Granthis and priests should have no hereditary rights in Gurdwaras and the Sikh places of worship should be deemed to be the exclusive property of Sikh *Sangat*. All *Jagirs*, lands and income of the Gurdwara to be declared as panthic assets and should be enlisted to the names of Gurdwaras to which they belonged. The appointment of the *Sarabrahs* should be made by the Sikh community and not by the British rulers. Only men of integrity, character and proven fidelity to the Sikh faith be appointed in the service of the temple. the British Govt should not interfere in the religious affairs of the Sikhs. An elected committee of the Sikhs should be formed and empowered to elect *Sarabrahs* and control the affairs of the Golden Temples and other Gurdwaras.

The Sikh revivalists under the banner of the Chief Khalsa Diwan were making vigorous attempt to strengthen and expand Sikhism and to preserve its separate identity. For this they demanded immediate reforms in the administration of the Gurdwaras. For fear of losing their position of vantage the *Pujaris* and *Mahants* of the Golden Temple were afraid of the Chief Khalsa Diwan popularly known as the Tat Khalsa, known for their staunch attachment to Sikh panth. The priests at Akal Takht were rejecting the offerings from lower caste devotees although Sikhism rejects caste based observations. The Tat Khalsa announced to lead a march to the Akal Takht with the offerings of the

lower caste devotees and to take direct action and punish the priests of the shrine for their misconduct and malpractices. The priests banned the entry of the Tat Khalsa in the Temple complex.

At this stage, the Sikhs got involved in a more forceful agitation for Gurdwara Reform. The British Govt acquired some land attached to Gurdwara Rakabganj, Delhi, from its Mahant to extend a road to the nearby Secretariat. The Sikhs were agitated and made strong protest against the action of the Govt.

At this junction there erupted internal dissension in the Sikh community with regard to their attitude towards the British. The Chief Khalsa Diwan for the sake of their own interest sided with the British. A general feeling of annoyance against the Chief Khalsa Diwan grew among the Sikhs. At this juncture First World War broke out. The British tried to appease the Sikhs for their loyal support in the war and pleaded for the postponement of the agitation and assured them to solve their problem after the cessation of the war. But when the promised time came, the Govt did not fulfill the demands of the Sikh community. The Sikhs resumed their agitation, passed Gurmatas, in religious diwans (meetings) for the immediate cessation of their demands. After the promulgation of Martial Law in the Punjab in 1919, a powerful political movement was launched against the British demanding *Swaraj* (self rule). The Sikhs too formed a political party, the Central Sikh League at Amritsar in 1919. In its first meeting, the Central Sikh League made some resolutions, one of the for the control of the Golden Temple by an elected Sikh Committee was also passed. At this time the Sikh societies, Sikh Sabhas passed Gurmatas that control and administration of the Sri Darbar Sahib as well as of other Sikh shrines should vest in the Sikh community with greater zeal. But the British were not prepared to attend their demands.

GURDWARA REFORMS MOVEMENT AND RISE OF THE THE AKALI PARTY

In 1920, the prevailing upheaval in the rest of the country drove the Sikhs Reforms Movement into a political agitation in 1920. The Akalis resorted to greater publicity to mobilize public opinion in their favour. The *Akalis Akhbar* was started from Lahore in May 1920. The daily effectively propagates the cause of the Sikh. The passive policy

of peaceful agitation to the British was decried. Instead direct action against the British authorities was advocated. The Akali Party preached that the exigencies of the time demanded sacrifices from the Sikhs to achieve their demands. The forceful propaganda of the *Akali Akhbar* proved very effective. It successfully stirred the religious sentiments of the Sikh masses who were agitated. Sikh *Shabeedi Jathas* were raised to launch a country wide agitation. The British Govt was alarmed and decided to suppress the Sikhs at all casts.

This was the time when Non-Cooperation movement of Mahatma Gandhi was in full swing. The British felt that, in case the Sikhs also joined the Movement the British position would become vulnerable. They made a declaration on July 14, 1920 that the Govt would hand over the control and Management of the Darbar Sahib to the Sikhs as soon as provisional councils were formed in consultation with the Sikh members of the Punjab Council. Since the British were not trusted, the Sikh did not pay heed to the declaration and continued their agitation with great vigour and zeal. At this time the sentiments of the Sikhs were greatly hurt by the attitude of Sardar Arur Singh, the *Sarabrah* of Golden Temple. In this zeal to show his loyalty to the British Govt, he went to the length of arranging a Sikh Diwan in front of the Akal Takht to felicitate General Dyer, the British Officer responsible for the Jallianwala Bagh massacre (19 April 1919) with a *Siropa* and a Kirpan. The General was not only honoured but declared to be true Sikh also. That was the height of idiocy on the part of the *Sarabrah*. The Sikhs were deeply hurt and felt that a great insult has been done to the highest seat of the Sikhs political-cum-religious authority. The service personnel of the Temple and the local Sikhs lodged their protest with *Sarabrah*. But he ignored. The Sikhs held a meeting at Manji Sahib and demanded the removal of the *Sarabrah* by 29 August 1920. A big gathering was held at Jallianwala Bagh, sensing the seriousness of the situation Sardar Arur Singh, the *Sarabrah* himself appeared in the meeting and tendered his resignation as desired by the Sikh community. The British now appointed Sardar Sunder Singh Ramgarhia as the *Sarabrah* of the Golden Temple. The Sikhs demanded control and administration of the Temple to be passed to an elected body of the Sikhs themselves. Hence the agitation continued.

The most serious complaint with regard to the practices at the

Golden Temple at that time was the turning down of the offering of the *Karah Prasad* of the low caste Sikhs by the Pujaris and the Mahant. The priests refused to pray for them. The virtual apartheid practised by the Pujaris and Mahants could not be tolerated by the Sikhs as the caste system had been abolished by the Gurus and the principle of the fatherhood of God and brotherhood of men as preached by the Gurus was the cardinal principle of Sikh ethics and social solidarity of the Sikh community. The priestly class of the Golden Temple was averse to the social reforms and free entry of the lower caste into the Sikh shrines, propagated by the Khalsa Baradari for long. A meeting was held at Jallian Wala Bagh on 12 October 1920 and demanded that *Karah Prasad* offered by all Sikhs, irrespective of their caste or status should be accepted both at the Akal Takht and the Darbar Sahib. At the meeting a number of people from the untouchable castes were administered *Pahul* (*Amrit*). The gathering then proceeded to Darbar Sahib to offer *Karah Prasad* carried by the new converts. But the Pujaris refused to accept it. A long discussion followed. Ultimately a hymn from the holy Granth was read at random (Guru Granth Sahib, p. 638) and the order of the scripture was followed. The *granthis* accepted the *Karah Prasad* and distributed to the Sangat. Then the gathering marched to Sri Akal Takht Sahib. But *mahants* and the *Pujaris* got frightened and left the Akal Takht vacant in a cowardly manner. The Sikh *sangat* occupied Akal Takht. It was decided by the *sangat* to leave 25 Sikhs there to carry on the services of the Akal Takht. It was also decided that the defaulting *granthis*, *pujaris* and *priests* of the Akal Takht might be pardoned and reinstated if they came forward with an apology for their disdainful conduct and the matter was reported to the Sarabrah, Sardar Sunder Singh Ramgarhia. He also asked the priest to tender their apology. But the *grantis* would not listen. Next day on 13 October 1920, the Deputy Commissioner of Amritsar nominated an ad hoc committee of nine Sikhs to take charge of the administration of the Golden Temple till some permanent arrangement was made.

After the appointment of the ad hoc committee *bukamanamas* were sent from Akal Takht to all prominent Sikh bodies to attend a general meeting of the Sikhs convened for the management and control of Sri Darbar Sahib, the Akal Takht Sahib and other Sikh shrines. The

conditions for attending the gathering were, the participant must be an *amritdhari* (baptized) Sikh, a regular reciter of the holy scripture, should have five *Kakars* (The Sikh symbols on his person) and a regular follower of Sikh *rabat* (Code of Conduct) and contributor of *daswandh* (1/10 of his income to the Sikh cause).

Immediately after the *bukamnamas* were issued from the Akal Takht, the Punjab Govt announced the formation of a committee of 36 Sikhs. Although the majority in this committee was of the supporters of the Gurdawara Reform Movement, the Sikhs felt aggrieved that the right to select their representative which appropriately belonged to the Sikh community has been **surrupitiociouly** by usurped by the British.

THE SHIROMANI GURDWARA PARBANDHAK COMMITTEE

In the joint meeting of the Sikhs held on 15 and 16 November 1920 at the Akal Takht, efforts were made to draw up concrete plans for the management of the Sikh shrines and Darbar Sahib. After lengthy speeches, all sorts of argument and suggestions, it was resolved that a committee of 175 members to be known as the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee, be formed to manage the Gurdwaras situated in the Punjab and outside it. The 36 members of the nominated committee declared earlier by the Government, were also incorporated in the Committee. Each district, state, army unit and Sikh body worth the name was given representation on it. Till the coming into existence of the proposed committee the following persons were selected to act on it in capacities mentioned below:

- Sardar Sunder Singh President
- Sardar Harbans Singh – Vice President
- Bhai Jodh Singh – Secretary

The first meeting of the Sikhs was held on 12 December 1920 at the Akal Takht to elect members for the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee.

The first meeting of the newly elected committee of the SGPC was held on 15 August 1920 at Sri Akal Takht to elect its office bearers. The committee elected Sardar Kharak Singh, its President, Sardar

Sundar Singh Ramgharia as its Vice President and Sardar Bahadur Mehtab Singh as its Secretary.

The SGPC took up the administration of the Golden Temple with a definite mandate to remove all sorts of shortcomings and anti Sikh practices and make improvement in the management, as well as to maintain regular record of the accounts.

The SGPC first of all took the task of listing all the articles and documents and precious articles kept in the *Toshakhana* (treasury). A local Committee of 9 members was formed to look after the day to day management of Golden Temple and the attached Gurdwaras. In September 1921, Sardar Sundar Singh Ramgharia was nominated as President of the Local Committee by the Executive Committee. The Committee framed rules and regulation for running the Gurdwaras. The income of Darbar Sahib and other local Gurdwaras hence forth made to be deposited in the name of SGPC. Daily income from cash offerings to be counted by the Darogah (Cashier) and amount to be entered in a register in the office of the SGPC, salaries to the *Granthis*, *Pujaris* to be fixed and practice of offerings in cash and kind to the *granthis* and *pujaris* was stopped.

The local committee brought tremendous improvement in the management of the Golden Temple and the local Gurdwaras. The Sikh community was fully satisfied with the working of the SGPC and local committee and believed that the British Govt would not interfere in the affairs of Gurdwaras and the working of the SGPC. But the priestly class disgruntled over losing unauthorized use of offerings were in favour of interference of the British Govt. The consequently, the British Govt refused to acknowledge the SGPC as a legally constituted body and managed to oust the Local Committee in charge of the administration of the Golden Temple.

Then Govt tried to induce the SGPC to take formal possession of the Temple. But the SGPC refused to oblige and pleaded that the Local Committee had already the de facto possession of the temple. When the Govt failed in its attempts to take hold of the control of the Sikh elected body, it followed the course of toppling it down. In the absence of its members, Lala Amarnath, the District Magistrate of

Amritsar, accompanied by police invaded the house of Sardar Sunder Singh Ramgharia, the President of the SGPC on 7 November 1921, and forcibly took away the keys of the *Toshakhana* (Treasury) of the Golden Temple. This high handedness on the part of the British Government enraged the Sikh community. As a result there ensued an agitation known in the annals of Sikh history as the *Kunjian da Morcha* (Agitation for the possession of the Keys). There was serious resentment in the Sikh community. Mass protests against the British were held throughout the Punjab and Govt was condemned for the anti-Sikh policy and interference in the religious affairs of the Sikhs. The SGPC in its special meeting held on 10 November 1921 at the Akal Takht, called upon the Sikh members of the provincial legislature, under threat of ex-communication to vacate their seats.

The Govt then tried to win over a prominent Sikh whom they could appoint Sarbarah and give him the keys. Captain Bahadur Singh was approached. He accepted the offer and brought the keys to the Temple. But he was reprimanded by the Sikh Sangat for accepting the appointment in contravention of the declared policy of the community. He appologised to the Sangat and tendered in resignation from the office of the Sarabrah.

The agitation for the possession of the Keys, soon took a serious turn and resulted in the arrest of two hundred Sikhs, including the office bearers and the members of the working committee of the SGPC. More Akalis were offering arrest. The Govt agreed to release the Sikh prisoners, provided the SGPC received the keys through the Court. The Sikhs refused to accept the condition and demanded that keys be delivered at Akal Takht. Such was ethical standard and commitment to religious sanctity of contemporary Sikh leaders.

The Indian National Congress and the Khilafat Movement of the Muslims also supported the Akalis in their demand. Frightened at the surcharged political atmosphere in the country, the British Govt yielded to the demand of the Sikhs and released the Sikh prisoners and the keys of the Toshakhand were handed over to Baba Kharak Singh, President of the SGPC on January 20, 1922.

The Akalis had remained non-violent throughout the Keys

Agitation. Mahatma Gandhi congratulated the Sikh community on the success of their agitation. His telegram of 18/9 January 1922, addressed to Sardar Kharak Singh read: "First Battle of India's Freedom won, Congratulations."

This was the time when the Non-Cooperation Movement against the British Govt was in full swing in India. The Akalis had supported the national demand and had passed a resolution not to cooperate with the Govt and had urged Sikhs to boycott British products. Considering the forceful mass agitation of the Gurdwara Reforms movement and the sentiments of the Sikhs, the Govt decided to make some arrangement of amicable settlement of the control and management of the Gurdwaras. Lieutenant Governor, Sir Edward Maclagan tried to push the matter through legislative measure to transfer the Gurdwaras to their rightful owners, the Sikhs congregation. The Govt decided to go for Gurdwara Bill on 5 April 1921. The Education Minister, Mian Fazl-i-Hussain succeeded in getting the bill passed in the legislative Punjab Council – as the Sikh Gurdwara and shrines Act VI of 1922. But the Sikhs ignored the Act altogether.

AKALI MORCHAS

At this juncture, the British atrocities on the Akalis participating in the Guru Ka Bagh Morcha and brutality with which they were beaten assumed tremendous proportions. The Sikh religious fervor was excited as never before. The British policy towards Maharaja Ripudaman Singh of Nabha and his subsequent abdication brought in another Morcha (agitation) called Jaito Ka Morcha. This feared the Sikh sentiment still further. The British used military force to suppress the Sikhs. The SGPC observed 9 September 1923 as the Nabha Day. The Govt came with a heavy hand, declared the SGPC and the Akali Dal as illegal organizations and arrested most of the Sikh leaders. But the agitation could not be suppressed. On the contrary it became a mass movement and won the sympathies of Punjab Hindus and Muslims alike. Even the Indian National Congress proclaimed its support to their cause. Simultaneously with the Jaito Morcha another Morcha was started at Bhai Pheru in Lahore against the Mahant of shrine there. The forceful and unbending resistance of the Sikhs for gaining control over the

management of their shrine exasperated the Govt and it made a desperate attempt to smash the movement.

In the early January 1924, the Amritsar police raided the Akal Takht from where the Jatha started. A number of documents of the SGPC were seized and 62 persons were arrested. Orders were issued for the confiscation of the properties of the participating Akalis in the State and for the use of greater force against the agitations. An alarming number of Akalis were killed when the police opened fire at Jaito on 21 February 1924 to disperse a peaceful Jatha of about 500 volunteers. The use of firearms against peaceful agitations aroused unprecedented sympathy throughout India for the Sikh cause. An adjournment motion was moved by MA Jinnah and Pandit Madan Mohan Malviya in the Central Legislative Assembly to discuss the Jaito firing, but the motion was not allowed. The next day, in a meeting of the working committee of the All India Congress Committee held in Delhi, under the Presidentship of Maulana Muhammad Ali, a resolution was passed expressing sympathy for the victims of the Jaito firing. The incident brought the Sikhs closer to the Freedom Movement going on the national level. The Akali organization was further strengthened and their demand for the Gurdwara Reform Movement became mass support. Jathas continued to march triumphantly from the Akal Takht to Jaito (Nabha) and Bhai Pheru (Lahore). Meanwhile the SGPC had declared that the primary aim of the Jaito Morcha was not to protest against the dethronement of the ruler of Nabha, but to affirm the right to perform religious worship in their temple there without outside interference. The Govt allowed a group (Jatha) of five Sikhs to enter the Jaito Gurdwara and perform the non-stop recitation (Akhand Path) of the holy Granth (in October 1924). A five members Committee of the Sikh members of the Legislative Council was constituted and the draft of the new Gurdwara Bill was presented to the Akali leaders imprisoned in Lahore Fort. The draft considered practically all the demands of the Sikhs concerning the management of their shrines. After a lot of discussion and good deal of thinking the Government passed the Gurdwara Act, 1925 (Punjab Act No VIII of 1925) which was duly signed by the Governor General on 28th July 1925. The act came into force on 1 November 1925. With Gurdwara Act management

of the Golden Temple and 625 important Sikh shrines passed from the hands of the hereditary Mahants, Pujaris and Sarabrahs into the hands of the elected representatives of the SGPC.

In accordance with the provision in the Gurdwara Act, a meeting for electing members of the Gurdwara Control Board was held on 4th Sept 1926 in the Town Hall, Amritsar. Fourteen members were elected for the purpose. The first meeting of the Gurdwara Central Board was held on 2nd October 1926 the town Hall Amritsar in which office bearers were elected and an interim committee was formed. It was resolved to rename the Gurdwara Board as the SGPC. The Govt accepted the change in the nomenclature through a notification dated 17th January 1927. The outgoing SGPC handed over the charge to the newly elected SGPC on 27th November 1926.

EMERGENCE OF SGPC AS CENTRAL BODY OF THE PANTH

With the transfer of the management of the Golden Temple and other shrines of the Punjab to SGPC, the Sikh control over their Gurdwaras was fully established. The SGPC, first concentrated its attention on removing various malpractices prevalent in the precincts of the Gurdwaras. The Sikh mode of worship, practices, *maryada* and observances were established. Rules and regulations for the appointment and services of the priestly class (*Granthis*, *Ragis*) and other service personals were introduced. First of all the SGPC paid its attention on the construction work and physical renovation beautification and development of the Golden Temple and other Sikh Gurdwaras under its administration. And afterwards planned numerous development schemes including – *sarais* (rest houses) *langar* (dining halls), medical facilities) colleges, dispensaries, hospitals, schools, training centres for missionaries, *ragis*, *granthis*, *kathawachaks*, libraries, museums, information centres etc, to be attached with the Central Sikh shrine – Golden Temple and other Sikh Gurdwaras.

The Sikh shrines made tremendous progress under the management of the SGPC. Gradually, the SGPC, became a sort of Parliament of the Sikh Panth, its decisions acquired the sanctity of the *Gurmata*s (decisions of the general gathering of the Sikh misal Sardars during the 17th and 18th centuries at the premises of the Akal

Takht). The Akali Dal became its army; and the income from Gurdwaras gave its financial sustenance. Disbursement of this income in the management of shrines, patronage in the appointment of hundreds of *granthis*, *sevadars*, (temple servant, teachers and professors for schools and colleges which were built, arrangement for training of the *granthis*, *ragis*, *kathawachaks* and missionary activities out the Punjab; Medical Colleges, Engineering Colleges, training centres for professional courses, huge cash offerings in *Golaks* (cash box) earnings from the agriculture lands and properties attached with the Gurdwaras, earning from the Publications of the religious literature, Sikh scripture and other books published and sold by the SGPC, donations of *Daswandh* (1/10 of the income) contributed by the devout Sikhs as a religious duty from India and abroad etc. income from all these resources have made SGPC a government within the Government. The control of SGPC became the focal point of Sikh politics.

The Akalis automatically took over control of SGPC after the Gurdwara Reforms Movement and have never relinquished it. The struggle for power in the Akali Party has been erupted between different factions of the same party. The group controlled by Master Tara Singh remained dominant for almost four decades. During this period the sanctity of the central shrines of the Golden Temple and the temporal authority of the Akal Takht remain intact. Rather the Akali leaders earnestly safeguarded and championed the aspirations of the Sikh community focusing its politics around the Sikh concepts of *Miri* and *Piri* while Prioritizing spiritual or religious authority and moral code of conduct over political power.

Master Tara Singh was a prominent leader agitating for Gurdwara Reform Movement and participates in the Guru ka Bagh Morcha in 1927. During partition of India, Master Tara Singh played significant part to protect the welfare and interests of the Sikh community. Under the policy of communal divide for the partition of India, the British tried to offer a separate state for the Sikhs, and made every effort to press the Sikh leader to accept this option. But Master Tara Singh refused to accept the offer and decided Sikh community's destiny with India.

After independence Master Tara Singh retained his hold over the

Sikh masses by being the spokesperson of the aggrieved Sikh refugees. Other Sikh leaders like Gyani Kartar Singh and Hukam Singh and Ujjal Singh were compelled to secure their future by cooperating with the party in power – the Congress. In 1953, a delegation lead by Master Tara Singh departed from Akal Takht to launch a movement seeking reservation benefits for Scheduled Caste Sikhs and those from backward classes. Yet the institution of Sri Akal Takht also demonstrated its willingness to the discipline to the Sikh Political leaders.

Master Tara Singh devoted his whole life for the service of the Sikh support in the General Election of 1957. In 1960 Master Tara Singh captured majority seats in the Sikh Gurdwara Committee election (136 out of 140). The support of the vast majority of the Sikh masses further strengthened the hold of Master Tara Singh on the central Sikh organizations and the Akali Dal. The very year Master Tara Singh resolved to launch Punjabi Subha Movement and launched the agitation from the precincts of the Akal Takht for the creation of the Punjabi Suba on the basis of language. In April 30, 1960 Chief Minister Partap Singh ordered the arrest of the Akali leaders including Master Tara Singh. For the continuity of the agitation Master Tara Singh appointed Sant Fateh Singh a *granthi* and social worker, to lead the agitation for the Punjabi Suba. During this period the venue of agitation was the precincts of the Golden Temple and the Akal Takht. Fateh Singh organized a massive scale passive resistance on a massive scale on the assurance from the Govt that the Sikh demand would be accepted. The agitation was called off on January 9, 1961. But promise was not fulfilled. Master Tara Singh undertook fast unto death on 15 August 1961 at the premises of the Golden Temple in support of his demands for the Punjabi Suba. Sri Akal Takht Sahib remained a centre of politics and anxiety for the people and press for 48 days. The effort of Maharaja of Patiala Yadendra Singh and Hardit Singh Malik brought about an understanding between the Akali Dal and the Govt. Eventually on 1 Oct 1961, Master Tara Singh gave up his fast. A few month later, Sant Fateh Singh took over the leadership of the SGPC and reviewed the announcement for the Punjabi Suba. The subsequent of the decision of Sant Fateh Singh created a widespread tension all over the country.

On 16 August 1965, Sant Fateh Singh announced from the Akal Takht to a gathering of about 25,000 Sikhs, of his intention to commence his fast unto death from 10 Sept 1965 for attaining Punjabi Suba, adding that, in case his demand, was not concluded, he would immolate himself by burning on the 16 day of his fast. The sant took his abode in a building adjourning the Akal Takht. All arrangements were made for carrying out the final threat. '*Anagitha sahib*' (self immolation platform) was built. The situation became very tense. In the meantime the Indo-Pak war broke out (September 1965). The attitude of the SGPC and agitation of Sant Fateh Singh began to be viewed as anti-national. The radio propaganda by the Pakistan promoting the Sikh agitation put the Sant in an awkward position. The Sikhs were perceived as anti-nationalists. Wise counsels prevailed and Sant Fateh Singh postponed his fast on 9 September 1965. It is to be noted that during Punjabi Suba agitation both Master Tara Singh and Sant Fateh Singh were declared *Tankhayias* (guilty of religious misconduct).

After the ceasefire between India and Pakistan, the demand for the Punjabi State was revived by Sant Fateh Singh in December 1965, because the proposal of the Union Govt about the demarcation line between Punjab and Haryana as separate State, particularly the snatching of Chandigarh from the Punjab and making it a UT and not satisfied the Sikhs and the Akali party. The situation in the Punjab became tense. On 26 December 1965, Sardar Hukam Singh arrived at the Golden Temple with certain proposals for negotiating with the Government. After discussion between Sardar Hukam Singh and Sikh leaders the Akali Dal approved of the proposal and thus the adverse effects of the political agitation by the Sikhs and tag of anti-national put on their leaders were warded off and a new chapter in the history of the Punjab opened.

The rule of SGPC and the Akal Takht in the subsequent history is very significant. The SGPC launched a peaceful Morcha from the Akal Takht against the promulgation of Emergency in 1975 and demanded early elections to Lok Sabha and Vidhan Sabha election and Parliament election. Sikh leaders courted arrest. Batches of Akali marched out of the Golden Temple daily and courted arrest for full 19 months during which the Emergency declared by the Prime Minister

Indira Gandhi was in force (from June 1975 to January 1977). Most of the Akali leaders were imprisoned. During their confinement they played a conspicuous role in suggesting the formation of a united front. Later on called the Janta Dal Party under the leadership of Jai Prakash, to fight the ruling party i.e. Congress and over throw it. The Akali leaders Parkash Singh played a prominent role in this political development. During this time of great hardship and turmoil for the leaders and masses when all freedom of expression, media and information services were put under the strict control of the Centre. The Sikh leaders and the Sikh religious institutions retained their peaceful discontentment. During this time Parkash Singh Badal emerged as the most popular and powerful Akali leader in the Punjab.

HOW THE AKAL TAKHT BECAME A TOOL IN THE HANDS OF SGPC

The phenomenon of seeking the Akal Takhts intervention to sort out differences among the Akali leaders' difference in the party with differing views and their request to Jathedar to play as peace broker started in 1970s'. Jathedar Gurcharan Singh Tohra, President of the SGPC and Jagdev Singh Talwandi president of the Akal Dal called for separate meetings on 10th October 1979 to elect the Akali Dal President. They sent their resignations to the Akal Takht. Jathedar seeking its intervention to unite them. The Jathedar of Akal Takht sent back their resignations. The MLAs who contested the elections were asked to support Chief Minister Parkash Singh Badal and a seven member committee headed by Sant Harchand Singh Longowal was formed in view of the upcoming Lok Sabha elections. Meanwhile, Jiwan Singh Umranangal made an alliance with Janta Dal Party. He was declared Tankhaiya (religious defaulter) and had to seek forgiveness at the Akal Takht in November 1979. Before the Operation Blue Star in 1984 relations between Akal Takht Jathedar and Militant Groups were mostly uneasy. The influence of Damdami Taksal grew in the working of Akal Takht after the entry of Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwala at the Akal Takht premises.

This incident set the trend of approaching Akal Takht for interventions in deciding the cases of differences among the politically influential persons began to come to Akal Takht. However, the turning

point was the period after Operation Blue Star in 1984. There was a political vacuum in the Sikh central Institutions. Many Akali leaders were in jail. At this juncture the Panj Piaras (five beloved ones) stepped in to provide leadership in the Sikh community. Gradually Akal Takht Institution was transformed into a tool in the power struggle for supremacy in the Sikh Panth. Even cases of personal enmities, group dispute and dominance of one-manship began to be submitted to the Akal Takht Jathedar for settlements. This practice gained the name of *Sarb Uch Kacheri*¹ (Supreme Court) of the Sikhs.

This concept generated a false perception of considering Akal Takht as district Court, it harmed the prestige and spiritual status of the highest spiritual seat of the Panth. The development of interference of the local issues into the Punjab politics and Punjab based problems became unwanted burden on the jurisdiction of the Akal Takht. Consequently during the period of uncertainty and chaos the political and religious ground began to slip from the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committees control. The institution of the Akal Takht was used to perform the SGPC assigned other work also. Gradually the religious issues that were handled earlier by the Dharam Prachar Committee of the SGPC were also referred to the Akal Takht Jathedar. This trend not only extended the area of responsibility of the Akal Takht but it also reduced the original status of the highest spiritual seat of the Sikh Panth into a subordinated position.

Following Blue Star Operation, the Akal Takht summoned President Giani Zail Singh and declared Union Minister Buta Singh as Tankhaya. (But both appeared at the Akal Takht after relinquishing their Constitution position) Chief Minister of Punjab Surjit Singh Barnala faced religious penalties over security operations at the Golden Temple complex in 1986 and 1988.

Clashed within the establishment of the SGPC and SAD Leaders had also appeared at certain times over the authority of the Akal Takht and the working of Jathedars. In 2000, Jathedar Giani Puran Singh excommunicates then SGPC President Bibi Jagir Kaur over the controversy supporting the Nanakshahi Calendar, when she refused to appear before the Akal Takht. Along with Bibi Jagir Kaur four other members of the SGPC were also excommunicated, the dispute further

escalated when the SGPC removed Giani Puran Singh the same day and Giani Joginder Singh Vedanti appointed as Jathedar of Sri Akal Takht.

The instances of recent examples of some influential Akali leaders (heading the SGPC) for exploiting the resources of the SGPC and managing religious sanctity to their wrong doings through the managed pronouncements from the Akal Takht and examples of deterioration in the working of the highest religious institution of the Panth.

The dominant Akali leaders particularly the head of the Akali Party gradually began to dominate the Akal Takht authority. The Akal Takht became the platform for the fulfillment of the political agenda of the Akali Party and managed orders and *hukamnamas* from the Akal Takht Jathedar were issued to the Panth or individuals to abide. Thus the Jathedars of the Akal Takht appointed by the SGPC at the recommendation of Akali Party head became pawn in the hands of the SGPC, their appointing authority. This is the tragedy of the highest spiritual and temporal seat of the Panth, held in high esteem for centuries, now almost subservient to the dictates of the SGPC. More than four centuries the Akal Takht has dominated the Supremacy as the centre of the Sikh religion and political life. The Jathedars are assumed as inheriting the legacy of the undaunted image of Akali Phula Singh, the Akal Takht Jathedar, who dared to declare powerful Maharaja Ranjit Singh guilty of religious misconduct over his relations with the Muslim courtesan Moran. The Sikh psyche expects the Akal Takht Jathedar to fear now except the Guru. Yet the realities of the modern era are considerably different. Today's Jathedar does not possess the authority or autonomous power like their predecessors.²

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## RETHINKING ULTIMATE REALITY THROUGH WAHEGURU/EK ONKAR

DR JASWINDER SINGH\*

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The notion of Ultimate Reality, frequently articulated through the Judeo-Christian term 'God', has long served as a cornerstone in the formation of religious identity. As Jacques Derrida observed, the perennial and foundational inquiry of philosophy remains: 'What is being?' (Dick & Kofman, 2002). Yet, despite centuries of philosophical engagement, a definitive resolution to this question continues to elude us. In pursuit of clarity, thinkers have persistently turned to the wellsprings of religious scripture. It is broadly acknowledged that the interrogation of God, being, and the nature of existence constitutes the central axis around which the perspectives of all religious traditions revolve. To apprehend the Sikh faith, established by Guru Nanak, one must engage with the Sikh conception of Ultimate Reality. The global religious landscape is broadly delineated into two principal traditions: the Semitic, originating with Judaism and extending through Christianity to Islam, and the Vedic or Indian, encompassing Jainism, Buddhism, and Hinduism. This study contends that these traditions articulate divergent understandings of Ultimate Reality, and seeks to situate the Sikh perspective within this wider intellectual and spiritual context.

In Judaism, the name of God is recognised as Yahweh. During the nomadic period of Hebrew culture, divinity was often associated with various manifestations of power. Yahweh was associated with elements such as storm, fire, and war, and was depicted predominantly

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in anthropomorphic imagery. In the Old Testament, Moses received a revelation (Exodus 3:2-15 and 6:2-8) from God as “He Who Is”, a singular entity without any possible rivals. This God is depicted as just and merciful. He requires absolute fidelity and unwavering devotion, prohibiting any form of worship of other so-called gods (Macgregor, 1990, p. 278). Yahweh is acknowledged as the deity of the ‘chosen people,’ who are the native inhabitants of Israel. W.T. Davison (1967) elucidates that the proclamation of Deuteronomy 6:4, ‘Jahweh our God, Jahweh is one’, serves as the fundamental declaration of the religion of Israel, and it is not employed in an artificial or superficial manner throughout the entire national history. The God who communicated with Moses from the burning bush was not an unfamiliar deity; He was recognised as ‘the God of thy father’ and ‘the God of your fathers.’ Furthermore, His name was already known – ‘Jahweh, the God of the Hebrews’ (Exodus 3:6, 15, 18). Thus, *Yahweh* is the God of the Hebrew peoples only. In the Christological account, God is, as the *New Catholic Encyclopedia* (1967) mentions:

The Supreme Being, Pure Act, First cause of all, provident conservator and governor of the universe; the Absolute- infinite, eternal, immutable, intelligent, omniscient, all-powerful, and free; the Creator, to whom creatures owe homage, respect and obedience; the Sovereign Good, diffusive of all goodness, toward which everything tends as to its ultimate final cause; the super-natural source of revelation; the Godhead composed of three divine nature – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit’. (p. 535)

After Christianity, the next major phase is Islam, founded by the Prophet Muhammad. Muhammad introduced Islam in Arabia, a land of diverse cultures and religions. Muhammad’s own tribe, the Quraysh, was pagan. The Quraysh were based in the city of Mecca, a centre of trade and pilgrimage where travellers from nearby regions passed through. They made a profitable trade from pilgrims visiting the local shrine, the Ka’bah, which housed numerous pagan idols, chiefly the image of the god Hubal. The shrine contained idols of gods from other tribes, associated with trees and stones near the Ka’bah. One of these gods, “Allah,” not yet recognised as the exclusive deity of Islam, may have been the tribal god of the Quraysh. Others included three

goddesses favoured by the tribes: al-Lat, al-'Uzza, and Manat, who played a significant role in Muhammad's prophetic career. Though Allah's existence was associated with various local gods in Mecca before Muhammad, it was the new message of God, conveyed by Muhammad through the Quran, that became the scripture of Islam. According to *The Encyclopaedia of Islam* (1986), Allah is:

The Unique One, the creator and Lord of the judgment, polarizes the thought of Islam; He is the sole reason for its existence. Allah was known to the pre-Islamic Arabs; he was one of the Maccan deities, possibly the supreme deity and certainly a creation-god. He was already known, by antonomasia, as the God, allah (the most likely etymology; another suggestion is the Aramaic Alaha). For Allah before Islam, as shown by archaeological sources and the Kuran. But the vague notion of supreme (not sole) divinity, which Allah seems to have connoted in Maccan religion, was to become both universal and transcendental; it was to be turned, by the Kuranic preaching, into the affirmation of the Living God, the Exalted One. (p. 406)

Within the Indian spiritual tradition, Jainism emerges as one of the earliest and most enduring faiths, often regarded as the oldest extant spiritual path. Distinctively, Jainism does not posit the existence of a supreme deity, nor does it affirm the conventional notion of the soul as found in other traditions. Instead, it envisions the soul as possessing the inherent capacity to attain divinity, rendering the practice of prayer, in its theistic sense, largely absent. Although prayer occupies a place in Jain ritual, the tradition fundamentally rejects the idea of a transcendent, all-powerful spirit or deity. Central to Jain practice is meditation, which assumes a pivotal role in the spiritual discipline of its adherents, who are renowned for their commitment to prolonged and rigorous meditative exercises. Consequently, Jainism is frequently characterised as an atheistic tradition within the broader spectrum of Indian spirituality. As B.B. Raynade (2002) observes:

Jainism is atheistical, if by atheism we understand the belief that there is no eternal supreme God, Greater and Lord of all things; for Jains flatly deny such a supreme God. Nor need it surprise us that atheism should be essential to a religious system; for even the most orthodox systems like Mimamsa deny the existence of a supreme God,

though, of course, on other grounds than those of the Jains'. (p. 63)

Buddhism is distinguished by its articulation of the philosophy of Shunya, or emptiness, which is inextricably bound to the attainment of Nirvana. The second-century philosopher Nagarjuna elucidates Shunya as contingent upon the principle of Pratityasamutpada, or dependent origination, which serves as the Buddhist expression of the Absolute and encapsulates the ultimate nature of reality. The apprehension of this Absolute, through Prajna—a wisdom that transcends the confines of rational cognition—necessitates the relinquishment of all fixed views, positions, and conceptual dilemmas. Only through a transformative immersion into this cosmic Absolute does one approach the state of Nirvana. In essence, Buddhist liberation may also be conceived as a process of recollection, a mode of organising phenomena in a non-differentiated, singular perspective.

Hinduism, with its rich pantheon of gods and goddesses, is often characterised as a polytheistic tradition. Its sacred corpus is anchored in the Vedas, yet the Upanishads, Smritis, Brahma Bhasha, Sutras, Puranas, the Mahabharata, and the Gita collectively constitute the spiritual and philosophical foundation of Hindu thought. Among the principal deities, Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva occupy preeminent positions. The Vedic pronouncement, 'Ekam sad vipra bahudha vadanti'—"Truth is one, sages call it by various names"—not only underscores the essential unity underlying the multiplicity of divine forms, but also establishes a profound ethos of universality and tolerance within Hinduism. The ideal of religious harmony is thus woven into the fabric of the tradition. Central to the Hindu conception of the divine is Ishvara, whose creative, preservative, and destructive energies are personified in Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva, respectively. These energies, manifesting through their Avatars, are believed to govern the cosmos. Swami Bhaskarananda (1998) observes:

Personal God in Hinduism is called Saguna Brahman or Ishvara. From the standpoint of man posited in the world of time, space and causation, Ishvara or Saguna Brahman is the creator of the world. He is omnipotent, omniscient and all-pervading. By His mere will, He manifests Himself as the manifold universe. (p. 70)

Prior to the advent of Sikhi, the principal markers of absolute reality were already inscribed within the world's major religious and spiritual traditions. Over time, these markers have been reconstituted as Meta-Signs and Grand Narratives, constructs whose limitations have been incisively critiqued by postmodernist thinkers such as Lyotard and Derrida. As Gayatri Spivak (1990) articulates, grand narratives are totalising stories that presuppose a definitive endpoint. In the post-structuralist view, the formation of any narrative inevitably entails omission; the establishment of one conclusion precludes the possibility of others, often unconsciously. Postmodernist inquiry thus turns its gaze to what is excluded or marginalised by these dominant structures. The central concern is that the ascendancy of grand narratives forecloses the space for alternative perspectives. The conceptualisations of Allah, Shunya, and Brahma, for instance, have historically operated within such totalising frameworks. As Gurbhagat Singh (2009) notes:

The Hindu and the Buddhistic memory modes are totalitive and uni-centred. The idea of absoluteive Allah with total unity does not leave space for His multiple revelation. This kind of absolutely unitarian meta-sign of Allah could set up a uni-perspectival memory not with many signifieds for varied contents. Accordingly, the articulation of this uniperspectival remembrance could also result into a uniforming organization of society and politics doing violence to other memories. (pp. 42-3)

This absence of space for alternative cultures, memories, and spiritual energies necessitated a transformative intervention. Guru Nanak, embodying the quintessential spirit of affirmation, undertook a profound reformation of spiritual and cultural reflexes. In doing so, he inaugurated a new symbol of ultimate reality—Ek Onkar—distinguished by its multidimensionality. The Sikh conception of the divine, discernible through its manifold modes, attributes, and the distinctiveness revealed in the praxis of the Sikh Panth, recognises Ek Onkar or Waheguru as the supreme and ultimate reality. Kapur Singh (2001) notes:

Waheguru is the focal word around which the Sikh yogic discipline of the Name revolves. It was adopted as the basic concept of Sikh theology and the esoteric essence of Sikhism from the time of Guru

Nanak. It is found in the revelations of the early Sikh Gurus, as preserved in the *Guru Granth*. (p. 53)

Within Sikh doctrine, the hymns of the *Guru Granth Sahib* are understood collectively as an exposition of the essence of Ek Onkar. The *Mul Mantra*, which introduces the text, offers the initial articulation of this concept. At first glance, Sikhism may appear to align with the monotheistic traditions of Islam and Judaism, positing a singular divine reality. Yet the Sikh understanding of monotheism diverges significantly from the personified, transcendent deities of Jehovah or Allah. Instead, Sikh philosophy conceives of the Supreme Being in a dual aspect: the unattributed-transcendent and the attributed-immanent. This distinction is subtly encoded in terminology: *Ek Onkar*, as the prelude to the *Mul Mantra*, signifies the Sole, Indivisible Supreme Being, the transcendent Par-Brahm, who perpetually manifests both Nirguna (without attributes) and Sarguna (with attributes). Dialectical debates regarding the locus of the divine—whether external or internal—are resolved by the Guru's assertion that the divine dwells with those immersed in meditative consciousness. Some say He is outside; others say He is inside, but the Guru addresses this by saying He lives with the meditative souls.

This signifies that *Waheguru* is not only existent but is realised by meditative souls through the practice of Naam. He is beyond enumeration, measure, and articulation; the entirety of creation resounds with His limitless praise. The *Guru Granth Sahib* enumerates a multitude of attributes ascribed to Ek Onkar, yet affirms that Ek Onkar, Waheguru, or Akal Purakh cannot be circumscribed within any single dimension. He transcends all forms and symbols, eluding the grasp of any power that seeks to define or delimit Him. Guru Gobind Singh, in *Japu*, proclaims that the divine possesses neither physical form nor any markers of caste or lineage. No one can delineate His features, complexion, or essence. The eternal, self-luminous bearer of infinite potency is addressed as the supreme among Indras, the God of gods, and the sovereign of sovereigns. As the ruler of the three worlds, He is referred to as *neti neti*—'not this, not this'—by gods, humans, demons, and even the blades of grass in the forest, all bearing witness to His infinitude. The multiplicity of His names defies

enumeration, which is why the wise invoke only His functional name.

*Ek Onkar* cannot be confined to a single form or interpretation. It transcends caste and cannot be frozen into a single aspect or format. During Guru Nanak's time, the concepts of Allah and Brahma were monads, and it was thanks to the Guru's grace that he broke the one-dimensional perspective of God. Through spiritual and practical deconstruction, he created a new symbol of God, one full of wonders. He (*Waheguru*) is original yet allows space for others' originality and creativity. This wonderful attribute is imagined by modern postmodern thinking. *Waheguru* is the highest symbol of the Sikh revolution, whose unique originality has yet to be fully understood. *Waheguru* is multidimensional; he is an idol of polynomial truth. Like a "quantum leap" in quantum physics, any burst of original thought from his multiplicity can come suddenly. Even in unity, *Waheguru* is multiple, worth seeing, and layered. His layered nature creates the possibility of multiple revelations. Thus, *Waheguru* creates wonders and offers the world opportunities to perform in many colours. In Guru Nanak's paradigm of *Vismadic* terminology, *Waheguru* is also *Vismadi*. Gurbhagat Singh (2009) observes:

*Vismad* is in fact what Bataille would term "excess" or the self-crossing of the mind and life in the non-rational diversity of life. *Vismad* of the Guru, because of its diversity and high intensity exceeds the excess of Bataille'. (p. 71)

Within the universe, every manifestation—music, knowledge, living beings, diversity of forms and colours, the elements of air, water, fire, and earth—exists in a state of joyous marvel. In Akal Ustati, Guru Gobind Singh evokes the vismadic Akal Purakh through a language replete with potent metaphors, signs, and symbols, underscoring the distinctiveness of Sikh thought, which is marked by an absence of parochialism. Sikh teachings consistently frame prayer in the second person, as an address to the divine 'Thou,' for the Sikh perpetually sings of Him; apart from *Waheguru*, nothing subsists. The resonant strains of Tuhi Guru suffuse the atmosphere of being with the fragrance of pure metaphysics, charting the journey of *Surti* towards *Par-Brahma*. Significantly, the Sikh encounter with the divine is rooted in Neh—love—rather than fear.

Viewed through the lens of distinctiveness, the Sikh experience of ultimate reality stands apart. The tradition of naming the divine occupies a central position in Sikh spiritual practice, functioning as the axis around which spiritual life revolves. The Sikh experience is uniquely situated at the confluence of Aryan and Semitic traditions, a synthesis that has led to Punjab's recognition as a crucible of global spiritualism. The Guru Granth Sahib encapsulates the zenith of the Semitic tradition, as embodied by Sufi figures such as Baba Shaikh Farid, alongside the apogee of the Aryan tradition, represented by the Bhagats. The architecture of religion on earth may be likened to a vault (*mehrab*), constructed upon two foundational bases: Aryan and Semitic. Rather than being anchored to a single dominant pole, this structure is centred and radiates outward, akin to a sphere. *Gurmat* serves as the keystone of this vault, imparting stability and permanence. *The Bhagti* tradition forms the culminating brick of *the Aryan Dharam Stupa*, forging a connection to *Gurmat*, while the final brick of the Semitic tradition—Islam—joins *Gurmat* through the Sufi lineage.

The Aryan tradition's inclination to ascribe a multitude of names to the divine is exemplified in the *Sehsarnamas*, which enumerate thousands of appellations for deities such as Vishnu, Shiva, Durga, and Chandika. Similarly, the Semitic tradition, particularly in Islam, manifests this practice through the Quran's enumeration of the 99 names of Allah. In both traditions, these names often crystallise into static, one-dimensional, and hegemonic representations of the divine. In contrast, *Waheguru* emerges as a symbol that transcends any singular stratum. The linguistic sources employed—ranging from Islamic-Persian-Arabic to Vedic Sanskrit—were deliberately chosen, reflecting the Sikh revolution's intent to dismantle the monopoly of a single dimension. The paradigms of Allah and Brahma, once fused within a hegemonic framework, were reconfigured by Guru Gobind Singh, who articulated the symbol of 'Waheguru' across diverse perspectives and languages.

The Sikh experience of *Waheguru/Ek Onkar* is vast and expansive. Its prominence in both the Guru Granth Sahib and the Dasam Granth makes the experience of God's naming extraordinary. Guru Arjan refers

to *Waheguru/Ek Onkar* by names such as *Karim*, *Pritpal*, *Rahim*, *Allah*, *Khuda*, *Bhagwant*, *Gusai*, *Jagnath*, *Jagjivan*, *Rikhikes*, *Gopal*, *Gobind*, *Mukand*, *Meharvan*, *Maula*, *Pir*, *Paikambar*, *Saikh*, *Narain*, *Narhar*, *Dyal*, *Ram*, *Basdev*, and *Parbrahma*. These names reflect the spiritual experiences of both traditions. In *Japu* and *Akal Ustati*, Guru Gobind Singh also mentions thousands of God's names. In *Japu*, there are a thousand names of *Ek Onkar*, such as *Sehsarnama*, but they are not presented in a hegemonic manner; rather, they flow as part of a multifaceted spiritual expression, honouring various forms of the divine, including salutations to the Kinless, the Fearless, the Merciful, and the Compassionate. Additionally, he honours the Perfect Yogi, the Enjoyer of all, the Benevolent, and the Preserver of all. *Waheguru/Ek Onkar* is recognised as the Supreme Being of all living and non-living entities within the universe. He does not recognise distinctions of caste, creed, colour, or region. From His vastness, Guru Gobind Singh observes that all people sing His praises worldwide.

In light of the foregoing analysis, it becomes evident that the Sikh articulation of the divine, as encapsulated in the terminology of *Waheguru* or *Ek Onkar*, is fundamentally distinct. Guru Nanak's experience of the divine—*Jahra*—defies confinement within the doctrinal boundaries of the Vedas or Kateba. Within the ceaseless current of spiritual infinity, the Sikh encounter with the divine generates a capacious space for the coexistence and flourishing of diverse spiritual experiences.

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## RE-EXAMINING THE POSITION OF WOMEN IN SIKHISM: GURU GRANTH SAHIB AND SIKH PRAXIS

DR SHEFALI BEDI\*

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Dr Shefali Bedi has taken a very pragmatic view of the manner in which a woman is denied a religious role in the affairs of Sikh shrines. It is to be remembered that it is an outcome more of the accepted practices of the collective wisdom of the community than any patriarchal tendencies as interpreted and laid down by modern feminists. It is true that the opinion on the participation of women in the religious sphere remains sharply divided. – Editor

### ABSTRACT

This paper investigates the position of women in Sikhism through a multidimensional lens encompassing scriptural analysis, historical development, and socio-cultural practices. Drawing upon feminist readings and Sikh theological sources, the paper reveals that while Sikh scripture, especially the *Sri Guru Granth Sahib* (SGGS), provides a deeply egalitarian and inclusive framework regarding gender, the social and institutional expressions of Sikhism have not always aligned with these values. The evolution of Sikh identity—especially with the institutionalization of the Khalsa—has increasingly been shaped by gendered hierarchies and patriarchal norms, often sidelining women from religious leadership and decision-making roles. The paper

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emphasizes the need to critically differentiate between religious ideals and cultural practices, and calls for a re-engagement with the inclusive ethos of Sikh scripture to address contemporary gender inequalities within the community.

## INTRODUCTION

The question of women's position in any religious tradition requires a nuanced approach that considers both the doctrinal principles and the socio-historical context in which these principles are interpreted and practiced. In the case of Sikhism, a religion founded in 15th-century Punjab, this inquiry is especially significant because of the egalitarian ethos attributed to its foundational texts and teachings. The Sri Guru Granth Sahib (SGGS), the central scripture of Sikhism, emphasizes the spiritual equality of all beings, regardless of caste, class, or gender. Yet, the lived realities of women within Sikh society often reveal gendered disparities in access to religious authority, social mobility, and decision-making power.

This paper seeks to analyze the disjunction between Sikhism's scriptural ideals and its social practices, particularly concerning the position of women. By examining how women are conceptualized in the SGGS and how gender roles have evolved within Sikh institutions and Punjabi culture.

## WOMEN IN SIKH SCRIPTURE: THE GURU GRANTH SAHIB

The *Sri Guru Granth Sahib* (SGGS), compiled by Guru Arjan Dev Ji and later declared the eternal Guru by Guru Gobind Singh Ji, is central to Sikh philosophy and religious life. It includes the bani (divine verses) of the Sikh Gurus as well as compositions by Bhaktas, Sufi saints, and Bhattas from various religious, regional, and caste backgrounds. One of the defining features of the SGGS is its inclusive and anti-hierarchical character.

Sri Guru Granth Sahib creates a set of new signs/symbols to counter the running hegemonic systems and practices. In the perspective of Guru Granth Sahib, a being's ultimate goal is to achieve the ultimate light and to become one with Him. Human gets the body with much blessings of *Wahguru/Akal Purakh* who is *Mehrvan* (gracious), *Dialoo* (kind), *Kirpaloo* (merciful). He is neither male nor

female, beyond from gender. The seeker/devotee of the Guru is in quest to meeting with *Akal Purakh*. For seeker/devotee Guru Granth Sahib creates the signs of woman who is *Suhagan*. She is waiting for her *Kant/ Pritam/ Prabhu/ Khasam/ Veparvah/ Rangla/ Shauh* in libidinal intensity. It is remarkable in the Guru Granth Sahib that for the devotee's beloved is *Akal Purakh*. In essence, Purakh is one, and others are the women.

In the SGGS, the Divine is conceptualised as Akal Purakh, a formless, timeless, and genderless entity. However, to express the mystical relationship between the seeker and the Divine, the Gurus often employ the metaphor of the bride longing for union with her Husband-Lord (*Suhagan-Pir* relationship). The seeker is imagined as a woman, yearning for the love and presence of her beloved. This metaphor is not gender-exclusive but rather gender-transcendent. It suggests that both men and women must embrace qualities traditionally associated with femininity—emotional openness, devotion, surrender—to achieve spiritual realization. In Guru Granth Sahib the feminine voice prevails throughout as Kaur-Singh(2014) writes:

“Spiritually, the gurus connect with the female at a very deep level...woman is regarded as physically and spiritually refined, so it is in her tone, her mood, her image, her dressing-up that the gurus express their yearning”(pp 610)

This symbolic feminization of the spiritual self is particularly radical in a society where women were often seen as spiritually inferior or impure. The SGGS not only uses the feminine metaphor positively, it also celebrates womanhood in its biological and social dimensions. Guru Nanak Dev Ji, the founder of Sikhism, famously asked:

*So kyo manda aakhiye, jit jamme rajaan?*

Why call her inferior, from whom even kings are born?

This verse is more than poetic sentiment; it is a theological statement rejecting the misogyny prevalent in Indian society. The SGGS also rejects menstrual and postpartum taboos, which were common across Hindu and Islamic traditions in South Asia. Guru Nanak refutes these ideas by stating that pollution lies not in a woman's biological processes but in a person's inner thoughts and actions. Sikh experience denies such assumptions of body.

Furthermore, the Gurus condemned practices such as sati (the burning of widows) and purdah (veiling and seclusion), which were seen as oppressive customs imposed on women. In the Babur Bani, Guru Nanak expresses deep sorrow at the suffering of women during Babur's invasion, including the sexual violence faced by Hindu and Muslim women. His verses demonstrate not only empathy but also sharp critique of a socio-political order that devalues and violates women.

Thus, in its theological core, Sikhism offers a gender-egalitarian vision in which women are not only spiritually equal but also emblematic of the seeker's journey toward the Divine.

### **GENDER AS A SOCIAL CONSTRUCT IN SIKH HISTORY**

While the SGGS articulates gender-neutral or gender-transcending ideals, the historical development of Sikh institutions tells a more complex story. Gender, unlike sex, is a social and cultural construct that defines and differentiates roles, expectations, and behaviors of men and women. In Sikh history, gender norms evolved alongside major political and institutional changes, particularly the creation of the Khalsa by Guru Gobind Singh in 1699.

The Khalsa, a military and spiritual order, was formed to resist Mughal oppression and uphold justice. The initiation involved the selection of Panj Pyare (Five Beloved Ones), all of whom were men. No woman was among the first initiated, and to this day, women are rarely included in Panj Pyare representations during ceremonial functions. This exclusion is sometimes justified historically (that no woman came forward in 1699) but it carries lasting symbolic consequences—implying that women are unfit or ineligible for the highest spiritual-military honors.

Moreover, the Five Ks—*kesh* (unshorn hair), *kangha* (comb), *kirpan* (sword), *kara* (steel bracelet), and *kachera* (shorts)—have become visible markers of Sikh identity. While theoretically applicable to all Khalsa initiates, regardless of gender, in practice, these symbols have been coded as masculine. The martial emphasis of the Khalsa identity and its visual aesthetics have contributed to the masculinization of Sikh identity, marginalizing women and alternative modes of Sikh spirituality.

It is important, however, to distinguish between the Sikh Panth

and the Khalsa Panth. Sikhism includes diverse streams — Udasis, Nirmalas, Sewa Panthis, Sehajdharis, and others—that emphasize varied forms of spiritual discipline. Unfortunately, in contemporary discourse, Khalsa identity has become the normative model, leading to the erasure or devaluation of non-militant, often more gender-inclusive traditions within Sikhism.

### **THE SIKH REHAT MARYADA AND WOMEN'S RELIGIOUS PARTICIPATION**

The Sikh Rehat Maryada, the official Code of Conduct issued by the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) in the mid-20th century, contains many progressive directives regarding gender like it prohibits dowry, condemns female infanticide, allows for widow remarriage and encourages equal participation in congregational worship

Moreover, the Rehat Maryada permits both men and women to serve as *granthis* (scripture readers), *ragis* (musicians), and preachers. However, in practical terms, these provisions are rarely implemented. Leadership roles in major gurdwaras remain male-dominated, and women *ragis* are still not allowed to perform *kirtan* at the Golden Temple in Amritsar.

This contradiction between text and practice reveals the deep hold of patriarchal norms in Sikh institutions. While the Rehat Maryada promotes gender equality, the cultural milieu—shaped by Punjabi social structures—continues to prioritize male authority and leadership. Women often play key roles in private devotional spaces, organizing *satsangs* or performing *paath* (scripture recitation) at home, but are systematically excluded from institutional power and symbolic visibility.

### **CULTURAL PATRIARCHY AND THE CONTROL OF FEMALE SEXUALITY**

A crucial dimension of the status of women in Sikhism lies not in religious doctrine but in cultural practices—especially the notion of *izzat* (honor). In Punjabi society, honour is closely tied to the behaviour of women. A family's reputation often hinges on the perceived sexual purity of its daughters, wives, and sisters. This has led to the normalisation of strict controls over women's mobility, dress, speech, and sexuality. The feudal and patriarchal nature of Punjabi

society envisages for women to play the traditionally allocated roles of domesticity following the culture-honour code and as embodiment of family honour their sexuality is needed to be controlled especially till the time she is gifted as wife to a suitable owner. Although belonging to different caste and religious identities scholars regard one notion that defines the identity of Punjabi/Sikh women is the notion of *izzat* (Jakobsh, 2010). Izzat is regarded as highly complex term that goes beyond the traditional simplified translation of 'honor' and includes within its fold the notion of morality, pride, respect and dignity. The ideology of honor i.e. *izzat* is a gendered notion in India. Both men and women personify the notions of honor in different ways. Women embody this notion as a daughter, wife and mother while men regulate it. For Punjabi male it is reflected individually through wealth, status and actions but at social level it includes the behavior of kin especially daughter, wives and sisters. For women the values related to honor includes modesty or propriety (*sharam*). So, loss of honor is aligned with female behavior and hence need to control the same especially by controlling the female sexuality. The greatest threat to this honor lies in the woman's body due to her reproducing and procreating capacity.

Such cultural patriarchies directly contradict Sikh teachings, which emphasize inner purity and moral conduct over external appearances or gender roles. Despite Sikhism's condemnation of female infanticide, son preference, and dowry, these practices remain widespread among Sikhs in Punjab and the diaspora. The tragic result is a skewed sex ratio, as evidenced by census data over the years.

Moreover, intersections of caste, class, and education further complicate the gender landscape. Women from marginalized castes or economically weaker families face compounded forms of discrimination, even within Sikh households that nominally believe in equality.

A number of Sikh scholars and feminists have begun to revisit and reinterpret Sikh texts through a gender-critical lens. Today, activist groups, especially among the diaspora, are demanding greater inclusion of women in religious leadership, access to perform *kirtan* at sacred sites, and a more critical engagement with patriarchal customs. These movements mark an important reclamation of Sikh feminism grounded not in Western liberalism but in the egalitarian vision of the Gurus

themselves.

## CONCLUSION

The position of women in Sikhism presents a paradox: a religion whose scripture affirms gender equality, rejects biological essentialism, and celebrates feminine spirituality, yet whose historical and institutional practices often marginalise women and reinforce patriarchal norms. Such transformation requires reimagining religious leadership, opening sacred spaces to women, questioning caste and class hierarchies, and recognising the intersections of gender with honour, identity, and modernity. The spiritual message of Sikhism, when understood in its fullness, can offer not only a theology of equality but also a praxis of justice.

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## THE HEART OF SIKHISM

SIRDAR KAPUR SINGH

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This write-up has been reproduced from the book “Sikhism for Modern Man” authored by Sirdar Kapur Singh, the National Professor of Sikhism. It delineates the essential characteristics of Sikh religion and helps understand and resolve many misgivings which assail the religio-political atmosphere surrounding the Sikh community today. - Editor

Religion deals essentially with three subjects, the nature of Reality, the Nature of Man and its relation to this Reality and, lastly, with the way to reach this Reality. The first two subjects belong to Philosophy proper and it is the third subject which brings the other two into the domain of religion. As long as religion merely defines the nature of Reality and seeks to lay down the true values of human activity, it is no more than Philosophy and Ethics, but when it seeks and promises to help human soul to take these truths to heart and to put them into action with the object of resolving the problem of suffering and alienation which is inherent in the innermost core of man, his self-consciousness, then it becomes religion proper. Man can, possibly, keep his mind away from the intellectual problems of the mystery of universe, the nature of his own self and that of the world around him and the nature of the relationship that binds both, but he cannot help yearning and suffering. As Pascal has said, “Man is the only wretched creature that there is”, and a religion which did not whole heartedly tackle this problem would ring hollow. In this sense, Buddhism was eminently right when it declared that the basic human problem, demanding resolution is “*sab dukha*”, i.e., all individuated existence entails suffering which means that suffering inheres in the very nature

of the human psyche.

Sikhism is essentially a Religion of the Way, i.e. something that must be lived and experienced rather than something which may be intellectually grasped and declared. True, there can be no practice without the dogma. Sikhism, therefore, has its doctrines, its dogmatic stand, its view of Reality, its view of the nature of man, and their inter-relationship, but it lays primary Stress on the practice, the discipline, the way which leads to “the cessation of suffering”, as Gautam, the Buddha, formulated it.

A careful reading and understanding of the Sikh Scripture reveals that the religion of Sikhism has three postulates implicit in its teachings. One, that there is no essential duality between the spirit and the matter.<sup>1</sup> Two, that man alone has the capacity to enter into conscious participation in the process of the Evolution, with the further implication that the process of Evolution, as understood by modern man, has come to a dead-end and it, therefore, must be rescued by the conscious effort of man, who alone is capable now of furthering this process.<sup>2</sup> Three, that when the man has reached the highest goal of Evolution, namely, the vision of God, he must not be absorbed back into God but must remain earth conscious so as to transform this mundane world into a higher and spiritual plane of existence.<sup>3</sup>

The first of these propositions is a postulate of Philosophy. The view taken by Sikhism on this point is that ‘the spirit’ and ‘the matter’ are not antagonistic to or dissevered from each other, the one subtle, the other gross, but that they are simply and just dissimilated, and that the core of the human nature, which is self conscious, and the physical nature which is not conscious and is utterly inert, are accountable ultimately in terms of ‘the subtle’. The mathematico-physical aspect of Nature, to a mode of consciousness which is pin-pointed and individuated, appears to be poles apart? from itself. Indeed, consciousness as ‘subject’ is wholly dependent for its very existence upon the object as its polarity. A true comprehension, however, which results from proper religious discipline and culture of sublimating and integrating the human faculties, removes this basic duality between the mind and the matter. “When I saw truly I knew that all was primeval. Nanak, the subtle and the gross are, in fact, identical.”<sup>4</sup>

This assertion is repeated in the Sikh Scripture again and again in exegesis of the basic formula of Sikh dogmatism, given as the opening line of the Sikh Scripture, in which it is declared that, “the Primary is true, the pre-Temporal is true, the Phenomenon is true, and the yet-to-be-Evolved is, likewise, true.”<sup>5</sup>

This view of Reality which Sikhism postulates, has far-reaching implications, both in respect of the traditional Hindu Philosophy, and the problem of the true conduct for man. Firstly, it, in essence, repudiates the basic concept of Hindu thought embodied in the doctrine of Maya which is stated as the illusory Power which createth illusion and ignorance. True, the subtle Hindu mind characterises it as, *anirvaānā* “unsayable, whether is or is-not”, “real yet not real”, but it definitely is a veiling obscuring Power of nature, and an agent of error and illusion, accountable for the manifestation of all phenomena. In Sikhism, the term Maya, is retained but it is interpreted otherwise so as to make it not a category of existence, but a mere stage and plane in the involution of the spirit. The result of this re-interpretation is replete with tremendous consequences for the practical outlook of man. The world of phenomena is no longer a dream and a phantasmagoria in the minds of the gods, to be bypassed and shunned by serious minded persons. It is as real, in fact, as the Ultimate Reality, but the perceiving human mind is beset with limitations that must be transcended and cut asunder. It is this that has made it possible for Sikhism to lay down that the highest religious discipline must be practised while remaining active in the socio-political context, and not by giving up and renouncing the worldly life. It is this which has given the Sikh mind a sense of urgency, and imparted to it a genuine strain of extroversion which the Western mind has achieved only by adopting basically different postulates, such as, that this one life on earth is the only life a soul may look forward to till eternity, and that, the essence of the real is its characteristic of being the object of sensory-motor perception. It is the peculiar virtue of Sikhism that while it retains the primacy of the spirit over matter, it prevents human life degenerating into the purely secular and expedient modes of activity. It is a further virtue of this postulate of Sikh religion that it lends the necessary sense of urgency to the mind of man<sup>6</sup>, and imparts to it an extrovert outlook, in so far as it is desirable to retain them for human

welfare, material prosperity and spiritual advancement on this earth.

The second postulate, inherent in the teachings of Sikhism, is that the blind urge of Evolution, the thrust of the Life Force, after reaching the point of creating the self-conscious man, has come to a dead end and by itself is incapable of making any further real progress, unless the self-consciousness, in which is grounded the will of man, now takes a consciously guided and directed part in this evolutionary process: "Hail the Guru, for he teaches the ascent of man over himself".<sup>7</sup>

This line of thought, in various forms, runs throughout the voluminous Sikh Scripture, and it is legitimate to say that the concept of the "Superman" which agitated the mind of Nietzsche during the nineteenth century in Europe, and from whom the modern Indian thinker, Aurovindo Ghose, has taken his cue, was first of all adumbrated in the Sikh Scripture, and that the conscious effort of man alone is now, at this stage, capable of furthering the process of Evolution that has gone so far to make and shape the phenomenal world, is now a familiar concept to thinking modern minds.

But by far the most startling insight of Sikhism is that the true end of the man is not such a Vision of God that ends in re-absorption of the individual into the Absolute Reality, but the emergence of a race of God-conscious men, who remain earth-aware and thus operate in the mundane world of the phenomena, with the object of transforming and spiritualising it into a higher and ampler plane of existence. "The God-conscious man is animated with an intense desire to do good in this world."<sup>8</sup>

By and large the aim of the highest religious discipline has been taken and accepted as the attainment of abiding and self-sufficient identity with, or propinquity to God. It was not, thus, thought in terms of utilising the God-consciousness for transforming and spiritualising the life on earth, and transformation of the humanity. It is this stance of Sikhism which is the true prototype of the sophisticated philosophy of the modern Hindu Sage, Aurovindo Ghose, though there might be no direct indebtedness to the Sikh thought. Those, however, who know how basic and revolutionary trends of human thought of this kind are capable of influencing men and minds, far separated by distance and

time, without contact or causal connection from its original appearance, may perceive no difficulty in seeing the nexus between the two.

In this connection it is interesting to recall that not long ago, when Ramakrishna, the Paramhansa, the modern Hindu theophant, was at his most critical stage of blocked theophanic development, it was a Sikh ascetic, Udasi Totapuri, who imparted to the Paramhansa the Sikh esoteric mantram efficacious for removing impediments on the spiritual path, and that is why the most illustrious chela of the Paramhansa, Swami Vivekanand, so often uttered and introduced into his writings and speeches the Sikh mystic formula, *Vabeguru*, so as to sustain his flow of inspiration.

What is the discipline, and the practice which Sikhism recommends as necessary and efficacious for attaining this God-consciousness, and for yoking it to the evolutionary transformation of life and humanity on this earth, and on the plane of mundane existence? It is the Doctrine and Practice of the Name. In the age through which humanity is passing now no other practice but that of the Name is efficacious. Therefore, "Practise the Discipline of Name".<sup>9</sup>

This is the message repeated again and again in the Sikh Scripture. O, my mind, there is no help but in the Name; other ways and practices are full of pitfalls."<sup>10</sup>

Now, what is this 'Discipline of the Name' which Sikhism teaches? Is it the essence of religion for mankind in the present Age?

In the history of great religions, five paths have been recognized as efficacious for leading to liberation, i.e. for achievement of the summum bonum of religion: (1) disinterested action, known as the Karma-yoga in Hindu religious thought; (2) devotion, known as bhakti-yoga; (3) gnosis, jñân-mârga; (4) the ritual known as yajna; and (5) asceticism, maceration or tapas. This fifth and the last path to liberation is a typical Indian contribution to the history of religious practices. All the other four have been accepted, in some form or other, with varying degrees of stress on one or the other, as valid paths to liberation. In the Sikh Scripture, the first three are variously mentioned and subsumed under "the Discipline of Name". No logically systematic account of the theory or practice of 'The Name' is given in the Sikh Scripture,

but throughout its voluminous pages, it is stressed, again and again, with a wealth of metaphor and imagery, illustrative material and exposition, that the Discipline of the Name is the only suitable and efficacious practice for leading to the Vision of God for final fulfilment of man, for cancelling his basic alienation and for achieving the unitive experience of the Numenon. It is further sententiously declared that "Sikhism is the religion of the Name."<sup>11</sup>

In their Congregational Prayer, for the last three centuries, the Sikhs, morning and evening, have concluded their collective supplication to God by saying, "May the Religion of the Name, preached by Nanak, increase and prevail in the world, ever and for ever more".<sup>12</sup> The discipline of Bhakti and the discipline of Karma, the disinterested works, is also mentioned, commended and praised but throughout, it is tacitly assumed that it is a part and parcel of the basic discipline, "the Practice of the Name" "The limitation and the sickness in the soul of the man can be removed only by mercerising it with the chemical of the Name."<sup>13</sup> "The vision of God is, not easier to have by any other endeavour than that of the Name and man engages in this effort only by good fortune, for all the various disciplines and practices pale into insignificance before the Practice of Name."<sup>14</sup> It is asserted that, jñân, the Gnosis, the cancellation of the dispersal of mind, dhyân, and all-comprehending Intuition, tatva-buddhi, is a fruit of the Practice of the Name<sup>15</sup> and that devotion, Bhakti, is a corollary of the discipline of Name. It is again said that disinterested action, in the sense of high altruism, the genuine Karmayoga, is a natural propensity of the man in whom the discipline of the Name is ripened.

"The Mastery of mind, the acme of Purity, and all-encompassing Consciousness, are results of the programmed remembrance of God, the Name."<sup>16</sup>

It is clear, therefore, that Sikhism teaches a religious discipline which is in essence a practice which includes the technique of yoga, the psychological and spiritual integration, the technique of bhakti, the supreme training of the emotions in the service of one supreme End, and a socio-politically active life, motivated not by the little ego of the individual but by an individual self which is yoked to the universal Self. The technique of yoga has aroused a great deal of

interest in the West during recent years, but mostly as a technique for achieving mental rest and physical health, though this is not the true purpose of the science of Yoga. The concept of Yoga, though not the term, is as old as the Rigveda itself. That the Vedic material is complex is recognised in the Nirukta, the science of analysis of the Veda itself, which takes account of several methods of its exegesis. In recent times, particularly by Western scholars of Archaeology, it has been suggested that Vedic material is primarily historical events transmuted into myth. It is also said that it consists of poetic exordia to the Brahmanic ritual. There is a theory, recently revived by Sri Aurovindo Ghose that the Veda is a vast piece of symbolism representing the passions of the soul and its striving for highest spiritual realms, a concept which he himself has adopted as the proto-type of his great poem, the Savitri. Bergaigne suggested the theory that all mythological portrayals in the Veda are variants of the sacred fire and the sacrificial liquor, the soma.<sup>17</sup> Whatever may be said about this as a general theory of interpretation of the Vedas, it has the merit of suggesting a method which appears to be plausible, for, obscure Vedic texts assume some kind of coherence in general if in them we seek an attempt at portraying correspondence between the world of men, the performers of the yajna, and the immaterial, ethereal world of the gods, in short, the macrocosm and the microcosm. The primary function of the rishis, the revealers and preservers of the Veda, was to ensure the ordered functioning of the mundane world, and of the religious ritual, by reproducing the succession of cosmic events, in their ritual and in the imagery which that ritual embodies, and this is the true meaning that the Vedic ritual signifies. The term rta, the basic concept of Vedic imagery, is a designation of the cosmic order which sustains the human order, the social ethics and the social coherency. Terms such as, dharman, kratu, have a two-fold significance according to whether they refer to men or the gods, to the plane of the adhyâtman or the adhidvaitam, as the Upanisadas put it. Thus understood the Veda portrays the cosmic magical synthesis, symbolically expressed. The cosmic order is conceived as a vast yajna, the prototype of the yajna which the man must perform so as to ensure the integration of the two. Thus, Vedism is already a form of collective, communist yoga, a process of yoking together, of fashioning a recurrent linkage, in which the gods and men

both play their parts as witnesses and participants. It is this strain of thought which accounts for the yearning of the Indian mind constantly seeking hidden correspondences between things which belong to entirely different conceptual systems. The Science and the technique of yoga, as it has been developed in India since thousands of years, is thus as old as the Hindu thought itself. The term, comes from the Samskrit root, yuj which means “to yoke, or join together”. As the specific science of psychological discipline, it is designated to signify the union of the individual Self with the universal Self, the vision of God or absorption into God. As an art, the technique of yoga has been used since the beginning of Hindu historical time as the archaeological discoveries recently made in Mohen-jodaro, where a big water reservoir surrounded by unventilated cubicles, designed to ensure deoxygenation calculated to alter body-chemistry facilitative of introversion, has been unearthed, lends support to the speculation that, already in the millennia before the dawn of the Christian era, the art and practice of yoga was well developed and established. Its techniques and teachings have been accumulated through a continuous stream of adepts who have handed them down from generation to generation. Patanjali, a Hindu savant of the fourth century B.C., is the author of the text *Yogasûtra*, which is now the most ancient text extant on the science of yoga, though its opening sûtra says, “Now, a revised text of yog”, which makes it clear that this text is by no means the first of its kind. The philosophical basis of this system of yoga, as expounded by Patanjali, is the *Sâmkhya* which teaches that the world order is risen and is an expansion of the highest category of Intelligence, the Mahat; that there is no part without an assignable function, a value, a purpose; that there is always an exact selection of means for the production of definite ends; that there is never a random aggregation of events; that there is order, regulation and system. It postulates two ultimate realities, the Spirit and the Matter, the Purusa, and the Prakriti, to account for all experience, as logical principles out of which all things evolve. The fundamental tenet of the *Sâmkhya* is that creation is impossible, for something cannot come out of nothing, *ex nihilo nihil fit*, and that the real movement, therefore, only consists of modification. This is the central doctrine of the *Sâmkhya*, and it is called, *satkâryavâda* and its whole system evolves from this as its logical

ground. The Sâmkhya devices this process of cosmic modification into twentyfive categories of Mind and Matter and shows how the whole Phenomenon has evolved out of these two sources in accordance with these categories. The philosophy of orthodox yoga postulates that what is true of this macrocosm is also true of the human microcosm and that, as the individual soul has involuted through a set process out of the universal Spirit, it can, by the reverse process, evolve into the universal Spirit. The yoga assumes that the individual soul is part and parcel of the universal Substance, but so involved in the matter of Time and Space as to have lost all recognition of its true nature. The yoga sets forth a know-how and a technique to bring the individual back to his own and original position, to absolve him from the clutches of Matter and to return him to the essence from which he came, and, thus, to abstract him from every aspect of Time and Space.

In the Sikh Scripture the final goal referred to in this philosophic thesis, is indicated by the imagery: "a return to the original home",<sup>18</sup> by the human soul. Since Sikhism abolishes adamant dualism of mind and matter, it by implication, refuses to base the philosophy of its discipline of the Name, on the categories of the *Sâmkhya*. The Sikh doctrine of the Name does not assume the cosmological theory as set forth in the *Sâmkhya* system but it does assert that the basic sickness of the human soul arises out of its individuation, its fissiparous involution away from the universal Spirit, and that its cure and restoration of health lies in a process of disciplined progress towards its primal source, which is God.<sup>19</sup> For this it recommends a psychological technique, the basic ingredient of which is the mechanical repetition of the 'Name of God', accompanied by a constant and unceasing effort to empty the individual mind of all its content, conscious as well as sub-conscious.<sup>20</sup> Since Sikhism recommends that religion must be lived and practised in the socio-political context, the Sikh practice of the yoga of the Name may be pursued and even must be pursued throughout, while engaged in earning honest livelihood. The complicated technique of classical yoga as laid down in the text of Patanjali and the philosophical concepts by which it is validated, both go together, and the earning of a livelihood and the practice of the classical yoga cannot go together. In Sikhism this predicament has

been removed by laying down a technique which is at once practicable and efficacious. This practice of the Name is mechanical to start with, but has its adjuncts, without which it cannot succeed and fructify. The first adjunct is strictly ethical life.

The Sikh Scripture constantly stresses that unless a man leads an unstained ethical life he cannot come nigh unto God, although Sikhism does not confuse or equate the ethical commandment and value with the religious experience as such. A Sikh, engaged in the discipline of Name, himself must lead a life of the highest ethical purity in word, thought and deed, and every faltering from this high norm of rectitude constitutes a stumbling block in the progress of his ultimate realisation of God. The 'ethical life' of the Nam-yoga; takes over, modifies and encapsulates the inescapable preliminary of the classical yoga, that is its 'five restraints', *pantayama*. These five 'restraints' are (1) *ahimsa*, do not kill, (2) *satya*, do not tell a lie, (3) *asteya*, do not steal, (4) *brahmañārya*, sexual abstinence, and (5) *aparigraha*, do not be greedy and grasping.<sup>21</sup> These 'restraints' are aimed at purifying the individual, making him superior to the ordinary human being, and they are not claimed as generative of any 'yogic experience', change of consciousness, but this purity is essential for further spiritual progress of the practitioner. The modified Sikh directive-capsule, so to speak, separates such elements in these 'restraints' of classical yoga, as are incapable or difficult of coordination with a house-holder's life and his full participation in sociopolitical activity, necessary imperatives of the Sikh way of life. For instance, the 'restraint' of *brahmañārya* abstinence from sex-involvement, is dropped and in its place a monogamous, spiritually oriented married life, free from deviation and promiscuity is held out as the true 'restraint'.<sup>22</sup> The encapsulated ethical conduct, *yama*, of the Sikh way of life, is laid down in the Sikh Scripture, in part, as follows:

Let 'truth' be the strict norm of all you think and do, so that your pain and anxiety may go and all-felicity come to you.

Always cognise the near-presence of God, through the Practice of the Name.

Avoid hurt or injury to any sentient being so that peace may come to your mind.

Be humble by helping and serving those afflicted with misery and want so as to achieve God-consciousness.

Nanak testifies that, verily, God is the exalter of the fallen and the lowly.<sup>23</sup>

The Sikh is then bidden to rely upon prayer and the company of holy men to support and sustain him in his life of ethical rectitude. As he progresses in the path of spiritual development, he must deem it as his duty to persuade and help others to tread the same path, through socio-political activity which must be progressively purified of all taints of selfishness. This is the doctrine of *seva* of Sikhism, without which, Sikhism declares, the practice of Name does not fructify.<sup>24</sup>

It is further laid down in the Sikh Scripture that the discipline of Name must be constantly vitalised by *bhakti*, devotion to God. "Increase your devotion to God in ascending measure."<sup>25</sup> The word *bhakt* has the literal meaning of "well-joined". The word *bhakti* occurs in the *Svetasvatara*, the ancient Hindu text, which Otto Schraeder in his *DerHinduismus* calls "the gate-way to Hinduism", although earlier Pannini, in his Grammar, also appears to refer to it.<sup>26</sup> It was the *bhakti* principle which brought about the transition from the neuter, to the personal principle in Hindu religious speculation. Since *bhakti* is "joining with" or "participation" in the God, it presupposes an object distinct and discreet, dissimilar and distant from the subject. A purely monistic environment, such as the Sikh doctrine is, is not a very fertile ground for *bhakti*. *Bhakti*, therefore, has always been better adapted to a *Vaisnavite* background wherein a personal god is assumed as taking human and sub-human forms in the phenomenal world. The orthodox Hindu theory of *Bhakti* is that a god without attribute is inaccessible and that there must be an intercessor. Since Hinduism has no founder or prophet God-incarnate, the 'word made flesh', as the Christians say, this intermediary must be one of those human or sub-human forms of Vishnu, which he has assumed in various Time-cycles of the Creation. This is the basic doctrine of Hindu *bhakti*, though gradually it has acquired many shades of secondary meanings. Since Sikhism does not countenance avatarvdd, the doctrine of incarnation of gods or the God, it uses the term, *bhakti*, in its pristine sense of canalising and sublimating the entire emotional energy of the individual to sustain

the continuous yearning for a vision of God.<sup>27</sup> This form of *bhakti*, the Sikh Scripture declares, is a necessary adjunct of the discipline of Name.<sup>28</sup>

The last adjunct of the discipline of Name, the Sikh Scripture says, is the intuitive understanding of the philosophical truths which underlie the world of phenomena. This is the True knowledge, the Gnosis, and the Sikh Scripture commends that a Sikh must always strive by study, by discussion, by meditation and by every mental effort, to acquire an intellectual and intuitive understanding of the philosophic truths.<sup>29</sup>

This, in short outline, is the Discipline of the Name which Sikhism teaches as the path to the realisation of God, and, broadly speaking, it consists of the three well known paths to liberation recognised in the world-religions, namely, 'the path of unselfish action', 'the path of devotion', and 'the path of knowledge', all subsumed under and practised as adjuncts to the grand Discipline of the technology of the Nam-yoga. The modern Hindu thinker, Aurovindo Ghose, in his own way, has tried to expound an almost identical technology under the title of "Integral Yoga", though it is definitely something less but expressed in a more sophisticated and pedantic language.

It is, therefore, this Discipline of the Name through which Sikhism seeks not only to ensure the continuous renewal but a firm conservancy of the fundamental traditions of the great religions of mankind and, in addition, it thereby seeks to make available to man, new dimensions of consciousness for the purpose of a higher integration of human personality, such as would transform man and his destiny on this earth. Out of the five paths to liberation, followed by mankind the two, namely, 'the ritual' and 'the maceration', have not been recommended and approved of by Sikhism for obvious reasons. The 'ritual' is basically repetition, aiming at renewal but discouraging and blocking development and growth, change and advancement. Mechanical rituals, where interiorisation is lacking and where mental correspondences are absent or atrophied, tend to make zombies of us all.<sup>30</sup> The ritual, in its original essence, is magic and its nature and function is different from that of true religion as conceived by Sikhism. Magic seeks to control powers of nature directly through the force of spells and

enchantments, techniques and know-hows, while religion recognises existence of spiritual beings external to man and the world and employs persuasive methods of sacrifice and prayer to procure their aid. Magic is coercive and dictatorial in approach while the other is persuasive. Magic depends upon the way in which certain things are said and done for a particular purpose by those who possess the necessary skills and the power to put the supernatural force into effect, while religion is personal and supplicatory. It is for this reason that the path of the ritual and the yajna has been discountenanced in Sikhism. Asceticism and maceration have been like-wise disowned as the desirable and direct paths to liberation,<sup>31</sup> for, these practices necessarily implicate withdrawal from socio-political activity, and Sikhism rejects such a withdrawal in view of its basic doctrines which envisage an ultimate transformation of the man and his destiny on this mundane earth as the true goal and fruit of religion.

The Order of the Khalsa which the Tenth Nanak, Guru Gobind Singh, founded, must be viewed in the context of these doctrines of Sikhism, as intended to be a Body of men who not only practise the essential spiritual discipline of Sikhism, and live the life of a true Sikh, but who are also pledged to ensure, by every legitimate means, in which means is included the control of political power, the coming into existence, the prevailment and the preservation of a World Society, vitalised continuously by the afflation of the truths of religion, open, tolerant and catholic sustaining a creative World culture, consistent with the spiritual dignity and the spiritual goal of man.

An outline of such a World Society is indicated in the Sikh Scripture thus:

“Henceforth, such is the Will of God:

No man shall coerce another, no man shall exploit another.

Everyone, each individual, has the inalienable birth-right to seek and pursue happiness and self-fulfilment.

Love and persuasion is the only law of social coherence.”<sup>32</sup>

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 Hear the ding-dong ring.  
 Go walking to the table,  
 See the same damn thing.
31. ਜਗਨ ਹੋਮ ਪੁੰਨ ਤਪ ਪੂਜਾ, ਦੇਹ ਦੁਖੀ ਨਿਤ ਦੂਖ ਸਹੈ। ਰਾਮ ਨਾਮ ਬਿਨੁ ਮੁਕਤਿ ਨ ਪਾਵਸਿ ਮੁਕਤਿ ਨਾਮਿ ਗੁਰਮੁਖਿ ਲਹੈ।) - Bhairau, M1, AG, 1127.
32. ਹੁਣਿ ਹੁਕਮੁ ਹੋਆ ਮਿਹਰਵਾਣ ਦਾ। ਪੈ ਕੋਇ ਨ ਕਿਸੈ ਰੰਵਾਣਦਾ।  
 ਸਭ ਸੁਖਾਲੀ ਵੁਠੀਆ। ਇਹੁ ਹੋਆ ਹਲੇਮੀ ਰਾਜੁ ਜੀਉ। - Sirî Râg, M5, AG, 74.

## REMEMBERING THE GLORIOUS LEGACY OF BHAJ JAITA DURING THE 350<sup>TH</sup> YEAR OF MARTYRDOM OF GURU TEGH BAHADUR

PROF RONKI RAM\*

By attempting to trace the genealogy and family details of Bhai Jaita Prof. Ronki Ram has provided much needed information on life of the celebrated Sikh Hero who performed the daring act of carrying the severed head of the Ninth Nanak to Guru Gobind Singh at Anandpur. The deeply researched article goes a long way in filling the long-felt voids in the family history of Bhai Jaita. – Editor

Bhai Jaita (Baba Jiwan Singh), upon whom Guru Gobind Singh bestowed the honorific title of 'Rangrette Guru Ke Bete' for bringing the severed head of his father, Guru Tegh Bahadur, to Anandpur Sahib, belonged to a Shudra Khokkar family of the devotees of Guru Sahiban. His forefathers were dedicated followers of the Guru Ghar from the time of the Guru Nanak – founder of the Sikh faith. Before deliberating on the glorious deeds of Bhai Jaita and his humble background, let me narrate two valorous feats exhibited by him during the martyrdom of Guru Tegh Bahadur on November 11, 1675. A day before (November 10) the martyrdom of the Guru, Bhai Jaita, with the help of Bhai Nanu of Dilwali Gali in the city of Delhi and Bhai Uda of Ladwa in Karnal district, also of Shudra background, in a daredevil act gathered the remains of the deeply mutilated bodies of Bhai Mati Das, Bhai Sati Das and Bhai Dayala Das who stoically attained martyrdom for

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endorsing the cause of Guru Tegh Bahadur, and immersed them in the waters of the Yamuna river nearby. Taking advantage of the dusty storm and darkness, Bhai Jaita again with the help of Bhai Nanu and Bhai Uda carried the severed head of Guru Tegh Bahadur from Delhi to Kiratpur covering 320 km long distance in a five day time. From Kiratpur the severed sacred head was taken to Anandpur Sahib under the command of Guru Govind Singh in the form of a religious procession for the proper cremation rites. According to a popular Sikh narrative, Bhai Jaita also made many trips before from Delhi to Anandpur and back on foot to deliver correspondence between Guru Tegh Bahadur and Guru Gobind Singh. He brought 57 Shaloks and 59 Shabads of Guru Tegh Bahadur from the prison as well as a coconut, 5 paisa and tilak to Anandpur sent by Guru Tegh Bahadur for Guruship ceremony of Gobind Rai.

Bhai Jaita, like his great-great grandfather Bhai Kalyana, dedicated his whole life for the cause of the Guru Ghar. His great-great grandfather was among the main sewadars of Guru Ghar from the time of Guru Nanak to the sixth Guru Hargobind. As a trusted disciple of Guru Hargobind, Bhai Kalyana was also a very close to Baba Buddha, one of the most reputed names in Sikhism. His native village was Rai Nangal. But on the persuasion of Baba Buddha, Bhai Kalyana first shifted to village 'Gaggomahal' and later to village Ramdaspur established by the former. Bhai Kalyana had another property in Delhi, popularly called 'Kalyane di Dharamshala', which was frequented by Guru Sahiban from the time of Guru Hargobind. Guru Tegh Bahadur stayed there for some time during his persecution at the hands of Aurangzeb. Bhai Kalyana also undertook wood sewa for the building of Darbar Sahib at Amritsar. His son Bhai Sukhbhan was an accomplished scholar and a reputed musician after Tansen, the most celebrated personality in the court of Emperor Akbar.

Bhai Jasbhan, son of Bhai Sukhbhan, was also deeply dedicated to the Guru Ghar. He spent very long period of his life in the service of seventh and eighth Gurus so much so that his name figured in a Hukamnama of the eighth Guru Harkrishan. Guru Arjan and Guru Hargobind also blessed him. He had two sons: Bhai Agya Ram and Bhai Sada Nand. Bhai Agya Ram lived in Delhi in the 'Kalyane di

Dharamshala'. He used to teach music and kirtan in his music school that was established by his grandfather Bhai Sukhbhan. His expertise in the field of music brought him in close contact with the officials of the court of Aurangzeb, which facilitated him in meeting Guru Tegh Bahadur during his imprisonment in Delhi. It was Bhai Agya Ram who with the help of his younger brother Bhai Sada Nand, Lakhi Shah Banjara and his three sons Nagahia, Hema, and Hari salvaged the mutilated body of Guru Tegh Bahadur and cremated it with great respect. His ashes were collected in a bronze pot and buried exactly at the place where the Guru's body was cremated. The Mughal administration, after knowing about the valorous deeds of Bhai Agya Ram, ordered for his brutal killing and took the custody of the cremation spot and built a mosque over it. In 1783, Jathedar Bagel Singh salvaged the place and constructed Gurudwara Rakabganj.

Bhai Sada Nand, the younger brother of Bhai Agya Ram, was also an accomplished master of 'sur' and 'rag'. He was one of the closest devotees of Guru Tegh Bahadur, who accompanied him during all of his journeys. Guru Tegh Bahadur recognised him as his main Sikh in his five Hukamname. The Guru helped him getting married with Lajwanti, the daughter of reputed Pandit Shiv Narayan, which was then a revolutionary step toward inter-caste marriages. The so-called low-caste status of Bhai Sada Nand and the upper caste affiliation of Bibi Lajwanti was the biggest hurdle in their marriage, which Guru Tegh Bahadur resolved amicably. After their marriage Bibi Lajwanti and Bhai Sada Nand came to Bakala and stayed with Bibi Nanaki and Mata Gujri. Bibi Lajwanti received her name 'Premo' from Mata Gujri for her sewa and devotion to Guru Ghar. The Guru was impressed with the dedicated service of Bhai Sada Nand and blessed him with two sons.

Though there are various accounts about the time and place of the birth of Bhai Jaita, a large number of scholars of Sikh studies mentioned September 2, 1661 as the date of his birth and Patna city as a place of his birth where he and his younger brother Bhai Sangta used to play with Gobind Rai during their childhood days. Bhai Jaita was elder to Gobind Rai and his brother, Bhai Sangta, was one day junior to him. Bhai Jaita gained proficiency in various languages, warrior skills,

horse riding, hunting, swimming, sailor, music, Gurbani from his own father Bhai Sada Nand and various other scholars associated with the Guru Ghar. He was also greatly inclined towards spiritual knowledge for that Guru Tegh Bahadur bestowed on him the title: *Biri Muratba* – a great soul destined to complete a special task. His vast scholarship and spiritual state-of-mind captured the essence of the most turbulent period of his life span in his seminal literary work entitled *Shri Gur Katha*.

After winning the battle of Bhangani, in 1688, Bhai Jaita was honoured with the title of Shiromani Jarnail (Chief General) by Guru Gobind Singh who on the request of Mata Premo married him with Bibi Raj Rani (later Raj Kaur), the daughter of Bhai Khajaan Singh Riar. They had four sons naming Bhai Sukha Singh, Bhai Sewa Singh, Bhai Gulzar Singh, and Bhai Gurdial Singh. All of them were born in Anandpur at their home situated on the west side of the fort Anandgarh, which is still preserved in its original form unlike rest of the historic Gurdwaras. Baba Tirath Singh, the eighth descendent of the illustrious clan of Bhai Jaita, who is also the current head of the Gurdwara Sri Tapo Asthan Sahib built on the place where Bhai Jaita used to meditate, lives with his family in the meticulously preserved historic residence and *Toshakhana* (weapon house) of Bhai Jaita. Adjacent to the Gurdwara Tapo Asthan Sahib are situated 84 steps of brick-laid staircase which was constructed for drawing water from river Satlej then flowing nearby the boundaries of the fort Anandgarh. These stair-steps still exist in their pristine form along with the Tapo Asthan and the heritage house of Bhai Jaita that have been preserved meticulously by the descendants of Bhai Jaita, which connect sangat with the Sikh heritage buildings of the times of the ninth and tenth Gurus.

Bhai Jaita was among those brave Sikhs, who crossed the Sirsa river and reached Chamkaur Di Garhi. All of his four sons and their mother were also with Guru Gobind when he left Anandpur. The forces of the Mughal Emperor and hill chiefs deceptively attacked Guru Gobind Singh and his accompanied entourage from behind while they were crossing the swollen Sirsa river. Bhai Sukha Singh and Bhai Sewa Singh, the two elder sons of Bhai Jaita, fought valorously in this battle at the shore of Sirsa river. However, Mata Raj Kaur and her two younger

sons were martyred. Bhai Sukha Singh and Bhai Sewa Singh, the elder sons of Bhai Jaita, were among those brave Sikhs who crossed the Sirsa River and reached Chamkaur Di Garhi. Both of them bravely fought in the historic battle of Chamkaur Di Garhi and achieved martyrdom. Bhai Jaita himself attained martyrdom in the battle of Chamkaur Di Gari. Thus, Bhai Jaita, his wife and their four sons, father, uncle, and brother Sangata, all achieved martyrdom while moving on the path shown by the Gurus. Bhai Nanu, who accompanied Bhai Jaita from Delhi to Kiratpur carrying the severed head of the ninth Guru, also attained martyrdom in the battle of Chamkaur Di Gari. And Bhai Uda, another valorous Sikh of the Guru, who also provided escort to Bhai Jaita attained martyrdom in the battle of Bhangani

On the basis of above discussion, it will not be out of place to highlight that Bhai Jaita gallantly carried forward the golden legacy of his forefathers' dedicated service at the altar of the Guru Ghar. Bhai Kalyana, his great-great grandfather, along with Baba Buddha, rendered selfless service in the Guru Ghar from the guruship period of the first Guru Baba Nanak to Sixth Guru Hargobind. In a similar vein, the illustrious names of Bhai Jasbhan, Bhai Agya Ram, Bhai Sada Nand's (grandfather, uncle and father of Bhai Jaita respectively) are found in the Hukamnamas of seventh, eighth and ninth Gurus. Bhai Agya Ram, Bhai Sada Nand and Bhai Jaita were inseparably attached with Guru Tegh Bahadur, who unsurpassably retrieved the severed head and mutilated body of Guru Tegh Bahadur safely before it was quartered to be displayed publicly as ordered by Aurangzeb. The valiant act of Bhai Jaita that he performed during the martyrdom of Guru Tegh Bahadur became unparalleled in the history of religions. However, beyond the extraordinary feat of Bhai Jaita in bringing the severed head of the Guru to Anandpur Sahib, one hardly finds any reference about him in the vast scholarly literature depicting his life, family background and valorous deeds he displayed in the various battles fought by Guru Gobind Singh. The space that the heroic deeds of Bhai Jaita deserve in the pages of history is yet to be reclaimed. It is in this crucial context that remembering the glorious legacy of Bhai Jaita on the eve of the 350th year of the martyrdom of Guru Tegh Bahadur being organised within India and abroad deserves special attention.

## **DR. MANMOHAN SINGH'S LEGACY: INTEGRITY, DIPLOMACY, AND ECONOMIC TRANSFORMATION**

**DR DEVINDER PAL SINGH\***

This write-up is a passionate tribute of the writer to Manmohan Singh who, as the Prime Minister of India, held the lofty qualities of a leader and took India on the path of progress and prosperity. He steadfastly treaded the path of integrity and hard work shown by the House of Guru Nanak. Every Sikh can take legitimate pride in this great son of India. - Editor

Dr. Manmohan Singh, India's 13th Prime Minister was a beacon of resilience, wisdom, and selfless service. From his humble beginnings in a refugee family to his transformative role in shaping India's economic and global stature, his journey is a testament to perseverance and visionary leadership. As the architect of India's 1991 economic liberalization, he dismantled bureaucratic constraints, paving the way for sustained economic growth. His tenure as Prime Minister witnessed landmark initiatives in economic stability, diplomacy, and social welfare, including the Indo-US nuclear deal and MGNREGA. Despite political challenges, Dr. Singh's integrity and humility remained unwavering, earning him global respect. Deeply rooted in Sikh values, he exemplified ethical governance and inclusive leadership. His life offers invaluable lessons, resilience in adversity, knowledge as power, diplomacy for progress, and leadership as service. In a world where loud rhetoric often overshadows action, Dr. Singh's quiet yet profound impact inspires future generations.

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Dr. Manmohan Singh, India's 13th Prime Minister, was widely regarded as one of the most visionary and principled leaders in modern Indian history. A man of exceptional intellect, unwavering integrity, and quiet resilience, his leadership has left a lasting impact on India's economic and political landscape [1-10]. From his humble beginnings in a small village in Gah (now in Pakistan) to becoming the architect of India's economic liberalization and a globally respected statesman, his journey is one of perseverance, wisdom, and selfless service.

Dr. Singh's tenure as Finance Minister in 1991 was marked by bold economic reforms that opened India's economy to global markets, setting the stage for decades of growth. As Prime Minister (2004-2014), he played a crucial role in strengthening India's international relations, steering the country through the 2008 financial crisis, and implementing key social welfare programs. Despite political challenges, he remained a leader of integrity, humility, and dedication to public service.

This article explores the defining qualities of Dr. Singh's leadership: his resilience in adversity, commitment to knowledge, ethical governance, and strategic decision-making. By examining his life and contributions, we uncover invaluable lessons for leaders and aspiring change-makers in today's world.

Born in 1932 in a modest household in Gah (now in Pakistan), Dr. Singh faced hardships early in life. The Partition of 1947 forced his family to migrate to India, where they struggled as refugees in Amritsar. The tragic killing of his grandfather in the riots during Partition was a significant personal loss [8-9]. Despite these hardships, he remained steadfast in pursuing education and excellence.

Instead of allowing his difficult circumstances to define him, he used them as motivation to succeed. His resilience saw him graduate with top honours from Punjab University before securing a scholarship to Cambridge and later earning a doctorate from Oxford. His perseverance reminds us that challenges are stepping stones to success rather than barriers.

We see that no matter how difficult the circumstances, resilience and determination can help one rise above adversity.

Dr. Singh's academic journey was exceptional. His education at

Cambridge and Oxford exposed him to renowned economists like Joan Robinson and Nicholas Kaldor, who influenced his views on balancing capitalism with a state-aided approach. His expertise in international trade led to his selection by the United Nations for the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) in 1966 [9].

His deep knowledge of economics became the foundation of his career. Whether as Chief Economic Advisor, Governor of the Reserve Bank of India, or Finance Minister, his ability to apply economic theories to real-world policies made him a transformative figure in Indian politics.

It shows that investing in knowledge and continuous learning can open doors to impactful leadership and innovation.

Dr. Manmohan Singh exemplified honesty and ethical governance throughout his career. Despite being in politics for decades, he remained untouched by corruption scandals. His reputation for personal integrity was so strong that even his political opponents respected him.

A notable example of his ethical leadership was when, as Finance Minister, he deposited the notional profit from devaluing the Indian Rupee into his foreign currency account, refusing to benefit personally from policy decisions. Similarly, he returned a cash contribution made to his brother by author Khushwant Singh for his election campaign in 1999, demonstrating his unwavering principles [9].

It shows that true leadership is built on integrity and ethical conduct, which earn trust and respect.

Perhaps Dr. Singh's most defining contribution to India was his role in the 1991 economic liberalization. When India faced a severe financial crisis, he, as Finance Minister, introduced landmark reforms that opened India's economy to globalization. His policies included:

- Dismantling the 'license-permit raj'
- Encouraging foreign direct investment (FDI)
- Reducing trade barriers
- Privatizing state-owned enterprises

These reforms set India on a path of rapid economic growth, making it one of the world's fastest-growing economies. Within a decade, India was recognized as a key emerging market, and by 2008,

the country had become part of the G20.

He showed us the way that visionary leadership requires bold and strategic decision-making that ensures long-term benefits despite short-term resistance.

As Prime Minister, Dr. Singh played a crucial role in strengthening India's global ties. One of his most significant achievements was securing the Indo-US nuclear deal, which ended India's nuclear isolation and recognized it as a responsible nuclear power.

He also worked towards building peaceful relations with neighbouring countries, particularly Pakistan. Although his vision for a lasting peace agreement did not materialize due to political opposition, his efforts demonstrated his commitment to regional stability.

Dr. Singh's global economic stature was evident in his handling of the 2008 financial crisis, where his policies shielded India from the worst effects. His expertise was so widely respected that world leaders, including US President Barack Obama, acknowledged that "when Dr. Manmohan Singh speaks, the world listens"[11].

**Lesson:** Diplomacy and strategic global engagement enhance a nation's position on the world stage and foster international cooperation.

## 6. HUMBLE AND SELFLESS LEADERSHIP

Unlike many political figures, Dr. Singh never sought power for personal gain. His leadership style was rooted in humility and quiet efficiency. He was known for listening to different perspectives and making informed decisions without engaging in unnecessary political theatrics.

His humility was evident when he was appointed Prime Minister in 2004. Despite being an accomplished economist and statesman, he always attributed his success to teamwork and collective effort. He led by example, showing that one does not need to be loud to be effective.

**Lesson:** Leadership is about service, not self-promotion. The most impactful leaders lead with humility and purpose.

## 7. COMMITMENT TO PUBLIC WELFARE

Dr. Singh's government introduced several transformative social welfare policies, including:

- Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) – providing employment to millions of rural Indians.
- National Food Security Act – ensuring food for vulnerable populations.
- Right to Education Act – making education a fundamental right for children.

These initiatives reflected his deep commitment to improving the lives of the common people, particularly the underprivileged sections of society.

He was convinced that leadership must prioritize the well-being of the masses and ensure inclusive growth.

Dr. Singh remained a devout Sikh, embodying Guru Nanak's teachings of honesty, humility, and service. His contributions to the Sikh community include developing the Guru Granth Centre at Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar, and his instrumental role in improving Hazur Sahib, Nanded, during Guru Gobind Singh's centenary celebrations [8]. He proudly represented the Sikh community on a global platform, proving that faith and governance can coexist harmoniously.

He made it to understand that upholding one's cultural and ethical values strengthens leadership and inspires people.

Dr. Singh led a coalition government, which required him to navigate multiple political challenges. Despite opposition and constraints, he managed to pass crucial legislation and maintain economic stability. His tenure saw both praise and criticism, but he never engaged in personal attacks or political vendettas.

In him we learn that a leader should focus on progress rather than getting entangled in political conflicts.

Dr. Manmohan Singh's life and leadership exemplify resilience, wisdom, and selfless service. From overcoming early hardships to shaping India's economic future, he has demonstrated that true

leadership is not about personal ambition but about making a lasting impact on society. His bold economic reforms in 1991 transformed India into a global economic powerhouse, while his tenure as Prime Minister strengthened international ties, promoted social welfare, and navigated the nation through financial crises with prudence and foresight.

Despite political challenges and criticism, Dr. Singh remained steadfast in his principles, never compromising on integrity and ethical governance. His leadership, marked by humility and quiet efficiency, contrasts today's rhetoric-driven politics. He showed that progress is best achieved through strategic vision, knowledge-based decision-making, and unwavering commitment to public welfare.

As the world faces new economic and political challenges, the lessons from Dr. Singh's journey remain relevant. His legacy is a testament to the power of intellect, perseverance, and moral leadership. For aspiring leaders, his story serves as a blueprint for effecting meaningful change with dignity and wisdom. Dr. Singh's contributions will continue to inspire generations, reminding us that authentic leadership is about service, not self-interest.

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PAGES FROM THE DIARY OF AN ACTIVIST

DR BHAGWAN SINGH

Dr Bhagwan Singh joined the All India Sikh Students Federation (AISSF) in the mid-seventies. Soon after he joined the Guru Nanak Sikh Studies department of Panjab University as research scholar. He worked in close association with Bhai Amrik Singh who was the President of the Federation. Dr Bhagwan Singh came into close proximity with Sant Jarnail Singh and Gen Shabeg Singh during the fateful times of the Dharam Yuddh Morcha. He was part of the militant movement as an intellectual who decided not to pick up arms. He was hauled up by the police on several occasions and linked to many cases including the murder of Dr Vishwa Nath Tewari ; though his role in this killing was never established.

This short account of his memoirs relates to the days when he was a prominent leader of Sikh Federation which was approached by the Indian Govt through its emissaries to diffuse the fastly rising volatile situation in the Panjab. The claims made by him in the given account are entirely his, and the Editor does not vouchsafe of the veracity of events described in the memoirs. However the details of the incidents recorded by him are an interesting piece of the oral history of the strife-ridden days of the state. – Editor

As I have written previously, we reorganized the All India Sikh Students Federation (AISSF) in Calcutta in September 1984. Thereafter, we continued our activities underground, though reports of our actions were carried in the press from time to time. Rajiv Gandhi became Prime Minister with a three-fourths majority following the death of his mother in late 1984. He was a novice in politics and was

surrounded by his Doon School mates as advisors. Immediately after taking over, he decided to send a politically shrewd man, Mr. Arjun Singh, as the Governor of Punjab. The new Governor began searching for us because, at that time, everyone in Punjab was saying that the Government must talk to the AISSF if it wanted to bring normalcy back to the state.

To my knowledge, the Government began searching for us from three sides. The first channel was Professor Saroop Singh of Punjab University, who was close to me; Governor Arjun Singh requested that he trace our whereabouts. The second was Sardar Jagjit Singh of Gwalior, an old freedom fighter and the brother-in-law of Sardar Tara Singh (the then-Speaker of the Haryana Assembly), who was also close to me. The third was Arun Singh, a scion of the Kapurthala family, who tried to find us using his own sources in Kapurthala.

Professor Saroop Singh was the first to meet me, in March 1985. The government ban on the AISSF was lifted that same month, but we issued a statement declaring the move a mere ruse. We advised Federation workers to continue operating exactly as they had been, taking little notice of the Government's gesture. Professor Saroop Singh met me in Ludhiana through his son-in-law, who was based there, and conveyed Arjun Singh's message that the Government wanted to open negotiations with the AISSF. I consulted my close aides in the Federation. They were initially reluctant about Professor Saroop Singh, but I ultimately used his channel to convey to the Governor that the Federation would not hesitate to negotiate—provided our leadership held in Jodhpur Jail was allowed to meet with us first, as only they could authorize us to go ahead with such a sensitive matter. The Professor met me thrice during April, eventually conveying that the Jodhpur Jail leadership would meet us in Delhi if we wished, and that the Government would arrange their transport. After consulting my associates, I gave him the green signal.

In the meantime, Rode—the home village of Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale—was becoming a hub of political activity for the Sikhs. His elderly father, Baba Joginder Singh, was being contacted by all the prominent Akali leaders, so we also decided to meet him. I remember one day when Charanjit Singh Talwandi and I were traveling from his

village, Talwandi, to see Baba Ji at Rode. On the way, near Jagraon, we happened to run into Sirdar Kapur Singh. We told him we were going to see Baba Joginder Singh. He grew annoyed with us and asked, "What will that old man do? Why are you not doing something yourselves?" We had nothing to say to him at the time, but looking back, I realize how right he was. Had we listened to him and acted on his advice, the history of the Sikhs would be very different today.

Sardar Jagjit Singh Gwalior met me at the AISSF office in Amritsar during the first week of May. I told him about Arjun Singh's message sent through Professor Saroop Singh. He tried to persuade me to abandon that channel, warning me that Saroop Singh was accompanied by K.P.S. Gill, who was then the Inspector General of the Punjab Armed Police (PAP). Jagjit Singh had also met Arjun Singh, who had requested his help in finding me, suggesting the Governor already knew a fair amount about me through intelligence sources.

Despite the warning, I sent Professor Saroop Singh to Delhi in the first week of May to initiate contact with our jailed leadership. When I consulted Baba Joginder Singh, he also dissuaded us from moving too quickly and advised me to wait a little longer. Professor Saroop Singh took Harpal Singh Pannu and Gurtej Singh (a distant relative of Bhai Amrik Singh) with him to Delhi to open his channel for talks. They returned with a letter written by Harminder Singh Sandhu and Bhai Manjit Singh, who urged me to proceed with the negotiations. However, they also granted us full authority; since we were the ones operating on the outside, it was at our discretion to act as we thought proper. Though neither of these two emissaries had formal locus standi regarding the AISSF, the Professor managed to save face through them.

Baba Joginder Singh was prepared to announce his new Akali Dal committee on May 2nd. He did not think highly of the AISSF and wanted instead to revive the Akali Dal, which had lost credibility among Sikhs because its top leadership had surrendered to the Army. Yet, Baba Joginder Singh included all those same top Akali leaders in the new setup, while including only Bhai Manjit Singh from the AISSF. He announced a seven-member committee with Simranjit Singh Mann as its convener. In the absence of Mann, who was in jail at the time, Baba proposed that the Jathedar of the Akal Takht head the committee.

Charanjit Singh Talwandi, Professor Rajinderpal Singh Bulara, and I accompanied Baba Joginder Singh to Amritsar. Because Giani Kirpal Singh was the Jathedar of the Akal Takht at the time—and had completely lost his credibility due to his controversial media broadcasts—we prevailed upon Baba Ji during our journey to Tarn Taran to take charge himself. We successfully replaced the Jathedar's name with Baba Ji's own, with Charanjit Singh Talwandi playing the primary role in making that switch.

The formation of this seven-member committee by Baba Ji diffused half the political leverage and pressure that the AISSF commanded in those days. Had Baba Ji placed his authority behind the AISSF instead of forming that committee—as I had requested him to do—the Government would have had no choice but to deal directly with the Federation. We chose not to revolt against him at the time because, as the father of Sant Jarnail Singh, Baba held absolute veto power in the eyes of the public. This decision marked the beginning of the AISSF's misfortunes.

I begged Baba Ji not to trust the old Akali leadership, but his mind was set on reviving the party. Furthermore, he did not grasp the political acumen of Simranjit Singh Mann. Who was pulling the strings behind the scenes, and who was manipulating Baba Ji, he perhaps did not even know. He was a simple-minded, ardent Gursikh, entirely unaware of deep political machinations. It is likely that Jagjit Singh Rode was used from Sangrur Jail to influence Baba Ji, given that Rode was an old Akali worker; he was released from Sangrur Jail and came directly to Amritsar on May 2nd, the exact day the committee was declared.

That was the same day we were supposed to travel to Delhi. An advocate from Faridkot, Inderjit Singh Sekhon, was constantly by Baba Ji's side advising him. When I grew suspicious and told Baba Ji to get rid of him, Baba Ji replied that Sekhon was indispensable and that he could not operate without him. While the Sikh community held great regard for Baba Ji, Sekhon was viewed with deep suspicion by everyone. Baba Ji appointed him Secretary-General of the Akali Dal, but the Akali leaders fiercely objected due to Sekhon's proximity to Giani Zail Singh, the President of India. They eventually forced Baba Ji to remove him from the post.

In the meantime, Sant Harchand Singh Longowal withdrew from the committee. The Akali leaders also caught wind of the Government's intention to talk to the AISSF through a parallel channel. This information was leaked by D.S. Pannu, the mentor of Master Harinder Singh Kahlon (the ad-hoc convener of the AISSF). Pannu was widely known to be an operative for secret intelligence agencies, which had recently appointed him Chairman of the BACKFINCO Corporation.

Prof. Saroop Singh arranged another date, May 20th, to meet Harminder Singh Sandhu and Manjit Singh in Delhi, and he came to inform me. Because of my apprehensions regarding his proximity to K.P.S. Gill, and having been warned by Jagjit Singh Gwalior, I decided to back out from the meeting. While I was deliberating, Harinder Singh Kahlon clandestinely sent for Jagjit Singh Rode through Hari Raj Singh Ghumman; an individual out Kahlon used throughout this entire process. Kahlon requested that I accompany them because I was supervising the entire operation. I traveled with them as far as Chandigarh but refused to go on to Delhi. I suspect I was deliberately left behind because of my open skepticism regarding K.P.S. Gill's involvement.

My suspicions about Master Kahlon's game plan were confirmed when he returned alongside Hari Raj Singh Ghumman and Bhai Jagjit Singh and recounted their visit to Delhi. I asked them what had happened. They told me the Government demanded an assurance that they did not believe in terrorism and that they held faith in the unity and integrity of India. I asked what their response was. They replied that they had point-blank refused to give any such assurances on either condition, and consequently, the Government refused to proceed further. Jagjit Singh's account matched, though he added with some ignorance that they had told the Governor they did not believe in India's integrity, but favored unity and had faith in armed struggle. I was stunned by their logic. When I asked what Harminder and Manjit's reactions were, they claimed they had prevailed upon the jailed duo to toe their line.

Smelling something foul in the entire drama, and growing increasingly wary of Master Kahlon's behavior and his closeness to D.S. Pannu, I was pondering over my next move. Then, Jagjit Singh Gwalior contacted me. He conveyed that the Governor was highly

displeased with the behavior of the team that had met him. The Governor had asked Jagjit Singh if there was “any serious man left in the AISSF.” Jagjit Singh told him about me, and the Governor requested a five-minute meeting if I was willing. Having repeatedly rebuked the foolishness of Kahlon and his company, I gave my consent.

At the appointed time, Jagjit Singh arrived with Kok Singh, an associate of Arjun Singh from Madhya Pradesh. They arrived in a staff car from the Raj Bhavan, which took me to the residence of an IAS officer from Madhya Pradesh—likely named Shankaran—whom Arjun Singh had brought along with him to Punjab. Arjun Singh was already waiting there. He received me warmly and began asking searching questions about the situation in Punjab. He ordered coffee, and our discussion lasted about 45 minutes. It was a strict one-on-one meeting; Jagjit Singh waited in another room. Afterward, Jagjit Singh dropped me off at my destination. He told me Arjun Singh was fully satisfied with our talk and wanted me to come forward alongside our leadership from Jodhpur Jail for formal negotiations.

While the Governor of Punjab was satisfied with my level of thinking, he remained reluctant to use Jagjit Singh Gwalior as a mediator going forward. The reason was obvious: by this time, D.S. Pannu had sneaked himself into Arjun Singh’s circle through Master Kahlon, who was now effectively controlled by government agencies via Pannu. Through Pannu, Kahlon was also in touch with Arun Nehru, the Minister for Internal Security. Balwant Singh and Surjit Singh Barnala had similarly gained access to the Governor through the Pannu channel.

The Governor wanted the original channel of Professor Saroop Singh to continue. Jagjit Singh later told me that the telephone line I used to contact him had been intentionally put out of order to delink him from me. Although I maintained a good rapport with Professor Saroop Singh, my apprehensions regarding K.P.S. Gill proved to be well-founded, which is why I had stayed away from the previous two meetings. However, the Government of India and Arjun Singh seemed hell-bent on continuing through that exact channel. Caught in this awkward situation, I had no choice but to wait out the events of the following month.

JAAP SAHIB
TRANSLATION AND INTERPRETATION (PAURIS 29 TO 43)

PROF KULWANT SINGH*

Jaap Sahib is a poetic compendium of Divine attributes and multiple facets of the Divine cosmic power as visualized by Sri Guru Gobind Singh in his mystical trance. This poetic composition consists of 199 verses written in different contemporary, prevalent meters or chhands. One of the stylistic practices used by the contemporary poets to describe the chosen object of praise during the medieval times was to describe that object through the use of negatives or what that object is not. In these verses under reference (29-43), the Guru poet uses these words with negative connotations to describe what the Divine cosmic power is not. For this purpose, he repeatedly uses the Gurmukhi letter **ਘ** as a prefix before the main epithets all these one-liner verses written in Chachri Chhand. Thus, the Divine power is indescribable, inscrutable, unfathomable, and unconquerable, not subject to mortality, unmoved by any rituals, not dependent on anyone, without any beginning or an end and not made of five elements. Moreover, He is eternally sympathetic, generous, compassionate, kind, generous, and worthy of worship. The verses are racy, recitative and rhythmical and evoke feelings of faith and ecstasy. Their english translation in free verse convey their essence to the English readers of this verse.

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ਚਾਚਰੀ ਛੰਦ ॥ ਤ੍ਵ ਪ੍ਰਸਾਦਿ ॥

ਅਰੂਪ ਹੈਂ ॥ ਅਨੂਪ ਹੈਂ ॥ ਅਜੂ ਹੈਂ ॥ ਅਭੂ ਹੈਂ ॥੨੯॥

aroop hain, anoop hain, ajoo hain abhoo hai | 29 |

ਅਲੇਖ ਹੈਂ ॥ ਅਭੇਖ ਹੈਂ ॥ ਅਨਾਮ ਹੈਂ ॥ ਅਕਾਮ ਹੈਂ ॥੩੦॥

alaikh hain, abhaikh hain, anam hain, akam hain. | 30 |

ਅਧੇ ਹੈਂ ॥ ਅਭੇ ਹੈਂ ॥ ਅਜੀਤ ਹੈਂ ॥ ਅਭੀਤ ਹੈਂ ॥੩੧॥

adhai hain, abhai hain, ajeet hain, abheet hain. | 31 |

ਤ੍ਰਿਮਾਨ ਹੈਂ ॥ ਨਿਧਾਨ ਹੈਂ ॥ ਤ੍ਰਿਬਰਗ ਹੈਂ ॥ ਅਸਰਗ ਹੈਂ ॥੩੨॥

tireman hain. nidhan hain, tirburg hain, asarg hain. | 32 |

ਅਨੀਲ ਹੈਂ ॥ ਅਨਾਦਿ ਹੈਂ ॥ ਅਜੇ ਹੈਂ ॥ ਅਜਾਦਿ ਹੈਂ ॥੩੩॥

anil hain, anadi hain, ajai hain, ajadi hain. | 33 |

ਅਜਨਮ ਹੈਂ ॥ ਅਬਰਨ ਹੈਂ ॥ ਅਭੂਤ ਹੈਂ ॥ ਅਭਰਨ ਹੈਂ ॥੩੪॥

ajanam hain, abarn hain, abhoot hain, abharan hain. | 34 |

ਅਗੰਜ ਹੈਂ ॥ ਅਭੰਜ ਹੈਂ ॥ ਅਭੂਝ ਹੈਂ ॥ ਅਭੰਝ ਹੈਂ ॥੩੫॥

agunj hain, abhunj hain, ajoojh hain, ajhunjh hain. | 35 |

ਅਮੀਕ ਹੈਂ ॥ ਰਫੀਕ ਹੈਂ ॥ ਅਧੰਧ ਹੈਂ ॥ ਅਬੰਧ ਹੈਂ ॥੩੬॥

amik hain, rafiq hain, adhundh hain, abundh hai. | 36 |

ਨਿਰੂਝ ਹੈਂ ॥ ਅਸੂਝ ਹੈਂ ॥ ਅਕਾਲ ਹੈਂ ॥ ਅਜਾਲ ਹੈਂ ॥੩੭॥

nirboojh hain, asoojh hain, akal hain, ajal hain. | 37 |

ਅਲਾਹ ਹੈਂ ॥ ਅਜਾਹ ਹੈਂ ॥ ਅਨੰਤ ਹੈਂ ॥ ਮਹੰਤ ਹੈਂ ॥੩੮॥

alah hain, ajah hain, anunt hain, mahunt hain. | 38 |

ਅਲੀਕ ਹੈਂ ॥ ਨਿਰਸ਼ੀਕ ਹੈਂ ॥ ਨਿਰਲੰਭ ਹੈਂ ॥ ਅਸੰਭ ਹੈਂ ॥੩੯॥

aleek hain, nirsrīk hain, nirlumbh hain, asumbh hain. | 39 |

ਅਗੰਮ ਹੈਂ ॥ ਅਜੰਮ ਹੈਂ ॥ ਅਭੂਤ ਹੈਂ ॥ ਅਛੂਤ ਹੈਂ ॥੪੦॥

agum hain, ajum hain, abhoot hai, achool hain. | 40 |

Chachri Chhand / With your Grace

You are formless and unique;

You are beyond birth and five elements. || 29 ||

You are inscrutable and without any garb;

You are without any name and any desire. || 30 ||

You are beyond any reflection and scrutiny;

You are unconquerable and unformidable. || 31 ||

You are lord of three worlds and all treasurers;

You are source of three virtues³ yet independent of these. || 32 ||

You are invisibly visible and without beginning;

You are unconquerable and independent. || 33 ||

You are beyond birth, beyond any caste;

You are beyond five elements⁵ and independent. || 34 ||

You are unconquerable and unbreakable;

You are invulnerable and bereft of controversies. || 35 ||

You are profound and universally empathetic;

You are bereft of controversies and attachments. || 36 ||

You are inscrutable and unintelligible;

You are immortal and bereft of limitations. || 37 ||

You are untraceable and unlocatable;

You are infinite and worthy of supreme worship. || 38 ||

You are unbounded and untraceable;

You are self-reliant and beyond all possibilities. || 39 ||

You are unfathomable and self-existent;

You are beyond five elements⁶ and beyond touch. || 40 ||

ਅਲੋਕ ਹੈਂ ॥ ਅਸ਼ੋਕ ਹੈਂ ॥ ਅਕਰਮ ਹੈਂ ॥ ਅਭਰਮ ਹੈਂ ॥੪੧॥

alok hain, ashok hain, akaram hain, abharm hain. ||41||

ਅਜੀਤ ਹੈਂ ॥ ਅਭੀਤ ਹੈਂ ॥ ਅਬਾਹ ਹੈਂ ॥ ਅਗਾਹ ਹੈਂ ॥੪੨॥

ajit hain, abheet hain, abha hain, agah hain. ||42||

ਅਮਾਨ ਹੈਂ ॥ ਨਿਧਾਨ ਹੈਂ ॥ ਅਨੇਕ ਹੈਂ ॥ ਫਿਰਿ ਏਕ ਹੈਂ ॥੪੩॥

aman hain, nidhan hain, anaik hain, phir aik hain. ||43||

You are invisible and beyond any grief;
 You are beyond any rituals and any illusions. ||41||

You are unconquerable as well as fearless;
 You are immovable as well as unfathomable. ||42||

You, being immeasurable, is the greatest treasure;
 You embody diversity as well as unity. ||43||

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ON THE ISC FRONT

KANWAL PAL SINGH*

During the second quarter of 2026 (April – June), the International Sikh Confederation (ISC) continued to further broaden its engagement with stakeholders at both national and international levels.

On 18th April 2026, the International Sikh Confederation (ISC) conveyed its firm support for the Nanakshahi Calendar prepared by S Pal Singh Purewal. In its communication to Giani Kewal Singh, S Kirpal Singh Bathinda, S Amritpal Singh Sachdeva, S Gulbarg Singh Bassi of Global Sikh Council, Dr Khushhal Singh of Kendri Singh Sabha, the Confederation commended the ongoing efforts to educate the *sangat* and to reconcile differing views on the calendar. The Confederation suggested that the cause could be further strengthened by initiating a collective exercise—such as a document co-signed by likeminded organizations and prominent personalities—which would help build confidence among the community and facilitate implementation of the Nanakshahi Calendar at the Panthic level. ISC extended best wishes for the event scheduled on 19th April 2026 and reaffirmed its commitment to Sikh concepts through unity and principled advocacy.

On 21st April 2026, the International Sikh Confederation (ISC) lodged a formal complaint with the Press Council of India against *The Tribune*, Chandigarh, for publishing a misleading headline on 26th November 2025 titled “*Op Sindoor legacy of Guru’s valour: Modi.*” ISC had earlier written to the Editor-in-Chief on 2nd December 2025 and sent a reminder on 11th February 2026, highlighting the misrepresentation of Guru Tegh Bahadur’s legacy and requesting an

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apology there for. Despite these communications, *The Tribune* failed to respond, prompting ISC to escalate the matter. The Confederation emphasized that such disregard undermines journalistic ethics, accuracy, and respect in matters of faith, and urged the Press Council to take cognizance and impress upon *The Tribune* the need to uphold accurate reporting and public trust.

On 18th May 2026, the International Sikh Confederation (ISC) conveyed its observations to the Hon'ble Chief Minister of Punjab, S. Bhagwant Singh Mann, regarding the recently enacted *Jaagat Jot Sri Guru Granth Sahib Satkar (Amendment) Act, 2026*. ISC noted that the Bill had been passed without adequate consultation with Sikh institutions, scholars, and the wider public, thereby lacking collective wisdom and consensus. Concerns were raised about the expanded scope of the amendment—bringing police investigations and court procedures into matters of *maryada*. Moreover, the absence of precise definitions of key words could lead to misinterpretations. The Confederation recommended that the draft Rules under Section 6A be placed in the public domain for wide consultation, and also that special courts to ensure *maryada* in trials be constituted and time-bound delivery of justice be ensured. The Confederation emphasized that such measures are essential to uphold community confidence.

On 15th May 2026, a joint representation by S Navkiran Singh, Sr Advocate, Human Rights, the International Sikh Confederation (ISC), Kendri Sri Guru Singh Sabha, Institute of Sikh Studies along with some other Sikh organizations was submitted to the Government of India through the Home Department, urging the initiation of structured talks with the Sikh community to resolve their long-pending issues within the constitutional and legal framework. The note emphasized that despite decades of various political parties' rule at the Centre and in Punjab, several Sikh concerns remain unaddressed, creating mistrust and adverse sentiments. Key issues raised in the Representation included: recognition and protection of Sikh identity, strict guidelines to safeguard the right to wear the *kirpan* under Article 25, expansion of the Anand Marriage Act to cover divorce and succession, review and amnesty for Sikh political prisoners, pardon for Devinder Pal Singh Bhullar, restoration of historic Gurdwaras under

trespass, protection of Punjabi language in adjoining states, reopening of the Kartarpur Sahib Corridor, liberal visa policies for NRI Sikhs, abolition of the NRI blacklist, immediate conduct of SGPC elections and amendment of the outdated Sikh Gurdwaras Act, return of artifacts and manuscripts seized in June 1984, and a formal apology in Parliament for the 1984 attack and pogrom. It was stressed that addressing these matters through dialogue would strengthen national unity, uphold Sikh dignity, address genuine concerns of the Sikhs, and remove irritants that have persisted for decades.

On 5th June 2026, a delegation of Sikh representatives, including Advocate Navkiran Singh (Coordinator), Dr Khushhal Singh, S Jaspal Singh Sidhu, Dr Birendra Kaur (Secretary General, ISC), Giani Kewal Singh, S Gurpreet Singh, and S RP Singh, met the Hon'ble Governor of Punjab to present the Representation addressed to the Government of India highlighting twelve long pending issues of the Sikh community. The delegation emphasized the historic role of Sikhs in India's independence and national security, while noting that successive governments have left key concerns unresolved. The Governor was requested to endorse the representation and take up the matter with the Centre. The meeting was fruitful, with hope expressed that dialogue will now be pursued in the right spirit. The delegation also announced a Panthic meeting of Sikh representatives to be held at Kendri Sri Guru Singh Sabha, Sector 28, Chandigarh, on 29th June 2026, to strengthen the process and present a unified case before the Government of India. It was clarified that role of the organizations signing the representation is to initiate dialogue and create an atmosphere for talks, while the twelve points raised are not exhaustive and that the list may be expanded upon collectively by the Sikh community.

A special meeting was organized on 17.4.2026 for Dr Gurcharan Singh, Chairman and S Malkiat Singh, General Secretary of Sri Guru Nanak Dev Ji Inter Religious Foundation to deliberate on measures to ensure the maryada of Sri Guru Granth Sahib. Members discussed practical safeguards and community responsibilities in this regard. Dr Gurcharan Singh, Chairman, Guru Nanak foundation is undertaking the responsibility to work on the issue. The meeting was also attended

by S Sarabjit Singh Sohal, S Harpal Singh, S Shinder Pal Singh and others apart from Dr Birendra Kaur and S KP Singh from ISC. Giani Jathedar Kewal Singh participated briefly herein.

The International Sikh Confederation (ISC) extended invitations for Fellowship Membership in the Sikh Think Tank, aimed at bringing together eminent Sikh personalities and organizations to deliberate on issues of collective importance to the Panth and Punjab. The initiative emphasizes respect for the independent existence and autonomy of all members while fostering unity on matters requiring a collective voice. ISC clarified that the Think Tank will function as a principled pressure group, convened transparently, with members retaining full freedom to dissent and/or abstain. Consent will be sought before inclusion of their names in joint statements. The members may also approach the Confederation with their concerns for a collective redress. The Confederation underscored that collaboration is indispensable for strengthening Sikh advocacy and ensuring that the Voice of the Panth is heard forcefully with clarity.

ISC extends warm congratulations to Dr Jaspal Kaur Kaang on her appointment as Professor of Eminence at Sri Guru Granth Sahib World University, Fatehgarh Sahib. S Gurbir Singh on his selection as President, and S Gurpreet Singh as Vice President of Institute of Sikh Studies, Chandigarh, Dr Birendra Kaur on her appointment as Vice President, Sikh Educational Society, Chandigarh. These honors were recognized as a proud moment for ISC, reflecting the dedication of its members to Sikh studies and education.

NAWAB KAPUR SINGH- AN UNTOLD STORY OF A SIKH WARRIOR

DR BIKRAM SINGH VIRK*

Nawab Kapur Singh was the pioneer crusader of the sustained Sikh struggle against the Mughal Empire and later the Afghan invaders. In reviewing the well-researched and inspiring book on this warrior-leader, Dr Bikram Singh Virk has developed the write-up into an article covering every aspect of the legendary hero. Setting down guidelines and instances of personal bravery and selflessness Nawab Kapur Singh paved the way for the Sikhs emerging victorious from the valley of death in the fight against the mighty power of the twin empires. The readers will find a wealth of information on his life which is made available for the first time. – Editor

A large number of Sikh warriors have remained oblivious from the pages of history and could not get the space they deserved. History and historians of the times were perhaps not kind to them as very little is found about them despite their massive contribution to the community.

One of them is a great warrior, leader and founder of Sikh Misl Faizulapur (Later on Singhpuria Misl) Nawab Kapur Singh Virk. Though the first writing on him was by Baba Prem Singh Hotimardan in form of a book entitled '*Navab Kapur Singh Virk*' and later on an exhaustive and detailed history of Virk clan by Bhagwant Singh Azad named '*Sandalbal Da Itibas- Virk Ate Hor*', carry information about his contribution in the times when the Sikhs were bearing the cruelties at the hand of Moghul rulers of the time. These both works are in

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Gurmukhi and throw light on achievements of this Sikh leader and his contribution to the Sikh community after the death of Banda Singh Bahadur. These were the times when whole community was in disarray and under great threat of Moghuls. Sikhs carried rewards on their heads and were living in *Jungals*. The history books contain a passing reference to him, but his remarkable contribution to the Sikh Community remained somewhat unnoticed.

But a recent book entitled, '*Nawab Kapoor Singh and Misl Singhpuria*' by a budding historian Jagroop Singh Chhina, who is school teacher but scholar by nature demands special attention. I am not a student of history, but certain factors forced me to write about this book after reading it. The biggest and foremost of these is that my family belongs to the progeny of Nawab Kapur Singh and we still have land holding in the village Singhpura in district Taran Tarn, where Misl Singhpuria's foundation was laid. The writer has carried out in-depth study on the life of Nawab Kapur Singh Virk right from the time of his birth, his contribution & service to the Sikhs, establishment of Misls, taking on the bullying Moghul rulers of times, especially Zakaria Khan and later on handing over the baton to the Sardar Jassa Singh Ahluwalia, his pupil and trusted lieutenant. The book is based on around six dozen secondary sources published in Gurmukhi, Hindi and English and primary sources in form of meetings with the families of the descendants of Nawab Kapoor Singh Virk till date. The book fills many gaps in the history already written so far as it is related to Nawab Kapur Singh.

EARLY LIFE AND GETTING NAWABI

Nawab Kapoor Singh was born in 1697 in the family of Choudhary Dalip Singh Virk, resident of village Kaloke, Sheikhpura (now in Pakistan). Dalip Singh was a companion of tenth master Guru Gobind Singh and accompanied him to Nanded. When Guru Gobind Singh sent Banda Singh Bahadur to Punjab to take on the Moghuls, Dalip Singh was also amongst the men who came to Punjab along with him. During this period, Kapur Singh as young teenager also started participating in the skirmishes against the Moghuls along with his father. Later on after the death of Banda Singh Bahadur, he was selected by the Sikh leaders to lead the community. By this time his

stature had gone up considerably in the community due to his humility, service to the community and the acts of valour in the battle field. Under his command the Sikhs had made it difficult to run the state for Zakaria Khan, who at the time was ruler of Lahore. Zakaria Khan was a known enemy of the Sikhs and it was now that Kapur Singh and his men had forced him to come forward for peace instead of going for armed struggle with them. Zakaria Khan through some peaceniks sent a *Jagir* (Land) and '*Nawabi*' (a title of ruler) in exchange of peace with the Sikhs, which at first was rejected by the Sikh chieftains on the pretext that the Sikhs never accepted such '*Bakshishes*' (perquisites) and were capable of snatching these with their strength and might. But later on after long deliberations they decided to accept it and hand it over to any Sikh leader of the time who was committed to the community and a good warrior. Finally the name of Kapur Singh was unanimously selected for '*Nawabi*' and it is said that it was given to him after touching it to the feet of five Sikhs. The major argument in favour of accepting this offer was that the worldly kingdom should have *Jagir* (land), regular income and Army in order to fight with the enemies, which could be achieved through the offered *Jagir*. Secondly it will provide an opportunity to the Sikhs to live in peace and reorganize themselves at a place without the fear of being hunted by the Moghul Army.

While this discussion was going on, Kapur Singh was doing the service of rotating manual fan to the congregation (according to some he was doing the service of the horses). He accepted it on the condition that he should not be deprived off from the service of the community as he wanted to remain as a humble Sikh of the Guru.

ESTABLISHMENT OF SIKH MISLS AND RENAMING FAIZULAPUR AS SINGHPURA

The *Jagir* consisted of the villages around present day village Singhpura, which falls in district Taran Tarn on Amritsar- Khemkaran road and is about 33 kilometers from Amritsar. At that time its name was Faizulapur and it was established by Faizulah Khan, who was brother in law of Zakaria Khan and son-in-law of Abdusmad Khan. The village was gifted in dowry by Abdusmad Khan to his daughter Hamshira Khan, wife of Faizula Khan. While Faizula Khan was a

good natured man, his wife on the other hand was a wicked lady and enemy of the Sikhs and had got many of them killed in the area. According to the writer, Kapur Singh (now *Nawab*) could not bear the atrocities of the lady and her men and one day surrounded the village Faizulapur from three sides and gave the residents the time of few hours to leave the village empty handed, disobeying which all were warned to be killed. He also announced that this dictate was due to the atrocities of the Hamshira Khan and the relief of allowing them to leave alive was due to the kind nature of Faizula Khan who had a soft corner for the Sikhs. The Sikh historians have different arguments whether the village Faizulapur was snatched or established by Kapur Singh, but the writer of the book is of the opinion that it was snatched and later on renamed Singhpura, a name synonymous with the Sikhs. It was here that Nawab Kapur Singh established Misl Singhpuria and made it the headquarter of the Misl. He is also said to have got constructed a fort over here.

Though Nawab Kapur Singh didn't marry as he was too busy with the issues relating to the community, it was his brother Dan Singh, whose family lived here. The progeny of S. Dan Singh moves on, some of whom are still residing in village Singhpura and are the owners of the land of that *Jagir*. Some of the decedents of the Dan Singh are also living at several places in district Roopnagar. The writer has traced all of them and given the family-wise lineage ('Kursinama') in the book.

WAR CAMPAIGNS UNDER THE LEADERSHIP OF NAWAB KAPUR SINGH

After the establishment of Misl Singhpuria and getting the *Jagir*, the Sikhs now had a safe place to halt and reorganize themselves. But the truce with the Moghuls was temporary and their armies again started hunting and killing the Sikhs. Kapur Singh after leaving his family at village Singhpura, left to lead the Sikhs who were again forced to move to jungles and other natural hiding places. The Sikhs had several head to head battles with the Moghuls under his leadership and had captured many areas. The power of Sikhs was growing exponentially and they had looted the Moghul treasures, killed their chieftains, avenged the death of Bhai Mani Singh and made it difficult for them to suppress the Sikhs. The campaigns under his leadership have been mentioned

in great detail in the book. They also suffered massive casualties, one of which is known as '*Chhota Ghalughara*' (Smaller Genocide), which took place at Kahnawan near Gurdaspur and around eight to ten thousand Sikh men, women and children lost their lives. Despite the huge casualties, the Sikhs led by Kapur Singh were successful in breaking the siege of Moghuls. Apart from Kapur Singh, Jassa Singh Ahluwalia, Baba Deep Singh, Sukha Singh Mari Kamboke and Charat Singh Shukarchakia were the key warriors who got serious injuries in this genocide, but were able to escape. No body part of Nawab Kapur Singh was without an injury according to the writer.

Leaving for heavenly above and Handing over the baton to S. Jassa Singh Ahluwalia.

Since father of Kapur Singh was a long term companion of Guru Gobind Singh, Kapur Singh got the blessings to lead to community from Mata Sundri Ji. Mata Sundri Ji later on sent an adolescent child Jassa Singh to Kapur Singh with the instructions to take care of him and make him a great warrior under his tutelage. Kapur Singh left no stone unturned to make Jassa Singh a great warrior and instilled in him all the qualities of leadership. After having led the community for about three and half decades, Nawab Kapur Singh left for heavenly abode in 1753 (In 1763 according to some historians) due to infection of some old injury. But before that he called a congregation of the Sikh leaders to announce the name of S. Jassa Singh Ahluwalia as his successor and sought full cooperation from them. It is a rare instance in the history that a leader of empire didn't chose anyone from his family as his successor but valuing merit, gave it to the most capable Sikh General of the time, which was S. Jassa Singh Ahluwalia. At this time he handed over the sword of Guru Gobind Singh, which was given to him by Mata Sundri Ji, to S. Jassa Singh and gave him the responsibility of leading the Sikhs. S. Jassa Singh Ahluwalia, who later on earned the title of '*Sultan-ul-Qaum*', also followed the footsteps of his mentor and led the community to further heights. According to writer he named the *Riast* Kapurthala after the name of his *Guru*, Nawab Kapur Singh, though the residents of city and some other historians link the name to some Rana Kapoor of Rajasthan. But logically it seems more authentic that the name was derived from Kapur Singh as

Kapur+Thal (thal means land), makes better sense as 'Land of Kapur'. Some old people used to tell that S. Jassa Singh Ahluwalia had a huge portrait of Nawab Kapur Singh installed in his Durbar and used to pay obeisance to it before attending the court.

The last rites of Kapur Singh were performed in the premises of Baba Atal Rai ji at Amritsar. Later on, one of the descendants of Kapurthala state, Maharaja Randhir Singh got a Memorial (*Samadh*) of Kapur Singh erected on the site of his cremation, which remained intact till 1923. But later on it was demolished due to unknown reasons. The residents of village Singhpura on knowing about the incident, brought the remains of memorial and re-erected it in the premises of Gurudwara of Nawab Kapur Singh in Village Singhpura.

SNATCHING OF VILLAGE SINGHPURA FROM VIRK SARDARS BY MAHARAJA RANJIT SINGH

After the establishment of Sikh rule under Maharaja Ranjit Singh, the Virk descendants of Nawab Kapur Singh were forced to leave Singhpura and the village was forcibly snatched from them. S. Dan Singh's grandsons Kunwar Budh Singh and Sudh Singh's families were living in the village at the time. It's a mystery, why such a step was taken by a ruler whose father was a contemporary of the great warrior. The reason for this act as cited in book is that Virk Sardars of Singhpura refused to bow to the authority of Ranjit Singh. The villagers link it to some unreasonable demands of Maharaja Ranjit Singh which Virk Sardars did not accede to and hence the families of Kunwar Budh Singh and Sudh Singh preferred to leave Singhpura and move to their *Jagirs* beyond river Sutlej in present day district of Roopnagar, as it fell in the territory of British rule. These *Jagirs* were won by Virk Sardars earlier, but they were living at village Singhpura. These Jagirs were located at Bharatgarh, Ghanouli, Ghanoula, Manouli, Bunga, Atalgarh and Bela. The progeny of both these Virk Sardars are still living in these areas and the writer has got a lot of information from them by visiting them personally.

MEMORIALS OF SAHIBZADA AJIT SINGH AND SAHIBZADA JHUJAR SINGH

Having forced to leave Singhpura, the Virk Sardars had shifted

to the areas beyond Sutlej as mentioned above. The *Jagir* of Bela area was occupied by S. Hardial Singh Virk son of Kunwar Budh Singh. It was a place where the most unequal battle of the world was fought between few hundred Sikh soldiers and lacs of Moghuls in 1705 and both elder sons of Guru Gobind Singh, Sahibzada Ajit Singh and Sahibzada Jujhar Singh attained martyrdom along with hundreds of other Sikhs. No memorial of these martyrs was erected on the place till 1820. Hardial Singh Virk identified the place of actual battle by asking the elders of the area and started the construction of memorial in form of Gurdwara Katalgarh Sahib Shahidganj, Shri Chamkaur Sahib, which was completed in 1831. He also got constructed a sacred step-well (*Baoli*) at the place, which is still there, but the original design of Gurdwara, like many other historical places, was demolished and reconstructed by the 'Kar-Sewa' babas in around 1962. The book also reveals a unique fact that S. Hardial Singh Virk got a prayer (*Ardaas*) performed by Sikh Preacher (*Granthi*) that he may remain issueless as he didn't want any claimant of the land on which he had got the Gurdwara and Baoli constructed as memorial of martyrs. As per his wish he remained in-fecund and the family had no issue. In Bela, S. Hardial Singh had an ancestral Mahal, which was demolished in around 1970 and a degree college, a Pharmacy college and school were established which are still functional.

The book contains the details of all other members of Virk clan belonging to the progeny of Nawab Kapur Singh living in the areas of Bharatgarh, Ghanouli, Manouli, Manoula, Bunga, Bela and Atalgarh. It carries the lineage (*Kursinama*) of the families till date, though there are some missing links which can be connected with further research.

RETURN OF VIRK SARDARS TO SINGHPURA

AS mentioned above, Kunwar Budh Singh and Sudh Singh's families were forced to leave Singhpura by Maharaja Ranjit Singh and settle in the areas beyond Sutlej. According to writer, in around 1886 two Virk Sardars of Bunga area namely Lehna Singh Virk and his son Attar Singh Virk came back to Singhpura to reclaim their properties after the demise of Ranjit Singh and annexation of Punjab by the Britishers. According to researcher, Lehna Singh Virk, who was great grandson of Budh Singh got a well excavated in village Singhpura, in

which he got installed a brick of his name as was the practice in those days. This brick is a testimony of the return of Virk Sardars to Singhpura to reclaim their properties and our elders also told us that they also got their share of land, which we still inherit, because of that brick. At present more than 8 families of Virks belonging to the progeny of Nawab Kapur Singh are living in the village and are the occupants of the land of his *Jagir*. Some other families living in Singhpura belong to villages Gandiwind and Dasuwal as S. Jawand Singh Virk had only two daughters who were married in these villages and their in-laws came and settled on the land which belonged to these ladies. The families of both these villages are also the big land owners in the village.

CONSTRUCTION OF *BUNGAS* (HALTING PLACE) AT SRI HARIMANDIR SAHIB

It was a practice in ancient times that the wealthy people used to get the halting places constructed near the religious places, where the pilgrims could rest and were called '*Bungas*' and named after the community, village or person who funded these. A lot of these '*Bungas*', though most are extinct now and were destructed due to several reasons, are still in existence around these historical places. Many of these are there around Sri Harimandir Sahib Amritsar, Darbar Sahib Taran Tarn and other historical Gurdwaras. Two of the '*Bungas*' were got constructed by the Virk Sardars, one by Kunwar Budh Singh and the other by Sardar Lehna Singh. These were at the place where the slips of *Karah Parshad deg* are issued now a day in the Parikarma of Sri Harmandir Sahib.

The book is a solid historical document on the life of Nawab Kapur Singh and the writer has really carried out an in-depth research to pen it. It traces the whole lineage of the families belonging to the progeny of Nawab Kapur Singh and can be a good source of information for the students of Sikh history who want to carry out further research on the topic. Though some gaps are evident at some places, but these can be filled with further research on the subject.

NEWS & VIEWS

Dear Editor,

Sat Sri Akal!

Thank you for your gracious letter and for the kind words about the interview published in the *Abstracts of Sikh Studies*. It is an honour to be associated with a journal of IOSS's scholarly standing, and I am glad the interview resonated with your readership.

I would be happy to contribute a substantive piece. My proposed subject is the procedure for the qualification, appointment, and removal of the Jathedars of the *Five Takhts* — with particular focus on Sri Akal Takhat Sahib. The existing framework — to the extent one exists at all — raises fundamental questions of Panthic sovereignty, institutional accountability, and the relationship between the SGPC, the Akal Takhat, and the temporal authority of the State. There is, to my knowledge, no comprehensive scholarly treatment of this question in the existing literature.

Should you, however, prefer that I address a different subject of greater relevance to the journal's current priorities, I would be glad to do so to the best of my ability.

I would be grateful if you could let me know the preferred word length, submission deadline, and any style or citation conventions the journal follows. I will calibrate the piece accordingly.

With warm regards and Fateh,

K.B.S. Sidhu, IAS (Retd.)

Former Special Chief Secretary, Government of Punjab
Founder-Editor, *The KBS Chronicle*, Chandigarh

□

9,909 SOLDIERS FROM UNDIVIDED PUNJAB ADDED TO WW - I CASUALTIES

Jul 08, 2026. The Commonwealth War Graves Commission (CWGC) has added 9,909 soldiers from undivided Punjab previously omitted from commemoration records, recognising them as casualties of the First World War. This is the outcome of the Punjab Registers project, a five-year partnership between the CWGC, the UK Punjab Heritage Association (UKPHA) and the University of Greenwich, the CWGC said in a release shared on its website on Monday.

“The CWGC today announces the largest single addition to its casualty records since the Second World War, following a major international research project drawing on rare historical records. A total of 9,909 Indian Army servicemen – previously missing from the CWGC’s records – have now been added, correcting a past historical omission that meant they were never formally commemorated,” reads the statement. Together, the organisations digitised and analysed a rare and fragile collection of documents held at Lahore Museum, containing the names and service details of approximately 320,000 Punjabi recruits.

Dr Inder Singh Palahey, a dentist in Leicester (UK), spent years searching for information about his great-grandfather Kesar Singh, who he knew had gone to the war and never returned.

“From just hearsay to now discovering the facts about my great-grandfather’s ultimate military sacrifice, in particular the regiment he served in, has been incredibly poignant. Upon his death, he left a widow and two young children in poverty. So, the fact that he will now be remembered in perpetuity within global history ensures the whole family sacrifice is recognised: which simply means everything to us,” stated Palahey to the CWGC.

Amandeep Madra, British historian, author and chair of the UK Punjab Heritage Association, said, “Britain and Punjab share a long history, notably during the two World Wars, and for over a 100 years, part of it was missing. These men were never commemorated — not because they didn’t serve, but because a decision made a century ago excluded their sacrifice from the record. Putting that right means giving families around the world their history back, and properly and equally

commemorating the men who died.”

“This has only been possible because the Lahore Museum kept these fragile records safe for a hundred years, because the University of Greenwich and the Commonwealth War Graves Commission took that archive seriously, and because volunteers gave their time to recover, name by name, this previously lost history,” he added.

The record states that one in six soldiers fighting for the British came from pre-Partition India, with half a million from Punjab, including Sikh, Muslim, Hindu and Christian servicemen.

Early work on the Punjab Registers showed that some soldiers listed as having died during the conflict were missing from the CWGC records and commemorations. A majority of the missing casualties were men who had died in non-operational zones within India during the war.

Claire Horton CBE, Director General of the CWGC, said, “Over a century after the end of the First World War, our mission endures, ensuring all those who died in the service of the Commonwealth receive the commemoration they deserve. The Punjab Registers project is a landmark moment in that mission.” “The recovery of every one of these 9,909 names helps restore missing chapters in family and world histories.”

□

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