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ABSTRACTS OF SIKH STUDIES

(Vol XXVIII, Issue 1)

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EDITORIAL

FROM THE GUEST EDITOR : Prof Harpal Singh 1

ARTICLES

MARTYRDOM IN SIKHI: A UNIQUE CASE OF
BHAI JAITA'S FAMILY : Dr Raj Kumar Hans 7
THE UNTOUCHABLES : Khushwant Singh 10
UNDERSTANDING SIKH MUSEUMS IN
CONTEMPORARY INDIA : Dr Kanika Singh 24
CONCEPT OF SEVA IN SIKHISM : Dr Ronki Ram 46
SOURCES FOR THE STUDY OF
GURU GOBIND SINGH'S LIFE AND TIMES : Dr Gurinder S.Mann 56
JAAP SAHIB
- THE POWERFUL MEDITATIONAL VERSE : Prof Kulwant Singh 112
ON THE ISC FRONT : Kanwal Pal Singh 118

REVIEWS

PEASANTS TO WARRIORS: A TRAVELOGUE OF
SIKH SOLDIERING OVER 250 YEARS : Manpreet Kaur 122

NEWS & VIEWS : 126

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Editorial

FROM THE GUEST EDITOR

December and January, corresponding to the month of Poh, are reminiscent of the frozen nights which mark the bone-chilling saga of the sacrifices of the four sons of Guru Gobind Singh and his mother Gujri. Before that, the martyrdom of Guru Tegh Bahadur had adumbrated the times of heightened persecution and repression of the House of Nanak. The name Bhai Jaita of the menial sweeper caste held the pride of Sikhi high by carrying the severed head of the Ninth Nanak to his child son Guru Gobind Singh at Anandpur Sahib. In this great act he redeemed the honour of his own downtrodden community for all times to come.

The contents of the last quarterly issue of the Abstracts of Sikh Studies were devoted to the momentous events related to the Ninth Guru. The forthcoming number of the AOSS celebrates Bhai Jaita as the enduring hero symbolising the dear Khalsa of Guru Gobind Singh. Three scholarly articles, including the scintillating piece of historical fiction garnered from the select writings of Khushwant Singh, are devoted to the diverse aspects of the life and the great deed of the legendary Sikh Bhai Jaita. The spontaneous exclamation of Guru Gobind Singh hailing him as the '*Ramghreta Guru ka Beta*' who, like numerous others, joined the ranks of the Khalsa and entered the haloed orbit of Khalsa fraternity and brotherhood, underlines the status of the lowest of the lowly in the eyes of the Guru.

The current issue carries an article of Gurinder Singh Mann from California University, wherein the learned writer points to the untapped sources which can widen the scope for constructing an updated biography of Guru Gobind Singh. Among such helpful references he cites the 'Letters of Command' known as *Hukammamas* and Dasam

Granth as a corpus of writings bearing Tenth Guru's seal of approval. A good amount of printed space of this issue has been provided to this article keeping in view of its scope and significance. Many findings of the author including the one in respect of the birth-year of Guru Gobind Singh, however, remain a subject of scrutiny and debate.

The article of Dr Kanika Singh takes up the close study of two prominent museums established by the religious and political leadership of the Sikhs. It ends up as a case study to point out the malady that ails the Sikh Museums across the state. The scholar has examined the entire phenomenon in the conceptual framework of the norms outlined by the experts in respect of creating an essential museum.

Seva and *Simran* are the bedrock of the essential spirit of Sikh religion. Prof Ronki Ram defines the concept of *Seva* as a spark of the Divine and the noblest form of the disinterested service. The article of the distinguished scholar from Panjab University delineates the *Seva* as a unifying thread that binds the humanity along lines of brotherhood and equality.

The end-section is enriched by the Review of Lt Gen R.S. Sujlana's book profiling the illustrious military history of the Sikhs from Banda Singh Bahadur to 1971 war, which marks the writer's own journey as an army officer. The keen researcher Prof Manpreet Kaur has reviewed the book to highlight the salient features of the painstaking work of Gen Sujlana. The enduring work of Prof Kulwant Singh presenting a translation of selections from the Sikh scripture appears as a regular feature.

The response of the readers and subscribers of the *Abstracts of Sikh Studies* remains our valuable treasure in guiding the editorial desk to improve and innovate.

□

NOTE

The Editor of the *Abstracts of Sikh Studies* solicits the valuable advice of the esteemed members of the IOSS and readers in respect of contributing articles and identifying new subscribers. The support and encouragement of the outgoing President and the new incumbent in this regard is highly appreciated. – Editor

MARTYRDOM IN SIKHI: A UNIQUE CASE OF BHAI JAITA'S FAMILY

DR RAJ KUMAR HANS*

Prof Raj Kumar Hans, formerly a professor at the University of Baroda is an authority on the socio-political history of the Sikhs. His present article traces the ancestral roots of Bhai Jaita affirming his lineal association with the path of Sikhi outlined by the Gurus. His unique act of courage and valour, according to the writer, is the culmination of the devotion of his ancestors at the feet of the Gurus.

– Editor

Sikhi is a new religion that has a difficult relationship with the so-called Hinduism from where it had arisen as a new way of life. It rejected the Brahmanical divisive ideology based on casteism and untouchability. Its founder Baba Nanak emphasized the love for labour and sharing the dividends of that labour with others. As the Sikh thoughts got accepted by the people, it created tensions in the minds of the ruling elites. The question of power led to the persecution of the fifth Guru, Arjun Dev by the Mughal state. The movement slowly got militarized in the seventeenth century, culminating in the heightened battles with the Pahari rajas and the Mughals and thence in the creation of Khalsa by the last Sikh Master, Guru Gobind Singh. Numerous Sikhs had lost their lives in the political struggles with the state powers but sacrificing one's life became a sacred call of the Faith. The eighteenth century ushered in the first assumption of political power under the command of Banda Singh Bahadur, eventually culminating in the establishment of an autonomous rule by Maharaja Ranjit Singh.

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Shahidi or shahadat (martyrdom) in Sikhi has become a centrally important factor in the memory and practice of Sikhs' lives at least for the past two centuries. A grand narrative of martyrdom got constructed by the Singh Sabha ideologues in the last quarter of the nineteenth century which slowly paved the way to numerous martyrdoms in the Gurdwara Reform movement in the 1920s. This year of 2025 has been commemorated as the 350th year of Guru Teg Bahadur's martyrdom. The three followers of the Guru viz. Bhai Sati Das, Bhai Mati Das and Bhai Dial Das have also been lionised for their martyrdom along with Guru's. Only in a minor way, Bhai Jaita's sacrifice for the love of his Guru has been remembered. This writeup places the outstanding sacrifices of the family of Bhai Jaita alias Jeevan Singh. It first looks at the life and contribution of Bhai Jaita and his family. The second part addresses the question of their shahadat for the Sikh Faith.

I

The fact that many Dalits, seeking liberation from Hindu caste discrimination and degradation, had joined and secured respectable status within the Sikh Order is exemplified by Gurus' special relations with some of the Dalit families. Guru Nanak's life-long spiritual companion, especially on his long travels in all directions, was Mardana, a Dalit musician from the Mirasi caste community. It is understandable numerous Dalit families had joined the new creed right from the first Guru's time. One notable Dalit family happens to be of Bhai Jaita. His great grandfather, Bhai Kaliana of Kathunangal village near Amritsar, is said to have become Sikh during Guru Amar Das's ministry. He had served well the Fourth and Fifth gurus. His son Sukhbhan, who had migrated to Delhi, was a great musician and established a music school 'Kalyan Ashram' named after his father in the nearby village Raiseena. Kalyan Ashram later came to be known as 'Kalayane di Dharamshala' and the Sikh visitors to Delhi used to lodge there. Even Guru Teg Bahadur had lodged in the Dharamshala on 20th January 1670 on his return journey from Assam. Sukhbhan's son Jasbhan was an equally accomplished musician and a notable Sikh of Delhi, close to the Seventh Guru. His two sons, Agya Ram and Sada Nand, continued to render Gurbani in musical notes for the Delhi Sikh congregations. Sada Nand emerged as a reputed musician and

turned out to be a close companion of Guru Teg Bahadur. Such intimate ties of his family with Sikh gurus and his complete devotion can be seen as a definite motivation for Jaita to carry the severed head of Guru Tegh Bahadar with daredevilry under the most violent circumstances from Delhi to Kiratpur in 1675. There is no wonder in young Gobind's getting overwhelmed with emotions and embracing Bhai Jaita while bestowing him with the famous blessing 'Ranghrete Guru ke Bete' (The untouchables are Guru's sons). Kankan also refers to the Tenth Guru's conferring upon the Mazhabi Sikhs the special rights of ablutions in the amrit-sarovar of Harimandir (Golden Temple) on this occasion. Undoubtedly Jaita had emerged as a fearless Sikh warrior who so endeared himself to the Tenth Guru that he came to be recognized by the Guru as his Panjwan Sahibjada (the Fifth Son) in addition to his own four sons. It is at the time of the creation of the Khalsa that he was rechristened as Jeevan Singh.

It is not well known that besides a brave warrior, a close associate of the guru-ghar who had participated in most of Guru Gobind Singh's battles, Bhai Jaita was a fine scholar and an outstanding poet. He composed a brilliant epic poem on Guru Gobind Singh. Bhai Jaita's Sri Gur Katha is his tribute to the Sikhi in general and the last Guru in particular. The manuscript seemingly remained unnoticed as it was in the custody of some Mazhabi Sikh families. The two manuscripts or copies that surfaced in the mid twentieth century have an interesting tale, as narrated by Naranjan Singh Arifi, a passionate researcher about Mazhabi Sikhs and the author of Ranghretian da Itihas. It was in 1973 that Arifi was told by Dhanna Singh Gulshan, an accomplished kavishar (bard) and former Akali Dal MP, also a Union Minister, that he had procured a Sri Gur Katha manuscript from Santa Singh, father of the celebrated Punjabi poet Daya Singh Arif (1894-1946), who in turn had got it from Baba Bir Singh of village Muthhianwala in Ferozepur district. Gulshan had a strong inclination to work on the manuscript but his demanding political life hardly left time for the job. Meanwhile, Giani Garja Singh (1907-1977), a keen collector and scholar of Sikh manuscripts, borrowed the Sri Gur Katha manuscript from Gulshan and reportedly misplaced it. Nonetheless, the Giani had prepared a copy before the manuscript became untraceable. The second manuscript was discovered by Arifi from the same family of Daya

Singh Arif. This manuscript was gifted to Kultar Singh, eldest son of Daya Singh Arif, an accomplished musician, by the Assam Sikhs on one of his kirtani jatha's visit to that area in 1950s. The latter manuscript, 18.1x11.45 cms, presently in the custody of Naranjan Singh Arifi carries 36 folios, tightly written in an unbroken line can be identified as the 'Assam Manuscript'.

It is one of the strange ironies of the Sikh tradition that its otherwise vibrant scholarship has hardly taken note of a magnificent text by Bhai Jaita (c.1657-1704), viz. Sri Gur Katha, even while it had been in the public domain in print for around past three decades. This irony gets a sharper relief with the appearance of a comprehensive, brilliant and insightful essay on the sources pertaining to Guru Gobind Singh and his times by Gurinder Singh Mann. It is quite dismaying that Bhai Jaita's composition available in at least 6 books by then would escape attention of Mann, a meticulous researcher and indefatigable fieldworker of the Sikh studies. Sri Gur Katha is a powerful and evocative epic, a 'story' of Guru Gobind Singh's life which has potential of settling a few important controversies generated by contentious interpretations of the Sikh tradition. Produced by a Khalsa Sikh unlike most of the early poets and writers, it wields a ring of proximity and authenticity to the central events of the tradition. It emerges as the first contemporary source to talk explicitly about the 5Ks (panj kakkars), a detailed description of 'amrit bidhi' (khande di pahul), the initiation rite, and the 'rahit' (code of conduct) as enunciated by the Tenth Guru. Being the closest witness, it does not mention any devi puja by the Guru while narrating the Khalsa event. Coming from a Dalit Sikh (rechristened by Guru Gobind Singh as Jeevan Singh) in the lifetime of the Guru, it offers an uncorrupted version of some of the central concerns to the Sikh tradition in general and the Khalsa tradition in particular as compared to the later brahmanical or brahmanized-Sikh interpolations of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Written in the prevalent old Punjabi (sadh bhasha) of the Sikh tradition, Sri Gur Katha is a testimony of Bhai Jaita as a master poet besides an accomplished warrior.

II

The question of sacrifice for the Faith has been very central in

the Sikh tradition though all may not come forward when the situations demand. Only very few would be ready with their lives, while majority would keep mum. Bhai Jaita's family test appeared in the most horrendous moment in the history of the Sikhs. Guru Teg Bahadur was executed at Chandni Chowk of Delhi on 11th November 1675 by the Mughal state power. This had shocked the Sikhs to numbness. No one could dare go closer to the body as the head laid severed from the body. Some Sikhs in Delhi started whispering how to cope with this trauma. There was a meeting of three men, Jaita, his father Sada Nand and uncle Agya Ram at their Raiseena residence as to what could be done. Only a clue is available about what could have transpired between the three. The three moved to the execution site in the darkness of the cold night. Meanwhile, a storm is said to have engulfed the area disturbing the guards deployed around Guru's body. In the chaotic situation Bhai Jaita with great emotions under control severed his father Sada Nand's head and then the two carried the head of the Guru and the body of his father to their home from where Bhai Jaita marched towards Kiratpur/Anandpur with the head of the Guru securely wrapped in a sheet of cloth. It is worth listening to Bhai Jaita in his Sri Gur Katha:

Hindwani jim kiyo kukaja
 Prabh sivkan kaou aveh laaja
 Aapan kau nahin Sikh bakhanai
 Sabh Sikh Ram bhagat pramanai
 Jo ko preet ki baat kareh
 Mur pit sam tabu preet nibhe
 Kaat dhare sir prabh charnan mein
 Preet tabeh aiye barnan mainh

The prevailing situation is well portrayed by Bhai Jaita. At the execution of the Guru, Hindustanis were saddened to silence as if they had done a wrong deed. The Sikhs were ashamed as they refused to recognise themselves as Sikhs and were announcing as the Ram devotees. In such a situation, Bhai Jaita asserts that if anyone talks about the love, then one should talk about the love of my father who

offered his life at the feet of the Guru. Only then one can describe what is love.

The head of the Guru was carried by Bhai Jaita from Delhi to Kiratpur in three days where the young Guru Gobind Das had come from Anandpur in the company of traumatised Sikhs. Overcome with emotions, it is then that Gobind Das blessed Bhai Jaita with 'Ranghrete Guru ke Bete'. Bhai Jaita says it poignantly:

Jaiyte taranhaar gur taar diye Ranghretde

Gur paras ne kar diye Ranghretde Gur Betde

It is important to understand Sada Nand's offer of his life and Bhai Jaita's exceptional courage at that moment. Most of the martyrdoms in Sikhi are known as the violent actions against them by the state power or they died in the battles against the state forces. But offering one's life for the love and devotion for one's guru is an exceptional voluntary act. It equally required an exceptional courage by the executor of that action, i.e. by Bhai Jaita severing the head of his own father. Was not it a martyrdom, par excellent? Why have the Sikh historians and writers not taken note of it? Is then the memory a selective process? Or it has been treated as such? Has the casteism played a role in Sikhi after it got afflicted with the Brahmanical virus in the past two hundred years? It is more shocking, even in the treatment by the Sikh scholarship as already pointed out in the case of Professor Gurinder Singh Mann. After such an unusual act, an extraordinary sacrifice of his father, Bhai Jaita remained part of the Guru-ghar, taking part in the most battles of Guru Gobind Singh. In the service of the Panth, Bhai Jaita also became a martyr in the battle of Chamkaur as his four sons, viz. Sukha Singh, Sewa Singh, Gulzar Singh and Gurdial Singh were also killed. His younger brother Bhai Sangat Singh also died while fighting the Mughal army. What a sacrifice and what a martyrdom of the three generations of Bhai Jaita! In the grand narrative of Sikh martyrdom, Bhai Jaita's family needs the recognition of their sacrifices.

CONCLUSION:

The print age in the nineteenth century created wonderful opportunities to produce and disperse the information and knowledge

about its past. But conversely, it led to mythification of the past as so much got forgotten and erased while imaginary things were added for the confusion of the ordinary Sikhs. The case of Bhai Jaita and his family is a strong pointer to this malaise. Belonging to mazhabi family of Kathunangal, the family had become Sikhs during the period of Guru Amar Das. They were expert musicians, and his forefathers had settled in Raseena, near Delhi where they established a music school as Kalyan Ashram. The school later also became Kalayane di Dahramsala, a resthouse, for the Sikh visitors to Delhi. Sada Nand had become very close to Guru Teg Bahadur and was part of his retinue during his travels to the East. His younger son Sangta was born in Patna, a day after Gobind Das's birth. On the insistence of his father and with great courage and composure, Bhai Jaita sacrificed his father's life for his Guru so that latter's head could be cremated with honour and dignity. Bhai Jaita had taken the severed head to Kiratpur/Anandpur in the most challenging situation. His family remained part of the guru-ghar of Guru Gobind Singh. As a brave warrior, he fought in most of the battles till his death at Chamkaur. His brother Sangat Singh and four sons also gave their lives in the service of Sikh Panth. Sikh history needs corrections as all histories get rewritten.

THE UNTOUCHABLES

KHUSHWANT SINGH*

Khushwant Singh created a unique piece of historical fiction to pay homage to the memory of Bhai Jaita. The narrative goes back to two generations of Mughal dynasty before Aurangzeb, whose hands are smeared in blood with the execution of Guru Tegh Bahadur. The writer has woven the story about the successive generations of untouchables who have been treated through the ages as no more than the dross of society. The gripping story describes Bhai Jaita experiencing the gush of pride for his entire community when the destiny chooses him to carry the severed head of the great Guru, fondly remembered as *Hind di Chadar*.

– Editor

It was a few days before Diwali that news of the Badshah Jahangir's death was heard in Dilli. No one was allowed to light a lamp or kindle a fire in their hearth for some days. Our elders said that anyone seen smiling or heard laughing during the next forty days would have his head cut off. My mother would not let me go out to play with the other boys lest I forgot not to shout or laugh. That is why although I was only a small boy I can never forget that badshah's death.

When I asked my Bapu the name of the badshah who had died, he said 'What will you do with the badshah's name?' None of the sweepers or cobblers in Rikabganj knew his name. Only the Mussalmans who lived in the sarai alongside the mosque and the contractor, Lakhi Rai, who lived in a big stone house with his wives, eight sons and their wives knew the badshah's name. These Mussalmans and Lakhi Rai's

* Reproduced from the book "*Delhi - A Novel*" published by Penguin Books, New Delhi, 1990, pp. 123-136

family went about with long faces as if their own mother's mother had died. Some people feel very big if they can cry over the deaths of big people.

'What have we poor untouchables to do with kings!' I remember my Bapu saying, "They are all the same to us. One goes, another comes, zulum goes on.'

I did not know who zulum was. When I was a little older my Bapu told me that zulum was not a man but what the rich did to the poor. We untouchables were the poorest of the poor. No one did anything to us except run away if we came near them. That, said my Bapu, was also a kind of zulum. It was in our karma. We had done bad things in our previous births. That is why we were born black and had to do all the dirty work.

My Bapu called every badshah a zalim. This one who had just died, said my Bapu, was a very bad man because he drank more wine than Uncle Reloo who was drunk most of the time. Uncle Reloo told me that the badshah could drink twenty cups of arrack and eat tolas of opium every day and yet poke his queen and the other women of his harem every night. He told me that his queen had been married before. But when she saw the badshah who was only a prince at the time she knew at once that he would become a badshah. So she put some magic powder in his cup of wine and made him fall madly in love with her. The prince had the husband murdered and when he became badshah he made her his queen. Uncle Reloo said that it was not the badshah but this queen who had ruled over Hindustan.

It was not so much the badshah's drinking or womanizing that had made my father angry with him as what he had done to our Guru. 'What is it to us how much he drinks and whose mother he fucks,' he used to say, 'but perish the man who raises his hand against our Guru.' Most of us untouchables of Rikabganj had attached ourselves to the lotus feet of the Guru and begun to call ourselves the Sikhs of Nanak. No one had seen Nanak or the Gurus who came after him to save us. The badshah who had just died had killed our fifth Guru Arjun and put his son Hargobind in jail. So there was no reason for us to beat our breasts on this badshah's death.

If there was a death in our family we did not light lamps at Diwali or squirt coloured water at Holi for at least one year. But the Mussalmans have strange customs. Three full moons after the death of the Badshah a fellow came from the city kotwali and began to beat his drum in front of the mosque. When everyone had collected he shouted: 'All you people listen to the order of the new badshah.' Then he gave his name which was as long as the road from Rikabganj to Paharganj- His Majesty Abul Muzaffar Shahabuddin Mohammed Sahib-i-Qiran Sani, Shadow of God on Earth, King of Kings, Monarch of the Universe, Emperor of Hindustan. He told us that we were to light our homes and pray for his long life.

We untouchables had no oil to light our homes and we had no temples to go to say our prayers. So we decided to see how others lit their homes and prayed for the new badshah's long life.

My mother gave me a clean shirt to wear. Everyone wore their best clothes. The sweepers and cobblers of Rikabganj formed a party. The men in front danced to the beat of the drum; women followed singing as they went along. I took hold of Uncle Reloo's hand. He was more fun to be with than Bapu. Aunt Bimbo was happy. 'You stick to your chacha and don't let him drink or get into mischief,' she said.

We drank lots of sherbet which was served free outside nawabs' mansions and we ate lots of sweetmeats which were also given free by rich tradesmen. My Bapu did not give me any money but I got a handful of coins in the scramble when a nawab showered them from his elephant.

The new badshah who called himself Shah Jahan or King of the World was not as zalim as his father had been. Although he had killed his brothers' families when he came on the throne, he did not hurt anyone else. But Uncle Reloo who knew everything told me that like his father, grandfather and great-grandfather and others before them, this badshah also liked women. His favourite was a queen whom he kept pregnant from the day he married her. In the fourteen years they were married she had fourteen sons and daughters. She couldn't take any more and died giving birth to her fourteenth child. The badshah was so sad that he decided to make the biggest and most beautiful grave over her body. This was very good news for the stonemasons of

Paharganj. They moved to Agra. It took over twenty years to make. People who came from Agra said it was higher than our Qutub Minar and much more beautiful than the tomb of Badshah Humayun at Arabki-Sarai. One day Aunt Bimbo asked Uncle Reloo: 'When I die, will you make a Taj Mahal for me?' He replied: 'You die first, we'll talk about a Taj Mahal for you afterwards.'

Some years after he became king, this badshah, Shah Jahan, came to Dilli. He liked our city very much and said: 'I am going to live here.' He sent for his chief builder, Mukarram Khan, and told him: 'Make a big fort along the river Jamna, and inside that fort make palaces for myself and my queens.'

'I also want the biggest mosque in the world.' Mukarram Khan bowed three times before the badshah and replied: 'Badshah, peace be upon you! If Allah wills I will build you as big a fort as at Agra with as many canals and gardens and fountains. You will also have the world's biggest and most beautiful mosque. I will build it on Bhojla Hill so it can be seen from Palam and Qutub.' Then Mukarram Khan asked Ustad Ahmed and Ustad Hira to make maps. When that was done he asked the badshah to come to Dilli. 'Badshah, peace be upon you! Now put down the foundation stone, so we can get on with work.'

What years they were! Everyone got work. We gave up skinning dead cows and buffaloes and carrying other people's shit. Lakhi Rai got a contract to supply labour. As I was now old enough, he gave me a job to carry mud and stones.

Dilli began to change. Every day a new building! Every day the city wall rising higher! Every day new minarets and domes rising into the sky! And so it went for many years. When the work was finished we had nine days of tamasha. Princes showered silver coins on the crowds. The badshah rode through the city on his biggest elephant and scattered gold coins by the palmful. His courtiers said, 'We won't call "Dilli" "Dilli" any more. We will rename it Shahjahanabad. But Dilli is Dilli and no king or nobleman can give it another name.'

When a person is busy making money he forgets his God. As soon as he has made ninety-nine rupees he wants to make a hundred. For the years I was working in the city I hardly ever thought of my Guru. When my Bapu died and I became the head of the family, the

Guru's agent sent for me. I went along with the messenger to the agent's camp. He reclined against a big pillow set on a big charpoy. I thought he was the Guru himself and so I went down on my knees and rubbed my forehead on the ground in front of him.

'Who are you?' he asked me.

'I am Jaita Rangreta of Rikabganj,' I replied.

'Are you a Sikh of Guru Nanak?' he asked.

I told him I was what my Bapu had been.

'You paid nothing for your father's soul nor on the accession of the new Guru,' he said.

I replied that I had no money left as I had to feast all the Rangretas in Rikabganj on my Bapu's death. His servant smacked me on the back of my neck and exclaimed angrily. 'You argue with the Guru's agent!' I had to borrow money from Lakhi Rai to pay him. I said to myself, 'At least I am something-a Sikh of Guru Nanak. I do not know what it means but it is better than being nothing but a Rangreta untouchable.' Thereafter every year I had to give this agent of the Guru something when he came to Dilli. Although he never allowed me to go near him or even touched my money with his own hands (his servants did that) I felt different. I was told that the new Guru did not like people to cut their hair or their beards. So I let the hair on my head grow long and wrapped a turban over it. I had quite a growth of beard on my face. The Mussalmans did not allow Hindus to wear beards but they did not bother us untouchables. We bearded Rangretas began to look different from other untouchables. And although after the building of Dilli was over I had to become a sweeper again, if anyone asked me who I was I would reply: 'I am a Sikh of Guru Nanak.'

For some years after the building of Shahjahanabad, the badshah liked Dilli more than Agra. Then he began to like Agra more than Dilli. His visits to our city became less and less frequent. Tradesmen and artisans began to move back to Agra. People began to say that very soon Shahjahanabad would become like the other old cities of Dilli: Mehrauli, Siri, Chiragh, Tughlakabad, Kotla Firozeshah and Kilokheri, the abode of Gujars, jackals, hyaenas and the owls.

I did not earn very much sweeping drains and cleaning latrines and had to borrow money from the Bania and Lakhi Rai. I had to pay

interest on their money and when I was unable to do that, they refused to lend me any more. Because of this I was forced to take employment in the executioner's yard attached to the kotwali in Chandni Chowk. This was really dirty work: first I had to get used to seeing a man's head being hacked off; then see his arms and legs cut off. After this had happened it was my job to put the pieces together and lay them out for the people to see. As I worked I could hear the onlookers avoiding me as if I were a murderer. Every evening there were at least three to four unclaimed corpses to be carted off and dumped in the river or on the garbage mound. What will man not do to fill his belly!

As I said before, I did not like this work. I did not like to shout dom, dom whenever I went out with the cartload of corpses. I did not like people covering their children's eyes against me and blocking their nostrils against the smelly load I carried. Even the sentries at the city gates would draw aside to let me pass. I used to console myself by recalling my Bapu's words: 'Son, only two people can pass through the gates of Shahjahanabad without being questioned: the King and the untouchable!'

It was on one of his visits to Dilli that Badshah Shah Jahan was taken ill. They tried to keep it secret but within a few hours everyone knew about the sultan's ailment mainly through the badshah's doctor who was a gossip. This is how it happened. The badshah had got up at night and complained of pain in his belly. The queen had sent for the hakeem who lived in Ballimaran. The hakeem told many people of having had no sleep because he had to stay up all night with a patient whose name he could not disclose-which is how news of the badshah's ailment spread.

When I came to work one of the doms shouted 'Chhuttee!! (holiday). 'Orders from the palace, no executions today. Executions were only stopped on religious holidays or if the king or one of his queens or their princes was ill and desired to earn merit and good health. By the time the sun had risen over the walls of Red Fort people were gathering in groups and speaking in whispers. Butchers were forbidden to slaughter animals; mullahs were ordered to pray to Allah to restore the king to good health; priests were ordered to clang their temple bells. Shops closed. People hurried to their homes and

barricaded their doors. At night they dug holes under their hearths to bury their gold and silver.

The king it turned out was constipated. The hakeem gave him a purgative made of laburnum pods. For two days and nights the king emptied his bowels till there was nothing left in them and he started shitting blood. But big people's illnesses are always made to sound big. The simple shutting and opening of the royal arse-hole was made to sound as if the world was coming to an end. At first he was said to be dying of constipation; then he was said to be dying of dysentery. My Bapu used to say that when a father hiccups his sons go for his purse. That was certainly true about the badshah's four sons. No sooner had they heard of their old man's illness than their hands were on the hilts of their swords. But they wanted to make sure he was really dying before they drew them. So they sent messengers to Dilli with gifts for their father. The old fellow knew these tricks as he had tried them in his own time. He seated himself at the window of his palace so that the crowd could see him. He had prayers of thanksgiving said in the mosques. However, his sons were not fooled and started raising armies to march to Agra and Dilli. The badshah decided to get to Agra and sit on his throne before one of his boys got to it. Despite this, one after another his sons proclaimed themselves kings of Hindustan. First, Shuja who was in Bangladesh from where the sun rises put a crown on his head and said: 'I am King of Hindustan.' A few days later Murad, who was somewhere in the south, sat himself on a throne and said: 'I am King of Hindustan.' Aurangzeb was more clever. He went to Murad and told him: 'Let me help you to defeat our brothers. Then we will lock up our old man who is now too feeble to rule and you can become King of Hindustan. I will then go off to Mecca and pray for you.' Dara who was the badshah's eldest and the favourite son was incensed at the behaviour of his brothers. He said, 'My father is King of Hindustan. After him, I will be King of Hindustan because I am his eldest son. Shuja, Murad and Aurangzeb are bastards. I will kill them.'

We were not sure which of the sons would make the best king. The contractor Lakhi Rai was in favour of Dara. 'He is the eldest and the eldest son always succeeds his father. Besides he is god-fearing and treats Hindus and Muslims alike,' he said. The Muslims did not

like Dara. They said he was a kafir because he made the stone gods of the Hindus equal to Allah and His Prophet. Their favourite was the third son Aurangzeb.

At this time there was a Yahoodi fakeer, Sarmad, who went about naked like a Naga sadhu. Sarmad told everyone in the bazaars that Dara would win. The people of Dilli were frightened of Sarmad because he was a friend of God and could ask Him for any favour he wanted. One day I casually told one of the Muslims at the sarai what fakeer Sarmad was saying. The Mussalman spat on the ground and exclaimed: La haul valla quwwat! 'That shameless fellow who dangles his penis before women! If I ever catch him alone I will cut it off and throw it to the dogs.'

Fakeer Sarmad was wrong. The king's sons fought each other as hungry dogs fight over a bone. Dara's son, Sulaiman Shikoh, defeated Shuja. Meanwhile Murad and Aurangzeb defeated Dara, captured Agra and made their old father prisoner. Then this fellow Aurangzeb tricked his brother Murad: he got him drunk, tied him up and threw him into a dungeon. He then finished off Shuja, Dara and Dara's sons. This was how we had a new badshah - Aurangzeb-while the old badshah Shah Jahan was still alive. The Mussalmans in the sarai were happy. They said that the new badshah was a good man. He did not drink wine; he did not have concubines or courtesans; he did not allow dancing and singing in the palace; he ate little, slept little and prayed a lot. He spent on himself only what he earned by making copies of their holy book and selling them. They said if all kings had been like him, Hindustan would have long ago been rid of kafirs. Alamgir was the name they used for him-'Alamgir, Zinda Peer, is a living saint,' they said.

Lakhi Rai was not happy. The new badshah did not give him any contracts. One day many years later when I was eating his leftovers in his courtyard I told him that the Mussalmans said Aurangzeb was a man of God because he did not drink wine or womanize. He lost his temper and said. 'What about that slut Hira Bai?' Then he got frightened and made me swear that I would never tell anyone of what h had said. But I could not get Hira Bai's name out of my mind. I asked the Bania, who also sometimes gave me his leftover about her. He made a ring

with the thumb and index finger of his left hand and pierced it with a finger of his right hand.

‘But that Hira Bai is dead,’ he said. ‘The Bania did not like Aurangzeb because he had imposed jazia tax on the Hindus. ‘Don’t tell anyone I told you,’ he said in a low voice, ‘but a tribe called the Marathas are going to finish him. Their leader Shivaji has stuck a big bamboo pole up the bottoms of these Mughals. Haven’t you heard how this Shivaji tore out the bowels of one of the badshah’s generals with his hands? In the name of Rama, don’t breathe a word about this to anyone or they will slit my throat.’

I couldn’t keep secrets. One day I asked the Mussalman cook at the sarai if he had ever heard of Shivaji. He almost spat in my face. ‘Where did you pick up the name of that dirty kafir?’ he asked angrily. ‘He murdered the brave General Afzal Khan who was embracing him as a friend. That is the kind of moozi he is. The badshah has sent an army against him. If Allah wills, the rat will be flushed out of his hole and destroyed. Inshallah!

Some months later the Mussalman cook gave me an extra large portion of leftovers. He looked very happy. ‘Have you heard of that Shivaji of yours? He has been captured and brought in chains to Agra. He will be sent to hell.’ When I told this to the Bania, he said it was a lie and that Shivaji had come of his own free will to talk to the king. For many days everyone in Dilli was talking of this man Shivaji. The Mussalmans said he was a great villain and that the king would cut off his head. The Hindus said he was a great hero. Then we heard that he had escaped and returned to his mountain kingdom in the Deccan. ‘Didn’t I tell you so?’ said the Bania to me. ‘They can never catch him. Ramji is his protector.’

The king was very angry. He ordered Hindu temples at Varanasi and Mathura to be destroyed. The Bania who was so frightened of the Mussalmans called the badshah a zalim. Whenever there is too much zulum,’ he said ‘God sends an avatar to destroy zalims. It is written in the Gita.’ Even Lakhi Rai who kept up with the Mussalmans wagged his head and said, ‘This is Kaliyuga (the dark age), God will send an avatar to save us.’

The zulum went on but no avatar came to stop it. When the Jats and Brahmins of village Tilpat, which is a few kos in the direction of the rising sun, claimed land which belonged to their temple, the badshah sent his army against them and blew up their village. Their leader, Gokula Jat and all his supporters were brought to Dilli and executed. No avatar came to save them.

Three years later there was a worse zulum at Narnaul. A sect of sadhus called Satnamis were slain by the thousand. No avatar came to save them or punish the zalim badshah.

I asked Lakhi Rai about the coming of the avatar. He just shook his head. I asked him whether our Guru could be the avatar. 'Which Guru?' he asked. "There are so many. And all they do is to send their agents to collect money. That was strange talk from Lakhi Rai!

I began to lose faith in the Guru. The Mussalmans in the sarai made fun of him. 'Who is this robber you worship?' one fellow asked me. The mullah of the mosque (may his mouth be filled with dung!) said: 'The badshah will soon bring this Guru of yours to the path of obedience and teach him that the only way of approaching Allah is through His only Messenger, Mohammed-upon Whom be peace. Although I knew nothing about this Guru I did not like Mussalmans talking like that about him. When the Guru was captured at Agra and brought to Dilli in chains, the Mussalmans mocked: 'We told you this Guru of yours is a robber! The entire gang will be hanged.'

I saw the Guru and three Sikhs who had been arrested with him. I said to myself: 'If he was an avatar he will save himself and destroy the zalims.' I prayed that he would fly out of his cell or perform some other miracle so that I could show my face to the Mussalmans of Rikabganj.

But who cares for the prayers of poor untouchables? There was this judge Qazi Abdul Wahab. His Allah had made him so deaf that everyone called him behra qazi. He sentenced the Guru and his three followers to death. He ordered their bodies to be displayed in front of the kotwali for everyone to see. For the first time even the timid Lakhi Rai became brave. "This must not happen," he said to me. "The Guru

has refused to save his life, but we must not allow them to dishonour his body. The rich contractor addressed me as Jaitaji. Before this he had always called me 'Jaitoo' or worse 'O, choorha (sweeper).' How was I to know Lakhi Rai was not a spy? I kept quiet. Silence is the best friend of the poor.

Strange things happened in Dilli that autumn. Dassehra passed without any Ram Lila or the burning of the effigies of Ravana and his brothers. The Hindus said the badshah had forbidden the celebration of Hindu festivals. The Muslims said that this was a lie and said they knew why Hindus were not celebrating their most important festival. A few days later came Diwali. Not a light in anyone's house! Not a sound of a cracker! No fireworks! No one sending sweets to anyone! The whole world was like a dark, moonless night. You know how much darker the night looks when you expect millions of oil-lamps twinkling and there are none! So no Diwali for the Hindus. And the Mussalmans feeling as if ants were crawling up their bottoms! The mullahji of the sarai mosque asked Lakhi Rai very discreetly why he had not lit any lamps on Diwali night. 'The death of a very near and dear one,' he replied. 'All the Hindus seem to have lost someone near and dear to them, exclaimed the mullahji very sarcastically. 'I hope it is not because someone very near and very dear is going to die, yes?'

Lakhi Rai did not answer. The mullahji turned his temper on me. 'And you, Jaitoo! Have you lost your mother's mother that you did not light lamps at Diwali?' I replied: 'Mullahji in poor men's houses there is a death every day. We never have enough oil to light a lamp. If you gave me money, I would have lit up every home in Rikabganj.' He mumbled in his beard, 'You have learnt to talk big, haven't you?'

Everyone in Dilli was talking about the miracle the Guru would perform. They said anyone who raised his hand against him or his companions would go blind. The Kotwal could not find anyone in Dilli to carry out the sentence of death and had to send for one Jalaluddin all the way from Samana in the Punjab. This Jalaluddin hated the Sikhs and their Gurus.

A few days after the Diwali-without-lights, Jalaluddin cut off the heads of the Sikhs captured with the Guru. Jalaluddin did not go blind;

nothing happened to him. Now it was the turn of the Guru. The behra qazi said, 'Jalaluddin we'll cut off the Guru's head on Thursday. His body will be exposed to public gaze after prayer on Friday. Everyone in Dilli will see which is mightier, the sword of Islam or the neck of an infidel! Everyone in the world knows that whenever the blood of a good man is spilled in Dilli, the Great God who lives in the sky makes His anger known. On Thursday the sun came up like a ball of fire. Everyone said: 'Something terrible is going to happen today. Even the Mussalmans were anxious and hoped the badshah who was away beyond the Punjab would get to know and would cancel the order of the behra qazi. The Kotwal told me that he had prayed all night. "It will be very bad for the Mussalmans if this Guru is martyred. he said shaking his head.

The Guru performed no miracle. With the name of God on his lips he permitted the monster Jalaluddin of Samana to sever his head from his body. The town-crier went round beating his drum and yelling that 'justice' had been done and that the Guru's body would be exposed in front of the kotwall for two days and nights for all to see and learn a lesson.

I brought the news to Rikabganj. In the afternoon all the Sikhs and Hindus of Rikabganj gathered under a tree. No one said anything. The men sighed and the women wept. The Mussalmans of the sarai watched us from a distance. Even they seemed to be touched by our grief.

As I sat in that crowd listening to the sighing and whimpering a strange feeling came over me. We had done nothing to save the life of our Guru-and now they were going to expose his naked body to the gaze of crowds and for animals to tear and birds to peck! What kind of devotees were we? My blood boiled within me; I felt very hot and angry with myself. Most of the Guru's disciples were high born Kshatriyas and Jat peasants who boasted loudly of their bravery. They had done nothing to save their Guru. I, an untouchable, could teach these high-caste fellows how a Guru's Sikh should act. It might cost me my life, but I would win the respect of the world for my untouchable brethren.

I slipped away. Lakhi Rai saw me get up and followed me. 'I have some work for you Jaitaji,' he said, putting his hand on my shoulder, adding meaningfully, 'if you are man enough to do it.' This was the first time he had touched me. I was not sure of this rich contractor-one can never be sure of rich people. I replied, 'I have to be on duty at the kotwali.' Lakhi Rai said: 'I will come with you. I also have business at the kotwali.' What was his game? I really did not care to find out. However, I felt not Lakhi Rai's but my Guru's hand on my shoulder. I was not afraid of anyone in the world-not of the badshah or the behra qazi or that Jalaluddin; not even of the Mughal soldiers or the Kotwal and his constabulary.

Lakhi Rai had several bullock carts lined up on the road. They were loaded with bales of cotton. His eight sons were with him. As he was a government contractor, he and his family were allowed to carry weapons. All the men were armed with swords and spears. Lakhi Rai always guarded his caravans in this way and everyone knew him. We left Rikabganj in the afternoon.

When we reached Paharganj, the sun suddenly disappeared. The wind dropped. Hundreds of kites began circling above us. We could see a dark brown wall come sweeping in from the west. As we came to the city wall, the circle of kites moved overhead towards the Royal Mosque. Then the storm overtook us with a fury I would not have thought possible.

The guards at Ajmeri Gate had muffled their faces with the ends of their turbans and waved us on. The storm swept us through Qazika-Hauz, through Lal Kuan and past Begum Fatehpuri's mosque into Chandni Chowk. We arrived at the kotwali.

Who knows the inscrutable designs of the Guru? The dust-storm had turned the day into night. Every door and window had been shut against the dust. The guards had bolted themselves in their barracks. And the only sound was the howling of the wind.

I had no difficulty in finding the Guru's body. I touched his feet and then slung his body over my shoulders. I took his head in my hands and walked through the blinding dust-storm. Lakhi Rai and his sons also touched the Guru's feet. We laid his body and head on one

of the bullock carts, piled bales of cotton over it and turned our carts around. The same storm that had driven us into Chandni Chowk drove us backwards through the same bazaar, out of Ajmeri Gate to Paharganj. When we arrived at Rikabganj, the wind suddenly dropped and the dust disappeared. The night had come on.

Lakhi Rai's wife and daughters-in-law had made a pyre of sandalwood in the centre of their courtyard. We placed the Guru's body on it. All the family touched his feet, Lakhi Rai said a short prayer and lit the pyre. His wife brought out a shawl and wrapped the Guru's head in it. 'Take this to the Guru's son in Anandpur,' she said, handing me the bundle. "The Guru will take you there in safety.'

As I went up the ridge, I looked back to make sure no one was following me. In the distance the flames of the funeral pyre in the courtyard of Lakhi Rai's house flickered. The storm had gone as suddenly as it had come and the sky was clear and full of stars. It was a few days after the full moon. I quickened my steps. By the time the moon came up, I was many kos from Dilli on the way to Anandpur.

At last the Guru had performed the great miracle. He had given a carrier of shit and stinking carcasses the privilege of carrying his sacred head in his arms. Hereafter anyone who called me unclean would have his mouth stuffed with dung.

I was now Jaita Rangreta the true son of the Guru.

UNDERSTANDING SIKH MUSEUMS IN CONTEMPORARY INDIA

DR KANIKA SINGH*

This well researched article of Dr Kanika Singh may aptly be described as a sequel to her scholarly lecture on the state of Sikh Museums delivered recently in the Institute Of Sikh Studies, Chandigarh. She has examined the two prominent Sikh Museums and pointed out the glaring indifference and ignorance in the community of what should a museum really look like ! The article aims at educating, and not criticising, the Sikh community of the importance and significance of good museums in the life of Sikhs as a vibrant people. The article underlines the fact that in the modern world, the great nations and communities can ignore the building up of a good museum at their own peril.

– Editor

ABSTRACT

A number of Sikh museums have been built in independent India, commissioned both by the government and religious organisations. Sikh museums are unusual: their display consists of modern history paintings depicting scenes from the Sikh past rather than historical artefacts. These paintings are ubiquitous in popular visual culture. The key questions examined in this paper are: when, why and by whom are Sikh museums created; the significance of the museum's presence in popular culture; the notion of heritage in these museums; and their role in contemporary India. A study of Sikh museums is valuable in understanding the museum as an institution, and its influence on the

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heritage politics of contemporary India.

SIKH MUSEUMS IN INDIA

A number of Sikh museums have been established in India since independence. By the term ‘Sikh museum’, I refer to museums that narrate the history and life of the Sikh Gurus, their most dedicated followers and significant events in the history of the Sikh community. Sikh museums are unusual: they contain few artifacts of historical value. The display is almost entirely made up of modern history paintings¹ which narrate events from the Sikh past (figure 1). Most paintings are oil on canvas done in a western realist style. Among the most popularly illustrated are the stories from the life of the founder and the first Guru, Nanak (1469–1526), examples of his divinity as a child and his travels through the Indian subcontinent; the baptism ceremony and the creation of the *Khalsa* by the tenth and the last Guru, Gobind Singh (1666–1708);² scenes depicting community service (*sewa*) and the community kitchens (*langar*); battles fought by the Sikhs particularly against the Mughals and the Afghans; and scenes of martyrdom remembering the Sikhs who gave up their life in defense of their faith.

Sikh museums are often found as adjuncts of gurdwaras, but some exist independently as well. In large museums, the display can be a few hundred paintings in a building separate from the gurdwara. In smaller sites, the display may constitute just a few canvases or prints of paintings along a wall. Some recent museums have adopted multi-media displays based on history paintings. The museum display is widely available as religious prints in bazaars, in social media as music videos, animation and as pedagogical material in academic works, children’s books, popular tracts. These visuals enjoy tremendous popularity in the Sikh community and are a major source of popular history for the Sikhs.

There are several features which sets apart the Sikh museum from a traditional museum in both Western and South Asian context. While designated a ‘museum’, there is no drive to collect, classify or preserve historical remains in Sikh museums. Sikh museums rarely have a curator and it is common for artists to be associated with specific museums.

These artists are commissioned to create history paintings for the museum. The paintings are not unique, rare or antique, nor are they relic objects associated with the Gurus. The claimed uniqueness is that of the narrative, that of Sikh heritage. The display is malleable in its circulation and in its form; it is widely available for use, reuse and consumption in popular culture. The audience comes to the museum to see something they are already familiar with—as stories, and in their visual form too. There is a perceptible overlap of the secular and the sacred in the Sikh museum. This is evident in the display and visitor behaviour, the location of the museums (often as part of a sacred landscape) and its sponsorship by both religious and secular authorities. What then, is the nature of the museum? If the history paintings are anyway available everywhere, why do we then need a museum to house them? And why so many Sikh museums?

The politics of museums in India has only recently been commented upon by scholars. These studies can be broadly divided into two: the first, on government museums which were first planned and built during colonial rule, and their trajectory in independent India, such as the Indian Museum, Kolkata and the National Museum, New Delhi (Guha-Thakurta 2004, Singh 2003). These works examine colonial museums in close relation to the history of archaeology in India and have especially noted the museums' role in development of a specific idea of India's history, located in its material evidence such as sculptures. The second strand of scholarship focuses on a new kind of museum which has recently emerged in India, built by non-state actors. These museums are often notable for their spectacular architecture and multimedia display, for example, the Akshardham Cultural Complex, New Delhi (Brosius 2011). These works have highlighted how the boundaries between shrines and museums are indistinguishable in these institutions, and how religious practices specific to a particular group are presented as heritage for larger communities.

Within this field, very little is known about Sikh museums, their emergence and their modes of representation. The existing scholarship on Sikh museums focusses on single institutions and two Sikh museums have been studied so far—Central Sikh Museum at Amritsar,

and Virasat-e Khalsa (Khalsa Heritage Complex) in Anandpur Sahib, both in Punjab. Central Sikh Museum is the first Sikh museum built in India and is located in the Golden Temple complex, a site of tremendous religious and political significance. Virasat-e Khalsa is a recently built mega-museum complex, notable for its spectacular architecture designed by Moshe Safdie, the well-known architect of holocaust museums around the world. Launois (Sat Kaur) (2003) questions the relevance of the Virasat-e Khalsa, in terms of resources required for the project as well as definition of Sikh identity in the museum. Chopra (2010, 2013, 2018) analyses the mode and the significance of the commemoration of events of 1984 at the Central Sikh Museum and the Golden Temple. Singh (2015) sees the Virasat-e Khalsa as representative of the emergence of the holocaust museum paradigm in India, with an emphasis on the trauma suffered by the Sikh community through its history. Mathur and Singh ([2015] 2017b) and Glover (2014) consider Virasat-e Khalsa within the larger context of monumental architecture and shrines recently built in India and view it as a site of post-national claims by a minority community in a Hindu-dominated state. These works recognise Sikh museums as important sites of Sikh memory and identity in contemporary India.

This paper expands the field of enquiry to provide a comprehensive overview of the emergence of Sikh museums in contemporary India. I trace the creation of Sikh museums, the networks of patronage which commissions them, and examine the circulation of this display across multiple spheres. I argue that this visual and narrative construction of Sikh history is highly influential and that Sikh museums are an important vantage point for understanding heritage politics in contemporary India. The idea of history as represented in Sikh museums is narrow and lacking in criticality. It provides interesting insights into the dynamics within the Sikh community and its relationship with the Indian nation-state and the other communities in it. Further, Sikh museums are an important site for examining the nature of the museum as it developed in India.

2 EMERGENCE OF SIKH MUSEUMS

Both Sikh museums and the history paintings in them, have been commissioned by two distinct authorities: religious bodies, notably

the gurdwara management committees, and the government. The *Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee* (SGPC) and the Delhi Sikh Gurdwara Management Committee (DSGMC) are influential and rich religious bodies which regulate Sikh religious affairs and manage the most important gurdwaras in India. Table 1 lists some prominent Sikh museums located in Punjab and Delhi, the year of their establishment, their sponsors and the artists commissioned to work for the museum.

Table 1: *Prominent Sikh museums in India*. Compiled by: author

Museum	Year	Sponsor	Artists
Central Sikh Museum, Golden Temple, Amritsar, Punjab	1958	SGPC	Kirpal Singh (1923–90), Sobha Singh (1901–86), Gurdit Singh (1900–81), Amolak Singh (1950–2006), R.M. Singh (b. 1965), Bodhraj (1934–1992), Devender Singh (b. 1947)
Anglo-Sikh Wars Memorial, Ferozepur, Punjab	1976	Govt. of Punjab	Kirpal Singh, Devender Singh
	1983	Govt. of Punjab	Guru Teg Bahadur Museum, Anandpur Sahib, Punjab Jawant Singh (d. 1991) , Kirpal Singh, Devender Singh
Bhai Mati Das Museum, Sis Ganj Gurdwara, Delhi	2001	DSGMC	Bodhraj, Devender Singh, R.M. Singh, Mehar Singh (b. 1929), Kirpal Singh, Amolak Singh
Baba Baghel Singh Sikh Heritage Multimedia Complex, Bangla Sahib Gurdwara, Delhi	First in the 1970s; renovated, reopened in 2014	DSGMC	Originally paintings by Kirpal Singh, Jarnail Singh (b. 1956) and G.S. Sohan Singh (1914–1999);

			New multimedia display based on history paintings
Virasat-e Khalsa, Anandpur Sahib, Punjab	2011	Govt. of Punjab	Multi-media display, mixed style Interpretation Centre,
Golden Temple, Amritsar, Punjab	2016	Govt. of Punjab	Multi-media display based on history paintings

One of the most notable patrons of history paintings has been the Punjab and Sind Bank (PSB) and it is important to note the bank's role in the promotion of Sikh heritage³ through history paintings. PSB was a private bank founded in 1908 and subsequently nationalised by the Indian government in 1980.⁴ Since the 1970s, PSB has regularly published illustrated calendars on Sikh history. Each year, the bank chose a theme from Sikh history for its annual calendar and commissioned artists to illustrate that theme. The bank continued to commission paintings for its calendars for a period of almost three decades. Many important events from Sikh history were represented visually for the first time in PSB's calendars, and these images went on to create a template which continues to be followed decades later.⁵ Incidentally, it is PSB's collection of paintings which form the major part of the collection at the Bhai Mati Das Museum at Sis Ganj gurdwara, Delhi.

2.1 INTERSECTING THREADS OF PATRONAGE

While the SGPC or DSGMC and the Punjab Government are distinct authorities, these networks of patronage intersect and overlap. Firstly, they are united by a common interest in highlighting the Sikh past through museums and production of popular pedagogical material using history paintings. Secondly, irrespective of who commissions the museums and the paintings, the display is nearly identical. Except for the Virasat-e Khalsa (which is stylistically more diverse), these museums overwhelmingly use history paintings. Thirdly, it is the same

set of artists who work for the gurdwaras as well as the government: Kirpal Singh, Devender Singh, Bodhraj, Mehar Singh, R.M. Singh are among the most popular artists. Additionally, government employees and office-bearers in religious organisations often work closely with each other on pedagogical projects on Sikh heritage (such as organising commemorative events and exhibitions, publishing books and popular literature), and sometimes individuals hold positions in both the sectors. An institution like the PSB well illustrates this. PSB's Chairman, Inderjeet Singh (1911–1998) was advisor to some SGPC publications on Sikh history. Satbir Singh (1932–94), a prolific writer on Sikh history, was a member of the *Dharam Prachar Committee* (lit. the Committee for Propagation of Religion) of the SGPC and was a consultant to the PSB for its illustrated calendars. Take, for example, a popularly available illustrated storybook on Sikh history published by the SGPC: *Nikkijyan jinda vadda saka: Chhote Sahibzadiyan di shahidi di sachitra sakhi* (Great Deeds by Young Lives: Illustrated Story of the Martyrdom of the Chhote Sahibzaade or the Younger Princes). For this book, Inderjeet Singh was the chief advisor, the 'historical background' was provided by Satbir Singh and the illustrations were by Devender Singh (SGPC 1976).⁶ The catalogue (or *Album*, as it is titled) of the Central Sikh Museum, published by the SGPC, gives credits to Inderjit Singh for "expert advice" and acknowledges Satbir Singh as the writer (SGPC, 1991).

These intersecting threads of patronage are significant for they extend the museum's reach and its sphere of influence to multiple domains outside the portals of the museum. Collectively, this has led to the production of an authoritative notion of Sikh heritage, and the creation of a visual and narrative template which is highly influential in contemporary India.

Moreover, these intersecting threads of patronage have ensured an indistinguishable merging of the secular and the sacred. In case of the Sikh museum, scholars have noted the religious content of the display housed within the portals of the museum. In her study of the Central Sikh Museum, Chopra (2018: 9) notes, "[the museum]... is a space where belief and historical events are visually woven together..." She argues that this is evident from the museum's narration of stories of sacred people (i.e. the Gurus and the martyrs), and the devotion of

the museum visitors towards the display of religious portraits by removing their shoes and covering their head, as if entering a shrine (Chopra 2018: 9). Mathur and Singh ([2015] 2017b) similarly consider the Virasat-e Khalsa as a site which combines the museum with the shrine (and a theme park), where a futuristic and spectacular museum form is deployed to narrate the story of a religious group. While the religious nature of the display does lead to a merging of secular and sacred in the museum, it is not the only factor. In addition to the sacred nature of display, we must consider the overlapping strands of religious and secular patronage as providing the foundation for the convergence of sacred and secular at the site of the Sikh museum.

3 SIKH MUSEUM IN POPULAR CULTURE

Another factor which makes Sikh museums remarkable is that the contents of the museum are not confined within its portals. Sikh history paintings are widely reproduced in popular cultural spheres and in different materialities: pocket calendars printed by local commercial establishments, official calendars of government institutions like the PSB, illustrated storybooks, academic works, films and animation available on the internet. For instance, Devender Singh's illustrations for *Nikkian jinda vadda saka* also appear in a recently made online video narrating the same story, which in turn, is part of the display at Baba Baghel Singh Multimedia Heritage Complex in Delhi (see Sahney 2013). The imagery of the history paintings is also reproduced in musical and theatrical performances which are routinely part of commemorative functions. The Sikhs participating in these performances re-enact historical events often dressed in deep blue robes, emulating the 18th century Khalsa warriors; those playing enemy soldiers are dressed in green—the costume and makeup replicate the colour-scheme and style of the history paintings (a discussion of the visual elements appears in the next section). TV programmes covering such events use history paintings in tandem with videos and photographs of the event, establishing a visual, narrative and temporal continuity between history, history paintings and the performance.⁷ Through such circulation of history paintings, Sikh museums become an inextricable part of educational, religious, commemorative and entertainment networks (see Appadurai and Breckenridge (1992) for interocularity

of museum displays in India). Supported by a wide network of sponsorship, the ubiquitous presence of Sikh history paintings when combined with the authority of the museum, gives the museum's narrative a dominance that is difficult to challenge.

An incident which played out in the Indian Parliament, the nation's highest legislative body, well illustrates this. In 1974, the Parliament secretariat distributed an illustrated calendar on Sikh history, published by Punjab Markfed, an agricultural cooperative. The calendar included paintings of Sikh sacrifices in the face of Mughal oppression and in the freedom struggle against the British. Some of the members of Parliament objected to the calendar in the House of Representatives (Lok Sabha), pointing out that such depiction of alleged atrocities by the Muslims against the Sikhs and the calendar's distribution by the government body would fan communalism by targeting and maligning a particular community. The Speaker of the House responded to these objections by noting that such pictures were circulated widely, were present in museums and were historical reproductions (Lok Sabha Debates 1974:columns 195–206). Zail Singh, the then Chief Minister of Punjab, stated that the calendar was a historical document.⁸ G.S. Tohra, then President of SGPC, too, claimed that it was vivid depiction of historical events.⁹ This episode well illustrates the paintings' status as *evidence* of Sikh history rather than *representations* of the Sikh past.

Further, history paintings retain their sacred value even with this prolific reproduction in popular culture. As Inglis (1995: 52, 72) has argued in case of calendar prints of Hindu deities, "[the]mechanically reproduced images continue to participate in the sacrality of the "objects" and their sacredness is played out in diverse and many forms. The consumption of Sikh history paintings at shrines, bazaars and museums is, according to Chopra (2018: 8), a clear evidence and performance of belief and each location becomes a site for "visual remembrance" (Chopra 2018: xiv–xv). While Chopra makes this observation specifically about the commemoration of martyrs and of traumatic events in Sikh history, this argument remains valid for the larger canvas of Sikh heritage, and its invocation and consumption through history paintings. Thus, each of these visual reproductions of

the Sikh past becomes a site which replicates the narrative of the museum, retains a connection with it and also maintains the overlap of the sacred and the secular.

This ability of the Sikh museum to flow between seemingly distinct domains gives rise to a number of questions: how do faith, memory, history, visibility and materiality interact across these networks? How does the circulation of the Sikh museums' display across multiple spheres shape our understanding of the museum as an institution? Is every site and mode of production and consumption of the past a museum? Murphy (2015) has proposed that consumption of the past at Sikh museums, gurdwaras, heritage trails and through objects constitutes a Sikh museumising imagination. This broad ontological claim fails to recognise the particular nature of Sikh museums and its consistent creation and use in independent India. In the Sikh case, the key point remains that the museum form and nomenclature was adopted as distinct from the shrine and other modes of performing the past. The creation of Sikh museums is an articulation of a conceptual relationship with the past, the need for which was particularly felt in independent India.

4 THE STORY OF SIKH PAST

In a typical Sikh museum, the narrative follows a chronological order: it presents the story of the development of Sikh community, beginning with Guru Nanak in the 15th century, followed by the other Gurus in the order of their succession. The display includes their portraits, stories of their birth, childhood, their contribution to the development of Sikh religion. Different aspects of each Guru's life and personality are emphasized: selfless service, kindness, humility and belief in equality, for the early Gurus, and the military prowess of Guru Gobind Singh.

After the Gurus, the narrative usually takes us into the 18th century, which is shown as a period of turmoil for the community when it faced repression at the hands of the Mughals and the Afghans. Some of the most well-known stories in the Sikh tradition, of bravery in face of adversity and martyrdom in defence of faith, refer to this period. A frequently remembered sacrifice is that of the warrior, Banda

Bahadur (1670–1716). After the death of Guru Gobind Singh, Banda mobilised an army of Sikh soldiers, swept through parts of Punjab, severely disrupting the Mughal rule in the region. According to Sikh tradition, he did this to avenge the death of the younger sons of Guru Gobind Singh, who were bricked alive by the Mughals. Banda was eventually captured and brought to Delhi, the capital of the Mughals, and tortured and executed. It is said that he was made to watch the killing of his four-year old son, whose flesh was forcefully fed to him. Then, Banda's own flesh was torn from his body till he died (figure 2). Such gory scenes of violence are commonly depicted in history paintings in museums.

The scenes of martyrdom are interspersed with portraits of military commanders who controlled parts of Punjab in the 18th century. Next, the story moves to the rule of Maharaja Ranjit Singh (1780–1839) in Punjab, with the display including portraits of the royal family and court scenes. The paintings emphasize the glory of his court and the secular and tolerant nature of his rule.

Beyond this point, the narrative often thins out. Often we find ourselves directly in the 20th century, with a few canvases on the freedom movement and the Sikhs' participation in the struggle against British rule. These include portraits of revolutionaries from Punjab, especially, Bhagat Singh (1907–1931) and Udham Singh (1899–1940), who remain iconic names in India. Some museums also feature Sikh participation in the Indian armed forces.

This visualisation of history is notable for its use of realism and the iconography and colour scheme. Realistic depiction is an important factor determining the popularity of these paintings (and, of South Asian popular visual art, in general). Some of the artists involved in creating Sikh history paintings were interviewed as part of this research and they were unanimous in highlighting the value of realism in establishing an instant connect with the viewers and of its accessibility as a narrative form. As Kapur has demonstrated, realism significantly influences the way images are perceived. It 'historicizes' the stories and characters giving them real faces, locations and characteristics (1993: 97) and simultaneously limits the possibilities of interpreting these in multiple ways, by fixing the narrative and the form. The choice

of visual elements and colours in Sikh history paintings is also significant. In fig. 2 there is a clear contrast between the body/facial features of Banda and his executioners. Banda is fair-skinned with handsome, noble features and wears a white loin-cloth representing purity. The executioners are dark-skinned with grotesque features and are clothed in black literally embodying darkness and cruelty. A Muslim cleric is shown dressed in green, a colour commonly associated with the Muslim community in modern India. In other history paintings and performances, Sikhs (dressed in blue, yellow, the colours of the Khalsa) are often shown fighting against enemy soldiers who dress in green.

4.1 HERITAGE IN SIKH MUSEUMS

This story of Sikh heritage is a powerful and a highly emotional narrative. Standing before the paintings, one feels the kindness of the Gurus and the energy of the Khalsa; the fearlessness of these Sikhs fills the heart with pride, and sacrifice of the martyrs is deeply inspiring. The men and women shown in the museum embody everything that is dear to the Sikh faith: selfless service, humility, equality, the ability to fight for justice, sacrificing oneself in defence of one's belief.

However, these ideal personalities however do not appear in their larger context. They are shown as exemplars of faith, but without telling us the milieu in which they worked. The narrative is entirely personality-centric. Since no context is not provided, the sole motivating force of history and the life of people depicted in the museum, is faith. All actions of individuals are thus inspired by the ideals of faith or are in defence of faith. Such a narrative strips away all context for the development of the community, including the Sikhs' close links with other groups, their interactions with different cultural traditions, and gives no indication of the transformation of the community over time. Sikh history in the museum then emerges as a long saga of exemplary Sikh behaviour inspired by faith. One gets little information on the historical evolution of the Sikh tradition with reference to caste, gender, language, region.¹⁰

Such a narration of the Sikh past projects the Khalsa as the only Sikh identity, while avoiding any mention of the diversity of beliefs and practices within the Sikh tradition. Indeed, Sikh museums are

built with the purpose that the visitors come to know the glorious historical legacy of the Sikhs and the sacrifices of its martyrs who are all identified as Khalsa. The history paintings inspire the younger generations to emulate these ideal personalities to “become Sikhs, Singh and Khalsa, true to their faith.”¹¹ All Sikhs, even those in pre-Khalsa times are depicted as the Khalsa (with uncut hair covered in a turban, full flowing beard) even when there is no historical evidence for it. This is a missed opportunity for developing a critical perspective towards the past. When museums around the world have been compelled to engage with issues of representation, diversity and the need for rethinking the past, one cannot fail to notice the absence of such an approach in Sikh museums.

The focus on the Gurus and martyrs is common to most Sikh museums and there is little information on contemporary events (except in the Central Sikh Museum and the Virasat-e Khalsa). Some of these differences in display could be due to factors like the space available in the museum and the local historical association of the museum with the site. However, what explains the omission of the Partition of 1947 and the events of 1984—events which had tremendous impact on the Sikh community—in most Sikh museums? Das (1995: 121) points out that, “the contemporary Sikh community is defined with reference to certain key events of the past which emphasize the building up of the community on the basis of its heroic deeds.” This might explain the focus on the Gurus and the martyrs. And, this is probably why there is very little representation of events such as the Partition. As Brass (2006: 21) notes, the Sikhs are unable to “integrate this disaster in a fully satisfying way into Sikh history and hagiography.” This, he argues, is because, the victimhood of the Partition is humiliating to acknowledge, and the Sikhs were as much the perpetrators of violence in 1947, as they were at the receiving end of it (Brass 2006: 21–22).¹²

An important factor determining these differences in the display is the differing priorities of the Sikh community in different locations. Sikh politics in Amritsar, we must bear in mind, differs from Sikh politics in Delhi. This is especially evident in the representation of the events of the year 1984. The Central Sikh Museum, Amritsar is

perhaps the only Sikh museum in India which includes the Operation Blue Star and Khalistani militants. Portraits of Bhindrawale and of the assassins of Indira Gandhi are displayed prominently in the SGPC-run Central Sikh Museum, enjoying the same status as that of the 18th century Sikh martyrs. No Sikh museum in Delhi displays content related to Khalistan. And this choice is not, in my view, based so much on the difference in the secular and religious setting of individual Sikh museums (as argued by Singh [2015: 450]) but rather, in the different stakes for Sikhs politics in different regions.¹³ These variations between museums in different locations are significant as they indirectly reveal the tensions within the Sikh community and differences in what is perceived to be the community's history. The museums' narrative, particularly of contemporary events, is evidently not subscribed by all. It also brings into focus the important political role played by the Sikh museums in independent India and why is it necessary to create and control them.

5 WHY DO WE NEED SIKH MUSEUMS?

The question why Sikh museums are needed may be examined in the context of events in independent India. Their creation coincides with some of the most significant developments in contemporary India, which shaped the Sikh community's use of its history and the perception of its own place in the Indian nation. In independent India, the Sikh community often sees itself in conflict, both religious and political, with the nation-state. In the years leading up to the independence of India and the Partition in 1947, there was a deep sense of anxiety within the Sikh community about their position as a minority in a Muslim-dominated Pakistan, on the one hand, and a Hindu-dominated India on the other. The mood of "dejection, resentment and indignation" (Grewal, [1994] 2009: 179) at the proposals leading to the division of the country seemed to continue in the decades after independence, especially in the agitation for Punjabi Suba in the late 1950s and '60s. The demand for Punjabi Suba gradually mutated into a demand for a Sikh homeland, leading up to the militant movement for a separate and autonomous Sikh state of Khalistan in the '80s and '90s. The question of Sikh identity and their place in the Indian nation was a theme common to these political agitations. The

Indian army's attack on the Golden Temple and the anti-Sikh violence in 1984 which was abetted by the ruling government, have left a deep sense of hurt and betrayal among the Sikhs. The injustice towards the Sikhs in independent India is perceived to be a continuation of the historical oppression suffered by the community since its inception, and is expressed in its commemorative practices. The 1970s and '80s were also a period of religious revivalism following rapid changes in the rural economy of Punjab (see Grewal ([1994] 2009) and Singh (1992) for an overview of these developments).

This is also the time when a number of state museums are being built by the governments in the new states created and reorganised within the boundaries of India. Mathur and Singh ([2015] 2017a: 6 n. 17) note a 'wave of museum making' (representing official culture) following reorganisation of states in the different regions of India. Through independent India, Sikh museums have been established and variously used by both the state and the Sikh community. It is noteworthy that the first Sikh museum (Central Sikh Museum) was founded as early as 1958 and was not a project of the Indian nation-state. And, the articulation of Sikh heritage has an uneven relationship with 'Indian' heritage. On the one hand, the Sikhs see themselves as proud contributors to the nation. Guru Teg Bahadur (1621–75) is popularly called *Hind di Chadar* or the protective cloak over Hindustan.¹⁴ The claim of Sikh conquest of the Mughal capital Delhi in 18th century is projected as the beginning of the struggle for independence for India. On the other hand, Sikh museums and history paintings articulate a unique Sikh identity which resists perceived attempts of assimilation into the majority Hindu population in India. They also articulate a defiance of Indian state's version of events, most notably that of 1984. Combined with this is a sense of failure of the Hindu-majority Indian nation to recognise the contribution of the Sikhs. There is an increasing articulation of the demand for 'national' recognition for Sikh contributions in form of inclusion in textbooks and through proclamation of national holidays.

In this background, the use of the museum form becomes even more crucial. The museum is necessary perhaps because it is not enough for the paintings and the stories with their claims of Sikh heritage to

remain in the religious and the popular cultural sphere. The authority of the museum is needed to consolidate and legitimate the claims of inclusion or challenges to the national, and to lend strength to contemporary claims made on this narrative. The museum form is particularly effective for such a purpose, as it is recognised globally. Moreover, this very secular authority of the museum confirms and consolidates the sacredness of the narrative. The Sikh museum uniquely draws upon the western model of the secular museum and transforms it for its own use.

The museum form is also successful in reaching out to multiple audiences. At one level, the Sikh community seems to be the museums' primary target, with their emphasis on inspiring the younger generations to emulate their ancestors. At another level, the fact that Sikh museums are used as highly political sites, indicates that the museums are regularly used to communicate with the ruling groups including the political and religious leaders. The more recent multimedia Sikh museums (such as the Virasat-e Khalsa, Baba Baghel Singh Sikh Heritage Multimedia Complex and the Golden Temple Interpretation Centre) also indicate a desire to address a larger audience consisting of the upwardly mobile traveller and consumer, both Indian and foreign, who have an appetite for experiences combining education, leisure and spiritual satisfaction.

Sikh museums continue to be built in the present times their numbers and consistency making them a noteworthy phenomenon in contemporary India. The fact that more and more Sikh museums are being built with the same message, is significant. It reveals that the museums' pedagogical (and political) project, though highly influential, still remains incomplete and exposed to challenges. And that, there exist differences in Sikh practices, beliefs and understandings of history.

6 WHAT IS A SIKH 'MUSEUM'?

Existing theories on museums and heritage have focussed on western societies where musealisation has been variously considered as part of the heritage industry, the exhibitionary complex, as nostalgia in face of loss of tradition and as part of visual media spectacles. In the Indian context, most studies on museums explore the institution's origins under colonialism, and its continuation in different postcolonial

forms, either as a project of the Indian nation-state or as an expression of identity politics.

A study of Sikh museums must take into account (a) their sheer number and the consistency of their emergence over decades; (b) their distinctive nature owing to their display, their ability to circulate across multiple cultural spheres, and the overlap of secular and sacred in their patronage, display and consumption. It may be useful to see Sikh museums as a contemporary Indian phenomenon and a “complex” or an “assemblage” (drawing upon Macdonald 2013: 6) where seemingly disparate elements of heritage interact in dynamic ways. Materiality, visuality, faith, identity, history and politics—each is an autonomous element influencing the Sikh museums and, in turn, shaped by it. Each also provides a different perspective for studying Sikh museums, some of which are highlighted in this paper: tracing a long-term pattern of emergence of Sikh museums; unearthing the intersecting threads of patronage, of the government, religious and educational organisations and individuals; considering Sikh museums as part of wider pedagogical, religious, cultural and political networks where the museum is popular, familiar, easily accessible and present in different forms; and in the background of developments in independent India which have shaped the Sikh community’s use of its own past.

Sikh museums are a rich site of examination from a range of perspectives and such an approach would be valuable in re-examining our understanding of museums and heritage in an India context with wider implications for other non-western societies. Sikh museums are also a useful vantage point for examining some of the most significant debates of contemporary India—on nation, citizenship, identity and history—through the perspective of museum and heritage studies.

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Endnotes

- 1 History painting refers to a genre of painting traced to 17th century Europe which had subjects drawn from classical history and mythology. Here, I use the term to refer to modern paintings done in academic style, which illustrate events from Sikh history.
- 2 Khalsa is the baptised Sikh identity, created by Guru Gobind Singh in 1699. The Khalsa were to wear the five Ks on their person, follow a code of conduct (rahit), and would be called Singhs. These 5 Ks are: kara (steel bangle), kesh (uncut hair), kangha (comb), kirpan (dagger), kachha (drawers), and they constitute essential markers of Sikh identity today.
- 3 For meanings and uses of heritage, see Lowenthal (1985), Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (1995), Smith (2006), Harrison (2013). ‘Heritage’ is most commonly understood as elements of the past which are of value in the present (and the future); it needs to be preserved; and is important in defining a community’s identity and history. PSB’s commissioning of history paintings was for the purpose (as expressed in their publications) of promoting the teachings of the Sikh Gurus and the making the younger generation aware of this legacy. See Singh (1995), Singh (2017: Ch 4).
- 4 The founders of the bank were Bhai Vir Singh (1872–1957), Sardar Tarlochan Singh (1872–1947) and Sir Sunder Singh Majithia (1872–1941). They were part of Singh Sabha, the influential 19th century religious reform movement in Punjab which emphasised the distinct identity of Sikhism as a separate religion from Hinduism.

- 5 The paintings are frequently ‘copied’ by other artists and individual artists may create multiple copies for use by several clients. This is quite common in the calendar art industry in South Asia.
- 6 As acknowledged in the publishing information of the book. It narrates the story the martyrdom of the two younger sons of Guru Gobind Singh in 1704 at the hands of Mughal officers, and is one of the most moving stories from the Sikh tradition.
- 7 For example, the Fateh Diwas (Day of Victory) celebrations organised by the DSGMC in Delhi in 2014 included the performance of a play, *Raj Karega Khalsa* (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LfzfUJ1X0HU>, accessed on 19 February 2015). The celebrations were covered by PTC news channel in their programme series ‘*Goonjan Sikh Virse Dīyaan*’ (Echoes of Sikh Heritage) which used modern history paintings of Sikh warriors, marching and fighting battles together with photographs and videos of the 2014 celebrations. (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yux0Vhdd3Fc>, accessed on 19 February 2015).
- 8 ‘Punjab not to ban ‘Moghul calendar’’. 1974. Hindustan Times. April 7.
- 9 ‘Taura defends calendar’. 1974. Hindustan Times. April 9.
- 10 This is not to say that the construction of the past in Sikh museums is lacking in historical basis. It is that such an idea of history lacks a critical perspective and is quite limited. There is little attention given to diversity of viewpoints within the tradition of Sikh history writing and in modern historiography.
- 11 As proclaimed in the introductory panel in Bhai Mati Das Museum, Sis Ganj Gurdwara, Delhi. The original text is in Punjabi. English translation is mine.
- 12 Only the recently built Virasat-e Khalsa includes Partition as part of the narrative of Sikh history. In 2017, Partition Museum was inaugurated in the city of Amritsar, the only museum on the theme in India. However, it is not a Sikh museum. It would be interesting to see examine the representation of the Partition both these museums, especially in light of Brass’s arguments.
- 13 This is because of difference in caste and class composition of the Sikh populations in these two regions. Delhi Sikhs are mostly Khatri, an urban, trading group. In Punjab, it is the Jats (a rural, agrarian caste) who are dominant in politics and in control of Sikh shrines and institutions (like the SGPC). These differences are particularly revealed in their respective political alliances and their stance on contemporary issues. The demand for a separate Sikh homeland (Khalistan) had significant

support among the Jat Sikhs in Punjab, but little currency in Delhi. Here, it is worthwhile to observe the museums' approach to the issue of caste. Sikh museums invariably mention the Gurus' emphasis on equality and their anti-caste stance. Yet, caste discrimination is a reality in Sikh society and the so-called lower castes do not subscribe to the Khalsa version of history and faith and are followers of other religious orders (deras) in contemporary Punjab. This reality does not find any mention in Sikh museums.

- 14 According to Sikh tradition, Teg Bahadur, the ninth Guru, sacrificed his life to protect a group of Hindus who were being forced to convert to Islam by the Mughal emperor, Aurangzeb (1618–1707).

CHARITY FOR THE SPARK OF DIVINE: CONCEPTUALIZING SEVA IN SIKHISM

PROF RONKI RAM*

Prof Ronki Ram is perhaps the only scholar who has been writing on the role and contribution of the lowly and the downtrodden in the history of the Panjab, especially the Sikhs. His brilliant exposition of the concept of Seva in Sikhi is quite academic and persuasive.

– Editor

Seva (also spelt as *Sewa*) literarily refers to selfless and meaningful service dedicated to help human beings irrespective of caste, creed, gender and class. In Sikhism, it assumes much broader meaning extending its content beyond mundane domain and connecting it with the fathomless spiritual realm that helps in getting rid of egoistic self and cultivating humility. It generates a sense of contentment in the mind of its performers, which in turn produces tranquillity and positive impact on the fellowship of the community. *Seva*-led collective wellbeing eventually fosters a mutually supportive and interconnected society. Being one of the foremost postulates of the philosophy and practice of Sikhism, *Seva* figures numerous times in the holy scriptures of Sri Guru Granth Sahib (SGGS). It assigns special importance to selfless acts and voluntary service for the welfare of the entire humanity and occupies a central place in the ethical domain of the community. Carried out without any concern for tangible and intangible personal gains, *Seva* acts as a guiding almanac for community living. It divests

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its practitioners of *Haumai* (ego) and makes them capable of walking on the path of spiritual attainment. In its real sense, *Seva* equates service to mankind with the worship of *Akal Purkh*. It instils a faculty of self-negation among its performers to seek His grace to serve others without any sort of expectation in return.

There is no space at all for self-glory and personal benefit in *Seva* in Sikhism. It is a service with devotion to Waheguru for His grace. Since all human beings are considered equal in the spiritual realm of God, they need to be served without any binary of ‘we and others’. It is in this context that *Seva* in Sikhism assumes the highest virtue of worship bereft of all sorts of rituals, ceremonies and structural paraphernalia of puja. The most sacred practice of performance of puja in Sikhism is selfless service to humanity, which is also the essence of *Gurbani*— holy Sikh scriptures. It draws its strength from the precept of the *Gurbani* that all human beings are one and the same in the spiritual domain of Waheguru. Serving humanity without any sort of discrimination as well as expectation of any kind of reward in return transforms one into a *Gurmukh* (one who has attained inner realisation) capable of recognising the divine spark within all. *Seva*, in this way, transcends societal boundaries and fosters inter-community solidarity. The notion of the *Seva* of fellow human beings as an act of devotion to Almighty metamorphoses it into a sacred act – service to Waheguru. Thus, *Seva* in Sikhism distinguishes it from its mundane meaning. It does not assign any special status to its practitioners vis-à-vis the one who is the recipient of *Seva*. It is equated with sharing (*vandchhakna*) one’s own hard earned livelihood with others who are in need of any kind of help. Sharing in the form of *shukrana* (thanks giving to God for being kind) rather than taking any pride in the process of helping others adds uniqueness to *Seva* in Sikhism.

Seva in Sikhism implies that it is imperative for a disciple to serve the needy, sick and poor without allowing any kind of pride or glory to draw out of this self-negating act. The real purpose of *Seva* in Sikhism is to generate humility, compassion and devotion to Almighty. It inculcates *sat* (truth), *santokh* (contentment), *sahaj* (natural/innate poise) and *daya* (compassion) in the mind of a practitioner. *Seva* prepares the disciple to tread steadfastly the path to kingdom of God. It rinses him/her of all worldly wickedness and negativities and make a

permanent bond with the Guru. It instils the values of brotherhood, humility, peace and *sarbat da bhala* (welfare of all). What is more important about *Seva* in Sikhism is not only its form but also the state-of-mind with which one performs it. It blesses its performer in two ways: connecting him/her with his/her community on the one hand, and forging an inseparable spiritual bond with the Almighty on the other. *Seva*, in fact, is a kind of worship in the form of social, physical, material or any other kind of service for the welfare of humanity. It is based on a sacred premise that since God reside within all of us, selfless service to humanity in its ultimate form takes the shape of service to God.

Seva in Sikhism binds together its two distinct but inseparable spheres: 'service' and 'worship'. In the house of Baba Nanak 'worship' is the prototype of dedicated work towards humanity and *Akal Purkh*. Worship in Sikhism is not just a ritual or ceremonial act of reciting prayers and lightening lamps in the adoration of anthropomorphic God. Instead, it is all about earning one's livelihood through 'the sweat of one's brow' and sharing its fruits with fellow beings and the needy hailing from any walk of life. Thus, *Seva* in Sikhism is an act of rendering service without any sort of reward – an act of *nishkam seva* – which bestows honour on its performers for providing them a respectable place in the *Dargah of Nirankar* (eternal kingdom of formless God). It is also believed to be helpful in getting rid of one's inner dissipations and becoming capable of building spiritual ties with Waheguru. The concept of *Seva* in Sikhism does not confine itself to physical activities alone. It combines emotional, intellectual and spiritual domains as well. Empathising with someone who feels lonely or dissipated, offering moral support and encouragement at a time when one feels left behind are some of the subtle but more effective modes to rendering selfless *seva*. Supporting the needy and emotionally deprived individuals can usher into a mutually supportive long-lasting harmonious social life. Standing with other during their challenging time is also a noble way of performing *nishkam* (without any expectation) *Seva*. Spending times with lonely and aged persons, listening to their life stories and helping them overcome melancholy foster a sense of calmness and friendly atmosphere in the society.

Another factor that distinguishes *Seva* in Sikhism from its counterparts – *dan* in Hinduism, *zakat* in Islam, charity in Christianity,

and almsgiving in Buddhism – is that it can only be practiced with the grace of Waheguru. It is the will of Waheguru that motivates the disciple to perform *Seva* and rinses his/her ego. In other words, according to the precepts of holy scriptures of Gurbani, only those can perform *Seva* whom Waheguru bless to do so. Guru Amar Das, the third Guru, says that the service of the true Guru is hard. It is obtained by surrendering one's head and by eliminating self-conceit. *Seva* cleans its performers and enables them to find place in Sachkhand, the eternal abode of Waheguru. By serving the lowest of the low, says Baba Nanak, one becomes capable of receiving the grace of Almighty.

Guru Nanak was the pioneer of the all-embracing *Seva* in Sikhism that he began in the form of providing free *Langar* (community food) in Dharamsalas (Gurdwaras) without observing any kind of social, cultural, religious, territorial, lingual and gender boundaries, and enjoining on all human beings to sit together to eat in a common row. *Seva* thus becomes a way to bring equality in society long segregated along caste lines based on four-fold Varna order. He was of the firm views that if one wants to find a place in the eternal Kingdom of God, he/she needs to serve the humanity in this mortal world. He further adds importance to *Seva* while saying that remembering the name of God without serving the humanity is useless and compared it with a tree without fruits. Similar views were also expressed by all the Gurus about *Seva* in the Sikhism.

The postulate of *Seva* in Sikhism as formulated and pioneered by Guru Nanak was maintained by all the Gurus who followed him and lived by this great ideal of service to mankind. Guru Nanak laid the foundation of *Seva* by spending the hard-earned money of his father that he gave him to establish some business, which he instead spent on feeding the sadhus whom he met by chance on the way. He thought it to be a best kind of business to feed sadhus, which has since become an all-embracing practice within Sikhism and also reached in all corners of the world wherever the Sikh diasporas has settled. Baba Nanak maintained the continuity of his regular *langar* by growing his own food in Kartarpur where he toiled hard. It was here that he taught: *kirat karo* (earn an honest living), *vand chhako* (share with others), *naam japo* (remember God). The second Master, Guru Angad Dev, followed the practice to whom Guru Nanak made him a part of his very being

for his selfless service and total submission to his Guru. His wife, Mata Khivi, immortalised herself by rendering relentless *Seva* of *Ghee Wali Kheer* (rice pudding made in clarified butter) in the *Guru Ka Langar*, which is continuing even today at Khadur Sahib. The third Nanak, Guru Amar Das, served his Guru (Guru Angad Dev) for twelve years by fetching water from a far-off river for his early morning bath without a failure. The fourth and fifth Gurus (Guru Ram Das and Guru Arjan Dev) served the *sangat* with their own hands. Guru Arjan Dev took care of the disabled and the lepers personally at Tarn Taran. He attained martyrdom for the noble cause of his faith by going through a most terrible form of tortuous persecution at the hands of the courtiers of Emperor Jahangir. The sixth, seventh, and eighth Gurus also served the *sangat* with a calm mind during the tumultuous period of Moghul rule. The ninth Master, Guru Tegh Bahadur, sacrificed his head for the selfless service of defending the faith of the followers of another religion who approached him for helping hand. He attained martyrdom for the noble cause of human rights and justice – a unique *Seva* of its kind whose example is hard to find in any part of the world. Guru Gobind Singh sacrificed his entire family for the cause of justice against tyranny of Emperor Aurangzeb. He founded Khalsa to put an end to social exclusion and to assign a district identity to save the weak and downtrodden.

Seva is performed with body (*tan*), mind (*maann*) and money (*dban*). All these three forms of service assume distinct meaning in the concept of *Seva* in Sikhism to the extent that it needs to be performed with utmost *nimrata* (humility) *nishkam bhaav* (without desire). *Langar* (free food/community kitchen) served within Gurdwaras and at other public places is a common practice of *Seva* with body in Sikhism being organized daily as well as on various occasions coinciding with the historic dates and events relating to the lives of Gurus and their struggles against injustice and restoration of human dignity and civic rights. *Seva* and *langar* have become synonymous. *Langar* consisted of various services like arranging common kitchen hearths, rations, ingredients for cooking food, distribution of meals, serving of drinking water, washing of utensils and dishes, and cleaning of dining halls. It is also a step towards social equality and care for downtrodden. Guru Angad Dev followed into the footsteps of his predecessor Guru Nanak in continuing the noble practice of *Langar Seva*, which was

institutionalized by the third Guru, Guru Amar Das, who set another noble tradition of partaking *langar* while sitting in a *pangat* (row). He also established the norm of assembly for prayer to be preceded by serving langar i.e. *Pable pangat piche sangat* (first having *langar* together to be followed by spiritual congregation). Since then, it has become a common practice of *Seva* in Sikhism. The institution and the practice of langar also help create social integration – a much needed intervention in a socially segmented society. *Seva* by body (*tan*) refers to physical/manual service of maintaining Gurdwaras, including dusting and polishing the shoes of Sangat, making arrangement for holding spiritual/kirtan congregations, and cleaning utensils. *Seva* with mind includes meditating on the name of Almighty, offering prayers for *sarbat da bhala*. The third kind of *seva* (*dhan*) is observing *daswand* for the community welfare.

Sikh history is brimming with innumerable instances of selfless *Seva*. The *Seva* of Bhai Kanahya, who provided water to all wounded soldiers irrespective of caste and creed sets an example of its own kind in the tradition of *Seva*. On being questioned by Guru Gobind Singh about serving water even to enemy wounded soldiers on a battlefield, Bhai Kanahya replied, “I see none else than your face when I put water into the mouth of a dying soldier. O Guru, it is definitely you”. The Guru felt happy and asked Bhai Kanahya to apply *Marham* (Ointment and dressing) on their wounds also. Another glaring example of selfless *Seva* is Baba Banda Bahadur and his companion Singhs, who, upon capture, boldly refused to embrace Islam and choose death to attain martyrdom for the cause of Panth and justice.

Shiromani Gurdwara Prabhakar Committee (SGPC), Delhi Sikh Gurdwara Management Committee (DSGMC), and similar other Panthic organizations draw inspiration from Sikh principles of *Seva* to perform various kinds of Services for the welfare of humanity. Their role during covid-pandemic is worth mentioning as the later made cylinders of oxygen available when many patients were finding it almost impossible to get admitted in over-crowded hospitals in Delhi. DSGMC made langar of oxygen cylinders in various public places near Gurdwaras in Delhi. The practice of Sikh *Seva* has further been popularised the world over by the concerted efforts undertaken by various Sikh Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs). Their

expertise in making use of modern management techniques as well as new gadgets to reach the needy across the globe is praiseworthy. Khalsa Aid and EcoSikh are two such well-known Sikh Non-Governmental Organizations, whose agile activists lose no time to reach out to people across the continents to help them during their trouble time. *Langar* Aid, Midland Langar Seva Society, and many other similar Sikh NGOs are equally active in different parts of the world providing hot nutritious foods to the undernourished. Khalsa Aid, a UK-based non-profit Sikh organization, founded by UK-based Ravi (Ravinder) Singh in 1999 – coinciding with the 300th anniversary of the foundation of Khalsa – and operating from London with a main office in Patiala, initially catered to the needs of Balkan war refugees in 1999. Gaining widespread support through social media, and funded primarily by community support, it mainly undertakes two types of projects: immediate disaster relief work for looking after the welfare of refugees, and victims of flood, hurricane and other natural calamities; and long-term community development endeavours like Focus Punjab project. Helping the needy people after through verification of their actual life conditions, Khalsa Aid launches long-term welfare programmes for making available to them basic housing, education, medical aid, and other similar types of facilities.

EcoSikh, another well-known Sikh NGO, was conceived in 2009 by the Sikh Council on Religion and Education (SCORE) during United Nations initiative for bringing together representatives from all nine major religions of the world at Windsor Castle, the United Kingdom. It mainly concentrating on environmental issues as the ‘Sikh response to climate change’. Headquartered in Washington DC, with an India office in Ludhiana, EcoSikh promotes green Gurdwaras (e.g., reducing disposable plates), tree plantation drives – such as creating forests with species mentioned in the Guru Granth Sahib – and the Sikh Environment Day on March 14. A major campaign provided 550 saplings to villages for Guru Nanak Dev’s 550th birth anniversary, a program adopted by the Punjab government. While initially funded by the Norwegian government, it is now supported by the Sikh community. EcoSikh bases its mission on the ecological sensitivity demonstrated by the Sikh Gurus, aiming to integrate *Seva* into environmental action globally.

Though much of its work is done in Punjab, especially Moga

district, wherein it has planted more than 5000 trees and plants of 60 different species as mentioned in the Guru Granth Sahib, EcoSikh has a global reach running green projects in Pakistan, Europe, and North America. Mainly funded by the Sikh community and drawing inspiration from the writings, principles, and lived experiences of the Sikh Gurus, especially the seventh Guru Har Rai, who was known for his passion towards nature, EcoSikh has done commendable amount of environmental work focusing on “green gurdwaras,” promoting recycling, tree plantation in each village, launching environmental education projects, and encouraging organic agriculture, cutting on the usage of disposable plates during langar and working towards augmenting the green built around the premises of the Golden Temple in Amritsar. Through the above-mentioned historical and contemporary endeavours, the tradition and essence of selfless *Seva* continues to be a defining feature of Sikhism both at home and abroad.

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SOURCES FOR THE STUDY OF GURU GOBIND SINGH'S LIFE AND TIMES

DR GURINDER SINGH MANN*

Gurinder Singh Mann is a leading scholar of Sikh historical studies. He is reputed for his analysis and interpretations of the events interspersed from Guru Nanak to our own times. His research is methodical and frequently invokes Sikh historical writings, Gurbani and related documentary evidence in support of his formulations. Needless to say that his writings attract the scholars and critics in the same measure. This valuable article gives insightful information on the sources involving the lives of the Tenth and Ninth Guru.

– Editor

This essay surveys the sites, artifacts, and literary texts associated with Guru Gobind Singh's period (1675-1708). In the process, it introduces a set of sources of information as well as attempts at reorientation of the context that produced them. In a brief conclusion, the essay highlights the need for expanding and revising the current understanding of the Guru's life.

The present day understanding of Guru Gobind Singh's life is constructed around three landmarks: his birth in Patna in eastern India, in 1666; his creation of the Khalsa ("Community of the Pure") at Anandpur, in the Punjab hills, in 1699; and his replacement of the office of the personal Guru with the Granth, the Sikh scripture, thereby elevating it to the position of the Guru Granth ("Book manifested as the Guru") at the time of his death, in Nanderh in south India, in 1708.¹ The details that fill in the forty-two years of the Guru's life are

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culled from a variety of texts, which begin with the Dasam Granth (“the tenth book” or “book of the tenth [Guru]”), an anthology of poetry created largely between 1685 to 1698, and Sri Gur Sobha (“Praise of the Guru”), a poetic history of the period presently dated in 1711, and include eighteenth and nineteenth century writings culminating in Giani Gian Singh’s synthetic narrative, Tvarikh Guru Khalsa (“History of the Guru Community”), completed in 1891.² (For a brief review of this chronology of events see Appendix).

The three tri-centennial celebrations associated with the abovementioned events in Guru Gobind Singh’s life, which fell on 1966, 1999, and 2008, respectively, have helped to open up this area of study. These events brought together educational institutions, media outlets, museum curators, scholars, state governments (Bihar, Haryana, Maharashtra, and Punjab), religious organizations, and the Sikh community to commemorate the most important figure in Sikh history after Guru Nanak (1469-1539), the founder of the Sikh tradition.³ The elaborate deliberations between people with a wide variety of interests that ranged from writing books about the Guru’s life and legacy to holding exhibitions of art and artifacts of his times and paving roads to commemorate his travels in the subcontinent helped to expand the corpus of information pertaining to his life and times in important ways.

As part of this larger activity, educational institutions in the Punjab launched a concerted effort to make the primary sources related to the period of Guru Gobind Singh available in print form. This initiative involved the preparation of critical editions of texts such as the Guru’s hukamname (“letters of command”), the writings pertaining to Sikh rahit (“code of practice”) that claim to have the Guru’s imprimatur, and the historical texts that reflect the literary and cultural ethos of his period.⁴

Simultaneously, the relevant Farsi writings created around 1700 with bearing on the Sikhs were translated into Punjabi and English, and some key Punjabi texts of this time are now available in English.⁵ Beside these, a host of scholarly studies narrating Guru Gobind Singh’s life and assessing the nature of his legacy came forth in the past decades.⁶ As a result, a sizable literature on this subject is now available

for those interested in studying it.

The celebratory activity around the three centennial events was instrumental in projects such as the building of Guru Gobind Singh Marg (“path”), a road covering the Guru’s journey from Anandpur, the town he founded in the hills, to Damdama, a place of brief stay in the Malwa region at the southern tip of the Punjab (400 miles), in the early 1970s, and plans for its extension to reach Nanderh (1600 miles) in south India, in 2008.⁷ In addition, there have been efforts to renovate the sites and towns associated with the Guru, which included the construction of new museums at Anandpur and Kapal Mochan, and arranging of major exhibitions of art to celebrate Sikh history that Guru Gobind Singh is understood to have shaped in fundamental ways.⁸ In the process, significant information has come to light that synchronized well with the increasing scholarly awareness of the use of material heritage in writing history and groundbreaking research in this area is in the making.⁹

Recent studies in the history of the Guru Granth have yielded important implications for scholarly understanding of Guru Gobind Singh’s period. Based upon manuscript evidence, it is now possible to locate the making of the canonical text of the Granth at Anandpur in the late 1670s and then trace the steady rise of its status to become the Guru Granth in 1708.¹⁰ As a result, Guru Gobind Singh’s role in the canonization, proliferation, and elevation of Sikh scripture at the time of his passing away is firmly established. The details of this narrative are different from the ones available in popular understanding that dated the canonization of the text in 1705 at Damdama and then its rise to the Guru Granth in 1708 at Nanderh.¹¹

Building on the wide variety of information that has become available in the past decades, this essay aims to survey the sources presently available for the study of Guru Gobind Singh and his times. It opens with a discussion of the sites and artifacts that shed light on the physical and social environment in which the activity of the Guru’s life unfolded, and then goes on to review the literary sources that were created under his guidance and patronage. In a brief conclusion, I propose the possibility of creating a new biography of Guru Gobind Singh, which duly takes into account the comprehensive data available

on his period. While presenting this detailed discussion, I introduce new sources of information that have surfaced during my past years' fieldwork, suggest revised dating of some well known texts and the time of enactment of some important events of the period, and argue for a concerted effort toward creating a ground-up understanding of Guru Gobind Singh's life, his achievements, and his vision for the future of the Khalsa Panth.¹²

Early Sikh towns like Kartarpur (1520s) and Goindval (1550s) were built around the gurdwara ("house of the Guru"), which served as a place for Sikhs to gather and sing their sacred compositions, listen to the Guru's words of wisdom, meet fellow community members, and partake in the langar (Farsi, "anchor," a term that now refers both to a place of eating and the meal itself in Punjabi). As the community grew, Ramdaspur (1570s), known as Amritsar beginning with the second half of the eighteenth century, was centered on an impressive structure (Darbar Sahib, the honorable court) that was surrounded by other "majestic buildings" (Mandar mere sabh te uche, GG, M5, 1141). The Sikhs sang of the appointment of "the guards to protect the town" (Guru sachhe baddha theh, rakhwale Guru dite, GG, M4, 653), and the presence of the army there (Gharu lashkar sabh tera, GG, M5, 622).¹³ The Sikhs who lived in other places away from the center congregated at their dharamsal ("place of worship"), where they prayed, listened to stories about the founder and his successors, and shared langar.¹⁴

Guru Nanak's idea that there was no pilgrimage center like the Guru himself (Gur samani tirathu nahi koi, M1, GG, 1328) developed into the belief that the Guru "sanctifies" the spot where he sits and the Sikhs should aspire "to rub their forehead with its dust" (Jithai jai bahai mera satiguru so thanu sohava ram raje/Gursikhi so thanu bhalia lai dhuri mukhi lava/ M4, GG, 450). This belief paved way for the performance of pilgrimage to the Guru's seat as well as making of the efforts to have the Guru visit other congregations to sanctify Sikh houses and dharamsals, if that was possible. The spread of the Sikh community across the river Satluj created the opportunity for Guru Hargobind (Guru 1606-1644) to visit there and extend the Sikh sacred geography to the Malwa region; and Guru Tegh Bahadur (Guru 1664-1675) with his extensive travels expanded it further to the eastern

edge of the subcontinent in Assam.¹⁵

Using this as a backdrop, we can focus on the sites associated with Guru Gobind Singh.¹⁶ They fall into two sets: Paunta and Anandpur, the towns that the Guru built and others like Patna, Damdama, and Nanderh, where he briefly stayed. The first set deserves closer attention and a look at their layout helps us understand the concerns that went into their planning. Both these towns were on the banks of major rivers. Paunta was situated at the confluence of the rivers Giri and Yamuna as they enter the plains of the then eastern Punjab, and Anandpur was on the banks of the Charan Ganga, a tributary of the river Satluj, which flowed nearby.¹⁷ At this location, the Satluj passes through a smallish valley (dun), which served as habitat for wild animals and migratory birds, and had some potential for agriculture.¹⁸ The beauty of these two natural settings is evoked in the literature of the period.

Although away from the hustle and bustle of the Punjab plains, both Paunta and Anandpur were situated on important trade and pilgrimage routes.¹⁹ The Hindus crossed the Yamuna at Paunta to immerse the remains of their dead in the sacred river Ganga at Haridwar, and Hindu as well as Jain devotees passed through Anandpur while undertaking pilgrimages to Devi temples in Naina Devi and Jawalamukhi and the Adi Nath temple in Kangra. These routes also served to funnel trade between Kashmir and the Punjab, and through it to Delhi, and the area between the rivers Yamuna and Ganga.²⁰ We have an early seventeenth century account of a European travelling from Haridwar to Jawalamukhi, and other references to the bulk of the trade flowing through this route.²¹ The locations of Paunta and Anandpur thus provided the Sikhs easy access to the travelers, the goods they carried, and other resources at their disposal.

The layout of Paunta and Anandpur reflects Sikh concerns of the times in important ways.²² At Paunta, the Sikh establishment was on the top of a hillock that surveyed the people crossing the river Yamuna.

From this vantage point, they could control the passage on the river while it was not easy for anyone to attack their base perched at a higher elevation. We have early references to Sikh surveillance of the

traffic on the ford, deciding on issues of entry and access, and the challenges that resulted from this position of power.²³ These issues come into focus further as we look at Anandpur.

After his victory against the chief of Garhwal, a powerful figure in the area whose ancestors had ruled Banaras for centuries, the Guru returned to his parental seat of authority in the Punjab hills. Whether Anandpur was founded in 1684 or 1688 is not entirely clear, but we know for sure that it was a thriving town in the 1690s.²⁴ It was built on the hillocks on the eastern edge of the valley. The Guru's residential quarters were at its center. These were surrounded by the houses of his battle-tested warriors of the Paunta days.²⁵ We have contemporary references to a spot called the Ucha Asthan ("High Place"), where the Guru held his court.²⁶ In all likelihood, the declaration of renaming the community as the Khalsa Panth was issued from here, and since the Sikhs from that point on were to keep their hair (kes) uncut, the fort built at that spot came to be known as the Kesgarh ("Fort of [the gift of] Hair").

Although concerns for security can be traced back to the development of Amritsar, this dimension of Sikh thinking underwent considerable growth at Anandpur. In its original plan, the town demonstrates the preparations its builders made to defend its territory from any external attacks, and they used both natural and other resources at their disposal toward this goal. The Charan Ganga and the Satluj rivers protected the town from the northern and western side, respectively. The Fatehgarh ("fort of victory") was the first fort to be built commemorating the victory at Bhangani, and it was followed by Holgarh ("fort of holi celebration," and a spot of army exercises) in the northeast, Lohgarh ("fort of steel") in the west, Anandgarh ("fort of bliss") in the south, and Kesgarh in the center.²⁷

While Holgarh and Lohgarh were across the Charan Ganga, and would have stopped any interference from the north, Anandgarh was located on the top of a hillock commanding a view in the direction of the Mughal territories. Among these five forts, Anandgarh was the largest, having a well with stairs (bauli) within its precincts, and thick walls with provisions for guns to be fitted in. A recently surfaced letter mentions the transportation of cannons (topan) from Kabul to

Anandpur.²⁸ The Fatehgarh and Kesgarh, being closer to the residential quarters, would have provided the second line of defense in case of need. In addition to the Sikhs that lived at Anandpur permanently and those who came for short visits, the population of the town included an army comprising both cavalry and infantry. The tradition was not new: Guru Arjan refers to the presence of his army at Amritsar, and we know that Guru Hargobind had a standing army at Kiratpur with “three hundred battle-tested horsemen and sixty musketeers.”²⁹ The institution had grown under Guru Gobind Singh and we have contemporary references to non-Sikh soldiers, both Hindu and Muslim, fighting for the Guru and details of some of them defecting to join the enemy in the heat of a pitched battle at Bhangani.³⁰

Sikh aspirations at Anandpur also helped crystallize their thinking about sacred space in interesting ways. An entry in the *Goindval Pothis*, a scriptural manuscript created in the 1570s, calls Guru Nanak “Vedi Patishah, the anchor of Sikh spiritual and temporal life” (Baba Nanak Vedi Patishah din dunia ki tek).³¹ This belief strengthened during the time of his successors, who were assigned the title of *Sacha Patishah* (“True Lord”), and the center at Amritsar was seen as their seat of spiritual and temporal authority.³² For late seventeenth-century writers, Anandpur substituted for Amritsar as the center of their Guru’s spiritual and temporal power.³³ No matter from which side pilgrims/visitors would have entered Anandpur, the first building that would have come to their notice was a fort, and, having entered the town there was no way to miss the presence of professional soldiers working in the Sikh army.

The belief in the sanctity of sacrificing one’s life, which had started with the deaths of Guru Arjan and Guru Tegh Bahadur, was further strengthened by warfare at Paunta and Anandpur. The sacrifice of life for the protection of the community translated into the emergence of spots soaked in Sikh blood as part of sacred geography.³⁴ The first call after the death of Guru Gobind Singh was to revive Anandpur to its erstwhile glory. The town marked the epitome of sanctity—it was the tenth Guru’s town as well as the site that had absorbed a huge quantity of Sikh blood in 1704.³⁵

Other spots where Sikh blood was spilt turned into centers of

Sikh pilgrimage with the passage of time. For instance, the first action that the Khalsa Panth took after the fall of Sirhind in 1710 was to locate the place of martyrdom of Fateh Singh and Zoravar Singh, the youngest sons of Guru Gobind Singh, and build a gurdwara on the site.³⁶ In the 1790s, when the Sikhs gathered sufficient strength to have their sway in Delhi, they erected a gurdwara at the spot where Guru Tegh Bahadur was martyred in 1675.³⁷ The touch of the Guru (than suhava) and the shedding of Sikh blood (shahid ganj) came to mark the sanctity of a spot, and this sense has been preserved.

Contemporary writers thought Guru Gobind Singh to be the chief (sirmaur) among the Gurus, and this sentiment reflects in the evolution of Sikh sacred geography during the eighteenth century.³⁸ Anandpur and Nanderh emerged on the Sikh pilgrimage map soon after the Guru's death, and Patna and Damdama joined them in subsequent decades.³⁹

Although historical circumstances led to the return to Amritsar as the center of Sikh activity, the four sites that followed it in sacred authority commemorated the life and activity of Guru Gobind Singh.

As to specific artifacts, we can begin with an examination of those that are available at the early sites mentioned in the previous section. Keeping in mind the treatment of manuscripts of the Granth as objects of reverence, it may be helpful to consider them as artifacts for the purpose of this discussion.⁴⁰ Manuscripts were a part of the treasury at the seats (gaddi) of the Gurus since the very inception of the community and it seems reasonable to assume that they had also reached Sikh dharamsals in distant places by the end of the seventeenth century. In their physical makeup, the extant manuscripts of this period are bound in leather, and some of them have illuminated opening folios.⁴¹ As for their treatment, they received profound reverence within the community. Some sites earned prominence because of the presence of an early manuscript there such as Kartarpur near Jalandhar, and others such as Patna developed as major repositories of these manuscripts.

The second item found at early Sikh sites comprises the Gurus' hukamname. The actual letters become extant from Guru Hargobind's time on, but this genre of writing seemingly existed before his time.⁴²

Sikh congregations and families to whom these letters were addressed preserved them as tokens of the Guru's affection and treated them with utmost reverence. Their texts follow a standard pattern. They begin with an invocation to Akal Purakh/Vahiguru, the frequently used epithet for God in the Sikh tradition, go on to recognize the names of community leaders and family heads, sometimes including females, and close with specific instructions to the recipients regarding their conduct.

Although authoritative voices in the field of Sikh art are open to the possibility that there were contemporary portraits of the Gurus, the research required to support this position is yet to be done.⁴³ However, my limited work confirms that some of these portraits have survived. For instance, the early seventeenth century seat of Bidhi Chand at Sur Singh, in the Majha area, holds two portraits of Guru Hargobind.⁴⁴ The corroborating evidence appears in *Gurbilas Patishahi Chhevin* ("Praise of the Sixth Guru"), which narrates the arrival of a painter (mussavar) and the making of a portrait of the Guru at Amritsar.⁴⁵ Once started, this tradition continued in subsequent times, and we have references as well to actual portraits of Guru Tegh Bahadur prepared during his visit to Assam.⁴⁶

In addition, we have houses that the Gurus built, the trees under which they rested, the pools, wells and baulis that they dug and drank water from, the utensils they used for eating, the clothes and shoes they wore, the cots on which they sat, the musical instruments that were played upon in their presence, and the weapons and the drums that were part of their entourage.⁴⁷

During Guru Gobind Singh's time, we see the expansion of this part of the Sikh heritage. For instance the number of the manuscripts of the Granth that belong to his time is much larger than the ones created earlier. I have records of thirty-three dated manuscripts. Eleven of these were compiled between 1604 and 1675, and the remaining twenty-two belong to Guru Gobind Singh's period.⁴⁸ It is reasonable to argue that the rise in the number of these manuscripts was related to their increased use in Sikh congregational worship. We will return to this issue later. During Guru Gobind Singh's period, the writing of hukamname advanced to such a level that they functioned as royal

decrees issued from Anandpur. The scribes took dictation from the Guru, committed these utterances to writing, inscribed them on illuminated sheets of paper in some cases, and assigned them some sort of serial number before sending them off. The thirty-four letters of Guru Gobind Singh are available in published form. They carry information ranging from norms of Sikh ethical conduct to the nature of Sikh religious and social organization, and materials ranging from gold to horses that the congregations in distant places were asked to bring or send to Anandpur.⁴⁹

I am gratified to bring two new hukamname to the notice of scholars in the field.⁵⁰ The first is dated 1698 (Samat 1755) and its contents are extremely important. It begins with an invocation, states that the Guru's congregations are presently spread in all four corners of the earth, asks the listeners to give their offerings (*kar bheta*) to the bearer of the letter, who is a special assistant of the Guru (*hazuri taihilia*), or bring them along when they come to Anandpur.

It further says that the Khalsa Panth constitutes the Guru's own form (*rup*), and that it is created to protect the dharma. An audience with the Guru (*darshan*) and taking of the *pahul* ("nectar") will ensure liberation (*Jo amrit chhakega so amar hovega*). While the Sikhs are asked to develop close relations among themselves, they are not to have any interaction with the "five groups." Other sources explain these five to include the followers of Pirthi Chand, Dhirmal, Ramrai, the erstwhile masands (all of the foregoing represented divisions within the seventeenth-century Sikh community), and the *kurhimars*, those who "killed their daughters," a term that referred to the Rajputs in the Punjab hills.⁵¹ It concludes with the information that the Guru had communicated this message to Sainha Singh, who duly recorded it in sixteen lines, and that it is being sent under the signature of the Guru.

The above hukamnama (Samat 1756, Magh Pravaste 9) brings the Guru's blessings to the congregation, declares its members to be the Khalsa of the Guru, asks them to meditate on the Guru's name, and then commands them to send their contribution through the bearer of the letter. Although its carries routine contents, it represents an interesting specimen of illuminated documents of this period.

Both these letters evoke language and issues that appear in writings of the period, but the first of the two has some unique features. First, this is one of the most elaborately illuminated hukamnama that I have come across in my fieldwork. Secondly, it is not addressed to any specific congregation but broadly refers to the presence of Sikhs in “all four corners of the world.” Thirdly, it includes the name of its scribe, Sainha Singh, as well as that of its bearer, Partap Singh. The effort put in its preparation, the nature of its details, and the absence of any particular address may imply that Partap Singh was supposed to travel with it to more than one place, announce its contents to different congregations, and answer any questions that they may have had. Finally, this letter refers to the availability of the pahul, links the ceremony with the attainment of liberation, and echoes the Guru’s expectation that the Sikhs will undergo the ceremony. These details confirm the existence of the ceremony of pahul in 1698, which points to the need to reexamine the tradition that associates the introduction of the pahul ceremony and the declaration of the Khalsa Panth with the Visakhi celebration of 1699.

In the 1960s, Ganda Singh and Shamsheer Singh Ashok made important contribution to the field by publishing their editions of the hukamname. Their work needs to be expanded with the details available

in these documents carefully incorporated into existing narratives of the 1690s. For instance, we have a set of five letters issued to different congregations on a single day (Phago 10, Samat 1758), and they all ask that their recipients come to Anandpur along with their weaponry.⁵²

While the existence of several letters written on a single day reflects the process of issuing these letters, the command for the Sikhs to come to Anandpur in early 1701 points to the circumstances that required the presence of additional community members. In another instance, one of the letters present at Takhat Harimandar, Patna, asks that hukkas and chilams (smoking equipment) be sent to Anandpur. Scholars have dismissed this document as spurious, but it may be worth considering that these items may have been required for the non-Sikh soldiers in the army at Anandpur.⁵³

There is also potential to expand this corpus and bring into the discussion the hukamname that are not yet available in print. In addition to the two presented above, I have photographs of five others that surfaced during my fieldwork. Their addresses and dates are as follows:

Ram Nath (1688) Samat 1745*

Sangat Goindval (1699) Samat 1756, Katak 4

Sangat Nurmaihi (1699) Samat 1756, Katak 24

Mohkam Singh (1701) Samat 1758, Fago 10

Dip Chand [Kabul?] Lower edge with date is lost.⁵⁴

The one marked with asterisk is beautifully illuminated. I am certain that these are not the only ones in the field that remain unpublished.

I was also fortunate to come across an altogether new category of artifacts created during the period under discussion. In the summer of 2000, I found myself in a fascinating situation when a copper plate (tamar patar) attributed to Guru Gobind Singh was unveiled in my presence at Naina Devi.⁵⁵ The inscription on the plate is in what is now called the Anandpur Lipi, a version of Gurmukhi script that began to appear in the 1670s and reached a considerable level of advancement in the following three decades.⁵⁶

The text on the plate reads: "Salutations to Naina (Namo Naine). Bhadia is our priest (purohit). Those who follow us should acknowledge him." The plate is undated, and contemporary Sikh writings that mention the Guru's visit to Naina Devi temple are silent about the issuing of a copper plate there.⁵⁷ The *Sudharam Marag Granth* ("Book of the Good Religious Path"), a little known Sikh text, however, mentions the story of the Guru's visit to the temple at Naina Devi and his bestowing of the copper plate.⁵⁸ Its narrator reports that the Guru offered gifts of cash and kind to various priests during his visit there. Bhadia, the principal priest of the site, however, refused the Guru's offering of 100,000 rupees. His argument was that he would like to have a gift that "will stay with the family for long time to come." In response, the Guru had his instructions "inscribed on a copper plate" and bestowed it upon him. Bhadia appears in the *kursinama*

(“genealogy”) of the custodians of the plate and on the basis of the count of generations one could place him around 1700.

Naina Devi Temple, Naina Devi Shiva Temple, Kapal Mochan

In order to make sense of this interesting find, I visited other Hindu sites associated with the Guru’s travels in subsequent years, and my explorations in these places bore interesting results. I found one copper plate at the Shiva temple in Kapal Mochan, near Paunta, and was given information about another one in Kurukshetar.⁵⁹ The plate at Kapal Mochan is dated 1679 (Samat 1736, *katak badi panchami din mangalvar*), and its inscription uses regular Gurmukhi. Its text reads:

“One God, with the grace of the Guru. The Khalsa belongs to the Immortal one. Guru Gobind Singh bestowed the hukamnama on Jawala Das Brahman on Tuesday, October 14, 1679. My Sikh, who will follow this hukamnama, will be blessed.” The following text records the opening passage of Sikh ardas (“supplication”), which supports the belief that the success of the Khalsa is imminent and that Guru Gobind Singh along with his nine predecessors, all recipients of divine blessings, will help those who will work for this victory.⁶⁰ According to its custodians, the Guru made two visits to their place, and bestowed upon the family a plate in 1679 and a hukamnama inscribed on an illuminated paper in 1688. A Sikh account also narrates the Guru’s visit to Kapal Mochan in 1688 but makes no reference to any of these artifacts.⁶¹

How does one interpret the significance of these copper plates?

Historically, they have served as symbols of political patronage in Hindu society and it was a common practice for the Punjab hill chiefs to bestow them on local shrines as a mark of their benevolence as well as authority. The surfacing of these two plates is not an anomaly in any way. Twentysix extant plates from this period dating between the years 1650 to 1725 were granted by the local hill chiefs in the region to the Hindu temples in the vicinity of Naina Devi.⁶²

As for the authenticity of these plates, their custodians report that the Guru bestowed them on the temples and they have preserved

them as markers of his blessings on the site they serve. If one takes into account the Sudharam Marg Granth's testimony, the tradition of the plate at Naina Devi is at least two centuries old. In all likelihood, the blacksmiths associated with the Sikh court had the capability to create these plates and then print the inscription on them. The specificity of the details of its "bestowal in the morning" creates the possibility that the Guru ordered the issuing of the copper plate, and the blacksmith paraphrased the Guru's command on the plate later. When ready, the plate was passed on to the priests.⁶³ The hukamnama presented above claims to have been prepared in the same manner.

Whatever the precise circumstances of the making of these plates, their symbolic content is not hard to grasp. They point to the hierarchy of authority and the direction of the flow of power in the area around Anandpur. It should cause no surprise that the Guru visited Naina Devi, Kapal Mochan, and Kurukshetar; he was obviously not the first Guru to travel to Hindu sacred sites.⁶⁴ While the custodians of these sites welcomed him, and received these plates as a marker of his blessings, the Sikhs saw the acceptance of the plates by the influential priestly families as a token of their formal submission to Sikh authority. The description of the Guru's visit to Kapal Mochan in contemporary Sikh sources is centered on the fun and frolic that they had at the annual fare associated with the shrine.⁶⁵ But there is no reference to local priests, the solemnity of the occasion, and the bestowing of the hukamname.

The inscription on the Kapal Mochan plate records 1679 as the time of the Guru's visit and names him as "Gobind Singh." Working within the accepted scholarly and traditional narrative, one would assume that the Guru appended the title "Singh" to his name in 1699 and the appearance of the "Singh" and the "Khalsa" in 1679 would seem anachronistic. Given the information available in the plate along with the terms used for the Guru's succession to his father's authority in other contemporary reports, however, it seems worth considering the possibility that he assumed the title "Singh" in 1675.⁶⁶ The existing sequence of developments during the life of Guru Gobind Singh is largely constructed from information that surfaces in late-eighteenth, or early-nineteenth century texts, and the data presented in the above

document point to the need of a revised chronology (see Appendix).⁶⁷

The illumination and calligraphy manifested in the above documents was also employed in manuscripts of the Granth prepared in both Gurmukhi and Anandpur Lipi. The Anandpur Birh, the earliest extant manuscript of what later came to be known as the Dasam Granth, is a beautifully inscribed text, which records in the margins the names of the scribes.⁶⁸ (For the facsimiles, see the last essay in this volume). In addition, the manuscript has two portraits of Guru Gobind Singh pasted on the opening folios.⁶⁹ The first presents him sitting on the throne with his attendant waving the ceremonial whisk, and the second shows him participating in the royal sport of hunting. These portraits leave little doubt that some of the accomplished artists of the time had moved to Anandpur and were working under Sikh patronage. These two portraits easily compare with the finest paintings of the period and they are not the only such pictures to have come to light.

A portrait presently available in the National Museum, New Delhi, records "Guru Gobind Singh" at its lower edge and was seemingly made by an artist at Mandi in the late 1690s. A portrait at Patna is also believed to have been "prepared during the Guru's lifetime (hayati)."⁷⁰ Some of his childhood portraits are also available there. The one below was acquired by Trilochan Singh, an important scholar of Sikh history, from the Patna area and is currently with his son Anurag Singh in Ludhiana.

These paintings have interesting correspondence with the verbal portraits drawn by the poets singing at his court at Anandpur.⁷¹

5.75" by 7.5", Anandpur Birh, Private Collection

244 JPS 15:1&2

10.75" by 7.5", Anandpur Birh, Private Collection

9.00" by 7.5", Anurag Singh, Punjab

G.S. Mann: Sources for Study 245

The Sikh community has also preserved Guru Gobind Singh's personal memorabilia. These include beds, turbans, clothes, combs, shoes, utensils, prayer beads, pens, and musical instruments that were

played in his presence.⁷² The largest single type of artifacts related to his period is weaponry. These arms range from small swords and bows that he is believed to have played with as a youngster at Patna to large matchlocks and heavy cannons employed by his troops based in various forts at Anandpur.⁷³ Some of these have handles with gold and silver inlay that traces their history to the markets in Kabul, while others carry inscriptions recorded both in Gurmukhi and in Arabic, which indicates that the suppliers of these arms were both Sikh and Muslim blacksmiths.

There are arrowheads that have a small clump of gold welded to their tip or carry a gold ring around at the base of their stem. According to popular Sikh traditions, the gold was intended to pay for the cremation of the person killed with the Guru's arrow.⁷⁴

Although the presence of Sikh weapons can be traced back to Guru Hargobind, their significance expanded considerably during the period of Guru Gobind Singh. The evolution of Sikh thinking at Anandpur, the center of their *din* and *dunia*, can be seen to be taking place in two stages: it began with the rise of the Sikh ideology of providing food and justice to all (*deg tegh fateh*), and then developed into the conception of *Khalsa Raj* (Divine rule), a religio-political state constructed around the obligation of providing food and justice to all. Within this context, *Vahiguru* was described as *Sarab Loh* ("All Steel") and the weapons were interpreted as divine instruments to be used toward the establishment of the *Khalsa Raj*. While the Sikhs at Anandpur trained to use these weapons, the local blacksmiths showed their artistic skills in creating different types of inlays for them and imprinting Sikh sacred verses on them.⁷⁵ The poets of the period declared them to be the objects of worship and took onomatopoeic delight in capturing the sounds they made in battle as they narrated the Guru's confrontations with the Rajputs of the hill states in the vicinity.⁷⁶

We also have contemporary reports of the presence of a *mohar* (official seal), a *nishan* (flag), and an early nineteenth century claim as to the minting of *sikke* (coins) at Anandpur.⁷⁷ Although none of these items is available for examination, references to them deserve closer attention. For instance, the first Mughal coin that carries the counter

strike of the deg tegh fateh symbol is dated 1698. It is easier to make a case for the rise of these symbols of sovereignty at Anandpur and their resurfacing in Sirhind and Mukhlispur in the 1710s than to attribute them exclusively to Banda Singh (d. 1716), as is often done in current scholarship.⁷⁸

At this point, it may also be helpful to briefly look at the nature and the evolution of sites and artifacts related to the female members of the families of the Gurus. The Janam Sakhi (“life story”/“eye witness account of life”) literature presenting Guru Nanak’s life and mission preserved the names and created portraits of Tripta, Nanaki, Sulakhanhi, and Chando Ranhi, his mother, sister, wife, and mother-in-law, respectively.⁷⁹ It is with Bibi Bhani, the daughter of Guru Amardas (Guru 1552-1574), and wife of Guru Ramdas (Guru 1574-1581), however, that the Sikh tradition began to retain a material heritage associated with the early Sikh women. The quarters where she gave birth to her son Arjan (born 1563, Guru 1581-1606) and her actual cooking place (chulah) are preserved at Goindval.⁸⁰ A chariot, which is associated with Mata Ganga, Guru Arjan’s wife, is presently available at Bhai Rupa, Bhatinda.⁸¹

Kaulsar, a pool in Amritsar, was named after Mata Kaulan, the wife of Guru Hargobind.⁸² The tradition has also preserved a prayer book (pothi), an embroidered handkerchief (rumal) and a fan (pakhi) that belonged to Bibi Rup Kaur, the daughter of Guru Harirai (born 1630, Guru 1644-1661).⁸³

As we move toward the closing decades of the seventeenth century, interesting developments took place. Guru Tegh Bahadur named his town, Chak Nanaki, after his mother, Mata Nanaki. Following his death in 1675, his wife, Mata Gujari, ensured a smooth succession of their son to the Guru’s position, and we also have a hukamnama that is formally issued under her name.⁸⁴ Guru Gobind Singh’s first wife, Mata Jito (died 1700), seemingly carried the title of Jagat Mata (“Mother of the World”), and she became the first Sikh female to be assigned a spot in sacred geography at Anandpur: her place of cremation was marked with a gurdwara.⁸⁵ Mata Gujari followed Mata Jito and obtained this honor a decade or so later.⁸⁶ After Guru Gobind Singh’s death in 1708, his wives Mata Sundari and Mata Sahib

Devi continued to issue hukamname; eighteen of these documents are available in printed form. These edicts asked help for the langar at Delhi and underscored the belief that the Khalsa Panth belonged to Vahiguru, and that there was no provision for personal authority within the community.⁸⁷

To sum up this section, the complex array of sources mentioned above needs to be examined and a concerted effort made to collect the information relevant to the period around 1700. The layers of security around Anandpur, the presence of the standing army, the weaponry, the elephants, the horses, the flags, the seal, the official stationery, the issuing of the hukamname, the copper plates, and the emergence of Mata Jito's place of cremation on the map of Sikh sacred geography—all these need to be incorporated in our understanding of Guru Gobind Singh's life, the nature of his leadership, and the contours of his vision for the future of the Khalsa Panth. Such artifacts also serve as the markers of the context in which the poets and writers of the time created their compositions and as a result should be taken into consideration while interpreting the textual sources created at Anandpur.

TEXTUAL SOURCES

Unlike the previous section, where we tried to discuss relatively underutilized sources of information, here we deal with texts that are familiar to scholars in Sikh Studies. The dating and contextualization of many of these texts, however, are not as firm as one would like to believe and additional manuscript work is required to attain the requisite degree of clarity about their time of compilation. Let us begin with a quick look at the nature of literary activity during Guru Gobind Singh's period and then focus on its various segments—the Granth that later becomes the Guru Granth, its commentaries, the rahit documents, the historical texts presenting the life story of the Guru, and the Dasam Granth. We will examine their relationships with each other as well as with the larger context that produced them.

Right at the outset, two basic observations need to be made. First, the Sikh poets and writers of the time (Nand Lal, Prihlad Singh, Chaupa Singh, Sainapati, and Seva Das) were the recipients of a literary

inheritance that had spanned over a century and a half. It is important to understand how these people built on existing Sikh writings and expanded or modified the ideas available therein. Secondly, we have an altogether new group of writers who joined the Sikh court in search of patronage during Guru Gobind Singh's period. It seems that this process started with the Sikh move to Paunta in the mid-1680s and developed further at Anandpur in the 1690s. Unlike the aforementioned group of writers, who came from within the tradition, these people belonged to a non-Sikh religious and literary background and had to adjust their activity to the parameters of the Sikh court. Barring one major exception, Prem Sumarag Granth ("Book of Good Path of Love"), which we will discuss later, the names of all the writers in the first group are known, while the identity of the authors belonging to the latter category has been lost, if ever it was known.⁸⁸

Early in its history, Sikh literature developed along five lines: (1) the scriptural text, (2) commentaries on this text, (3) statements about practice, (4) life stories of the founder and his successors, (5) and other historically inflected texts such as court poetry. These strands are not always demarcated but it may be helpful to look briefly at the evolution of each of them up to and through Guru Gobind Singh's times.

Guru Nanak's compositions provided the core of Sikh scripture. The *Puratan Janam Sakhi* ("Old Life Story" [of Guru Nanak]), a late sixteenth-century document on Guru Nanak's life, reports that his companions wrote down his compositions as he sang them, and we have references to these compositions being compiled in the form of a *Pothi* (volume) in the opening decades of the sixteenth century.⁸⁹

The volume created during Guru Nanak's times expanded as his successors created compositions and appended them to its text. This enlarged volume refers to itself as the *Pothi* (1604), the *Granth* (1653), the *Granth Ji* (1688), while other writings address it as *Granth Sahib* (beginning the 1690s), and even the *Guru Granth* (1697 and 1709).⁹⁰ The titles and honorifics that were assigned to the holy book reflect the rise of its status within the community. The *Pothi* of 1604 becomes the *Guru Granth* ("The book manifested as the Guru") by the time of Guru Gobind Singh's death in 1708.

The Pothi was already established as the foundation of Sikh spiritual and literary heritage by the turn of the seventeenth century and this position firmed up with the passage of time. During Guru Gobind Singh's period, its history can be traced in three phases: the creation of the canonical version in the late 1670s, the multiplication of its manuscripts in following decades, and a steady rise of its status until it became the "Guru Granth," the custodian of the authority of the line of personal Gurus. Guru Gobind Singh thus oversaw the closing of the community's Granth, a visible increase in the number of its manuscripts, and its elevation toward an iconic status.

Unlike the Granth, the remaining four categories of textual production were seen to comprise an open-ended corpus, which was expected to grow as time passed. The first segment of this "open canon" was comprised by the commentaries on the Granth. Beliefs enshrined in the compositions of the Gurus were not only to be recited and revered, but were to be understood and translated into real life (*Dithai mukati na hovai jicharu sabadi na kare vichar*, M3, GG, 594; M3, 560). Guru Nanak's successors attempted to elaborate on his themes, and the exegesis of Sikh sacred compositions thus began with the very inception of the community.⁹¹

The narrator of the *Puratan Janam Sakhi* makes a conscious effort to contextualize Guru Nanak's writings in real-life settings and then attempts to convey their message. During the seventeenth century, the ballads (*vars*) of Bhai Gurdas (d. 1638) take up themes such as the ideal Sikh (*gursikh*), the nature of relationship between the Guru and his followers (*guru-chela/pir-murid*), the nature of Sikh congregation (*sangat*), and values such as service (*seva*), explaining them on the basis of the Gurus' writings.⁹² This period also saw the rise of commentaries that focused on the benefit (*paramarth*) of the reciting and reflecting upon the scriptural verses.⁹³

During the period of Guru Gobind Singh, Bhai Mani Singh (d. 1734) emerges as the key contributor within this category of literature. The Guru sent him to Amritsar in the late 1690s with the responsibility of overseeing activity at the *Darbar Sahib*, which included helping the local congregation understand the message of the Gurus. A scholar, a scribe, and a martyr, Bhai Mani Singh enjoys the unique distinction of

being the only Sikh of the early period whose life and death became the subject of a biography (Shahid Bilas) at the turn of nineteenth century.⁹⁴ Bhai Mani Singh and Bhai Gurdas, both commentators on the scriptural text, are the only Sikhs to have made it into Sikh iconography in the mid-nineteenth century.⁹⁵

Given the Sikh emphasis on shubh amal (“good deeds”), it is logical that statements about practice (rahit) developed alongside the interpretation of Sikh beliefs. By 1600, we have a list of ten prescriptions, which included five things that a Sikh should do and five that he or she should not do. These originally appeared on the blank folios of scriptural manuscripts. Later they developed in such a way that took the form of narratives of question-answer sessions between the Gurus and the Sikhs in the middle decades of the seventeenth century.⁹⁶

The first statement of rahit created during Guru Gobind Singh’s period is attributed to Nand Lal and is dated December 4, 1694 (Samat satra sahis su bavan [1752], Magahar Sudi naumi sukh davan).⁹⁷ A document entitled Tankhahnama (“Letter of Conduct”) also refers to Nand Lal as its author and seems to have been created in the following years.⁹⁸ Another Rahitnama authored by Prihlad Singh refers to its date of composition as Samat satar sai bhai barakh bavanja nihar [1752], Magh sudi thit panchami Ravivar subh var.⁹⁹ In addition, we have a set of documents such as Sakhi Bhai Dan Singh nal hoi, which though undated falls in the same time period.¹⁰⁰

The next Rahitnama text that appears within this corpus claims to have been compiled by Chaupa Singh and carries the date of its completion as 1700.¹⁰¹ The manuscript evidence points to a text comprising of four parts: the preface, a set of prescriptions of conduct, a narrative of Guru Gobind Singh’s life, and a string of transgressions that need to be punished. The core of the text is constituted of the preface and the part that follows it, while the remaining two sections were appended later. The counting of the sentences in the section that follows the preface was eventually extended to the appended parts, creating the impression that they were always part of a single whole.

The opening two segments that claim to have been completed in

1700 need a careful look.¹⁰² The preface reports that this document resulted from a discussion between the *muktas* (“enlightened ones”) and the *mussadis* (“officials”) at Anandpur. The issue at stake was the Sikh norms for marriage. We are told that the *muktas*, who seemingly had the responsibility of providing advice to Sikhs visiting Anandpur, wanted the Sikhs to marry their children within the Sikh community without any consideration, to the social backgrounds of their families. The *mussadis*, however, had some doubts about its being the appropriate position and wanted to seek the Guru’s confirmation on this.

In response to their request, the Guru ordered Chaupa Singh to seek the help of other *gurmukhs* (“pious ones”) and draft a code of practice that would follow the “testimony of the *Granth Sahib*.” The text reports that Chaupa Singh prepared this collaborative statement and presented it to the Guru on May 14, 1700 (Samat 1757, Jeth din satven). The Guru listened to “some part of the prepared document,” found it to follow the spirit of Sikh teachings as enshrined in the *Granth*, gave it his formal approval, and asked for its copies to be made and distributed among Sikhs.¹⁰³

The next section of the opening segment lists a set of prescriptions pertaining to Sikh practice, which are counted in two extant manuscripts as 156 and 500, respectively. This section opens with an invocation (*Ek onkar satiguru prasadi*) and concludes with the following: “These words represent the consensus of the Sikhs and have the approval of the Guru. They are intended only for Sikhs and are not meant for everyone (*jagat*). Besides these [codes], the Sikh of the Guru should follow any other [code] that is in accordance with the teachings of Guru and the ideas of [enlightened] Sikhs. Never let a good deed remain undone.”¹⁰⁴ The preface and this statement manifest clear literary integrity, standing as independent units of text, and the sections that follow have distinct characteristics of their own.

The importance of the Chaupa Singh *Rahitnama* cannot be overstated. First, it offers a detailed statement on personal and communal obligations that the Sikhs were expected to follow. Secondly, by evoking the authority of the “*Granth Ji*” or “*Granth Sahib*” consistently, it establishes the source that one needs to tap to find answers to questions about practice. For the authors, “the word of the

Granth Sahib Ji should be considered the Guru.” Thirdly, the drafting of the document emphasizes the centrality of communal consensus in this process.

Finally, the document defines *rahit* as an open-ended concept within the Sikh community, which has full authorization to resolve any practice-related issue based on the teachings enshrined in the text of the Granth. It is crucial to register that the document, though formally approved by the Guru, leaves open the possibility of further additions.

These statements regarding the domain of *rahit* reach their highest elaboration in a text entitled the *Prem Sumarag* or *Param Marag* (“Good Path of Love,” “Great Path”).¹⁰⁵ The invocation to Guru Gobind Singh (*Giranth likhiate Patishahi 10*) at the beginning of the text points to its being compiled during his period, and in terms of its language and primary concerns it clearly expands the scope of the documents mentioned above. The *Prem Sumarag Granth* does not carry the name of its author, and the explanation may well be that it resulted from a collective effort of many *gurmukhs/muktas*; it was not found necessary to retain their names. The text reflects deep understanding of Sikh beliefs, a sense of Guru Gobind Singh’s vision for the future of the Sikhs, and a good knowledge of the beliefs of Hindu and Muslim communities.

Furthermore, it shows an amazing sensitivity to gender-related issues, and a considerable care is taken to include the details of rituals related to the birth, marriage, and death of female members of the Sikh community, including widows.¹⁰⁶ In my view, the *Prem Sumarag Granth* is a comprehensive document that marked the peak among *rahit* documents produced at Anandpur, and it synchronizes well with Sikh religious, social, and political aspirations of the rule of the *deg* and *tegh*.¹⁰⁷

From commentaries on Sikh scripture and lists of what Sikhs should or should not do, let us move on to the texts that attempted to record Sikh history. As I have said, this category of Sikh literature began with the *Puratan Janam Sakhi*, which evolved in such a way as to take three broad forms during the seventeenth century.¹⁰⁸ First, *Bhai*

Gurdas poeticized the life of Guru Nanak in forty-five stanzas. Secondly, the followers of Prithi Chand (d. 1618) and Handal (d. 1648) turned their compilation of stories about Guru Nanak into the markers of their sectarian outfits within the Sikh community. Finally, authors coming in the second half of the seventeenth century expanded the existing writings to include the life stories of Guru Nanak's successors, individually as well as collectively.¹⁰⁹ Despite all this, the literary integrity of the Puratan Janam Sakhi remained largely intact and its eighteenth-century manuscripts were scattered throughout far-flung places in India.¹¹⁰

During Guru Gobind Singh's period, the Janam Sakhi genre evolved in two distinct ways. First, the political concerns at Anandpur impinged upon the manner in which the existing stories were told. For instance, the Puratan Janam Sakhi's original episode regarding the Mughal invasion is expanded by means of a brief detour that describes a face-to-face meeting between Babur and the Guru. The Guru bestows sovereignty upon the Mughal chief. Another episode in the Puratan Janam Sakhi, a conversation between Guru Nanak and Qazi Rukandin, a Muslim leader based in Mecca, served as the occasion for the insertion of an altogether independent text trumpeting the idea that the period of Hindu and Muslim political power was gone and it was now the time for Guru Nanak and by implication his followers to rule.¹¹¹ Guru Nanak is the source of Sikh power, the text proclaims and the Sikhs are destined to establish their kingdom of deg and tegh.

Second, unlike the early Janam Sakhis that were created after the deaths of the Gurus whose life stories they narrated, Guru Gobind Singh's life and mission began to be sung in the 1690s while he was very much alive. The first surge of this narrative took the form of 471 couplets, and was entitled *Sarab Kal Ki Benati*, completed around 1698.¹¹² The narrative traces the mythical past of the social groups to which the Gurus belonged, the achievements of the first nine Gurus, the divine intervention resulting in the birth of Guru Gobind Singh, and an account of his efforts to establish the community of Vahiguru. The composition is firmly situated within the context of *vansavali* ("genealogy") literature popular in the Punjab hills. The poet, whose name has not come down to us, presents it as a first-person account,

creating the impression of its being autobiographical in nature.

With a poetic composition entitled *Sri Gur Sobha* (“Praise of the Guru”), texts singing about the Guru’s life come closer to the *Janam Sakhi* mode.¹¹³ There is no reference to the name of the poet in the text itself but later sources remember him as *Sainapati*, a court poet at *Anandpur*.¹¹⁴ The narrator begins with the Guru’s activity at *Paunta* around the time of his victory over the chief of *Garhwal*, and goes on to trace the details of the happenings at *Anandpur*, the Guru’s journey to south India, and his demise in *Nanderh*. It concludes with a call to return to *Anandpur* and revive the dream of *Guru Gobind Singh*.

I have had the chance to examine four manuscripts of *Sri Gur Sobha*. The two of these four carry the date of 1701 (*Samat satra sai bhai baras athavan bit [1758] Bhado sudi pandars bhai rachi katha kar prit*), the third records it as 1741 (*Samat satra sai bhai baras athavan bit [1798] Bhado sudi 15 bhai rachi katha kar prit*), and the last one does not contain the section that refers to the date.¹¹⁵ Both 1701 and 1741 have been considered and discarded by scholars who seem to be developing a consensus around 1711.¹¹⁶ Although 1711 may seem reasonable to many, it is important to register that there is no supporting evidence for this date in the extant manuscripts, and the logic that went into its formulation is not very convincing.¹¹⁷

The appearance of the date of 1701 within the invocation of *Sri Gur Sobha* needs to be taken into serious consideration. Its presence at the opening of the text could imply that the poet began writing it in 1701 and continued to work on the text until late in 1708. This dating, mode, and lengthy period of composition explain the detailed nature of its narrative, and bring into focus its importance as a first-hand account of the events that may have even been recited before and corrected by the Guru himself, if one accepts references to this effect in another source.¹¹⁸

This period also saw the continuation of the *Janam Sakhi* genre in the form of the *Parchian Patishahi Dasvin Ki* (“Introductions to the Tenth Master”), which was completed at *Nanderh* soon after the death of the Guru.¹¹⁹ An early manuscript whose date of completion was 1709 (*Samat 1766, aitvar thit panchami*) does not provide the

name of the author, but later manuscripts close with a couplet, which attributes the text to Seva Das Udasi. Although titled so as to give the impression that it contains only the stories about Guru Gobind Singh, the text actually begins with a set of twelve episodes that relate to the first nine Gurus. It then goes on to record thirty-eight episodes about the life and activities of Guru Gobind Singh. These stories about Guru Gobind Singh's activity do not appear in any chronological order and seem to have emerged from a context in which the narrator shared them on various occasions with people interested in knowing about his life. Important details appear in this text. For instance, the author records the title "Guru Granth" in referring to Sikh scripture (episodes 9 and 10), reports the use of an official seal by Guru Gobind Singh (episode 16), and in a different context quotes the epigraph that appeared in the seal of Banda Singh and later was put on Sikh coins.¹²⁰ His description of the death scene of the Guru includes the community's request for a personal successor, and the Guru's declaration that the Khalsa Panth will stay in the lap of the God (Akal Purakh di god, episode 50). This comes close to what appears in the account available in Sri Gur Sobha. Other texts could be added to the three I have just described. Given the varied background of their authors, they seem to present different facets of the Guru's day-to-day activities.¹²¹

This takes us to the last type of literature that emerged during this period. The presence of bards at the center of Sikh activities started with Mardana, a contemporary of Guru Nanak, and developed to include Balvand and Satta (1540s), the Bhattas (1581-1606), and Abdulla and Natha (post-1606). They were all poets who composed songs in praise of the Gurus in an idiom that they had acquired prior to accepting Sikh patronage. While some of them had ties with Islam, the Bhattas were Brahmins, who liked to compare the Gurus with Janak, the royal ascetic (raj yogi) who appears in the Ramayan.

With the move to the Punjab hills, there was a disruption in the activity of the Sikh court, but its revival started with Guru Tegh Bahadur and reached its peak during the period of Guru Gobind Singh. Poets entered the Sikh court in two phases. With the Sikh movement to Paunta (1685-1688), poets from the nearby Mathura region arrived

there. They sang about Krishna using Brajbhasha as their linguistic medium. The first products of this poetic activity were compiled under the title of *Krishan Avatar* in 1688.¹²² Some of these poets followed Guru Gobind Singh to Anandpur and continued to compose songs about the Hindu deities. These compositions were added to the previous corpus and compiled in the form of the *Bachitar Natak Granth* (“Book of Unusual Dramas”) in 1698.¹²³

There seemed also to have been other poets too who joined the court at Anandpur and were interested in tales about kings, warriors, uncouth men, and women of easy virtue. An assortment of four hundred such stories was compiled in the form of a text entitled the *Charitaro Pakhian Granth* (“Book of Stories and Tales”) in 1696.¹²⁴ Some of them carry historical details such as the Guru’s visit to Kapal Mochan and the fun that the Sikhs had there, while others focus on themes that would have had special appeal to people such as professional soldiers who also inhabited Anandpur. Debates about the place of this text within Sikh literature has resulted in efforts that range from allegorizing its contents to underscoring their “moral content” to making public appeals to eliminate it from the *Dasam Granth*.¹²⁵ The debate has completely missed the importance of this text as a representative of the literature created to entertain ordinary people in their free time.

The *Bachitar Natak Granth* and the *Charitaro Pakhian Granth* were not the only anthologies of this type to have been produced during this period. Another large text entitled *Sri Sarab Loh Granth* (“Book of Sri Sarab Loh [All Steel]”) sings about the annihilation of the demons by an incarnation of a deity named Mahakal/Shiva and closely echoes the spirit that pervades compositions collected in the *Bachitar Natak Granth*.¹²⁶

Harnam Das Udasi, a serious scholar of early Sikh manuscripts, prepared an excellent annotated edition of *Sri Sarab Loh Granth* in the late 1980s but its circulation has remained restricted. Consequently little is known about the nature of this text’s contents and the circumstances of its compilation.¹²⁷ Although Udasi dates *Sri Sarab Loh Granth* to Guru Gobind Singh’s period, others feel more comfortable in placing it in the late eighteenth century.¹²⁸

I was fortunate to come across two dated manuscripts of Sri Sarab Loh Granth that are presently available in private collections in the Punjab. Both the manuscripts mention the date of 1698 (Samat 1755, miti Bisakh sudi 5, folio 1, and 2b, respectively) as the time they were written.

Reference to another manuscript with the same date appears in Udasi's detailed discussion of twenty-four manuscripts of the text that he examined during the preparation of his annotated edition.¹²⁹

The first manuscript above begins with the text of Bachitar Natak Granth (folios 1 to 350), and then goes on to include Sri Sarab Loh Granth (folios 351 to 702). The second manuscript contains only the text of Sri Sarab Loh Granth, though its pagination begins with folio number 351 and closes with 747.¹³⁰

Besides the details of the activity of Sri Sarab Loh, the text contains short compositions regarding the history of the ten Gurus, the nature of the Khalsa, the importance of the Granth and the Khalsa Panth, and the inscription that appears on the seal of Banda Singh (1710) and Sikh coins. These are the same themes that appear in other texts of the period and Anandpur seems to provide the most appropriate context for the creation of a text such as this. Whether the two manuscripts below were recorded in 1698 or their scribes simply copied the information from the original they used may be open to discussion, but the appearance of this date in three extant manuscripts is in itself significant.

The early manuscripts of Bachitar Natak Granth, Charitaro Pakhian Granth and Sri Sarab Loh Granth thus appear independently as well as joined together in different combinations. The joining of Bachitar Natak Granth and Charitaro Pakhian Granth seemingly became the more popular of these two alternatives and this expanded text came to be seen as representative of the period. In the two early manuscripts in which Bachitar Natak Granth and Charitaro Pakhian Granth appear together, the tables of contents are recorded along with their respective texts. In the later manuscripts, however, a master table of contents is placed at the head of the combined text, named Dasvin Patishahi ka Granth ("Book of the Tenth Master"). During the

twentieth century, this title turned into what is now the more popular name, “Dasam Granth,” though the previous title, Dasvin Patishahi ka Granth, remained in use.¹³¹ Finally, we should mention that there are several other texts that claim to have been produced at the Sikh court at Anandpur.¹³²

A review of the textual sources of the period of Guru Gobind Singh thus brings into view a vibrant and multi-layered literary scene at Anandpur. The text now considered the Guru Granth provided the foundational stratum for this artifice and came to be seen as consisting a class of its own. By my count, manuscripts of the Granth are almost double that of all other texts of the period put together. The Guru himself and Sikhs like Nand Lal, Prihlad Singh, Mani Singh, Chaupa Singh, and others commented upon these writings to clarify the nature of Sikh beliefs to those who needed this information.

In summary, the rahit documents formulated norms of conduct in accordance with “the testimony of the Granth.” They laid out an array of activities ranging from the daily prayers to the ceremonies associated with birth, naming, marriage, and death, the ethical thrust of the Sikh way of life, and the obligations of the Khalsa Panth to society at large. Sikh family values appearing in the Granth turned into specific prescriptions in the rahitname.¹³³ And as we have seen, the Prem Sumarag Granth tried its best to attend to the needs of both male and female members of the Sikh community.¹³⁴ Given the time of its composition, the very conversation about ceremonies to be performed at the birth of a daughter, and prescriptions for ceremonies at the time of marriage or at the death of a widow is significant.

The Janam Sakhi genre as it developed during Guru Gobind Singh’s period presented the activities of the Gurus so that their followers could adopt them in their own lives. The Khalsa Panth, after all, was supposed to represent the Guru’s own form (rup), a theme which reverberates throughout this literature. So it was important that the community know what the Gurus did in the course of their own lives.¹³⁵

Then, in addition, we have a hoard of court poetry created by nameless poets at Anandpur. The texts now called the Dasam Granth

and Sri Sarab Loh Granth fall in this category. While the text of Sri Sarab Loh Granth is yet to be incorporated into scholarly discussions of the period, the tendency heretofore to attribute the contents of the Dasam Granth to Guru Gobind Singh and then use them to understand Sikh beliefs of the time has obviously not been successful. In recent times, however, two scholars interested in gender-related studies have made use of these texts in interesting ways.¹³⁶ But unless properly contextualized, this literature cannot help in making sense of either Sikh beliefs or practices or the overall history of the community at that point in time. In my view, the Dasam Granth and Sri Sarab Loh Granth are markers of the aura of royalty that the Sikhs attempted to create at Anandpur. The poets gathered there drew upon a shared reservoir of themes, literary forms, metaphors and images to create their songs. With the emergence of Sikh power, some poets who were resident in the broader region moved to Anandpur. A cursory look at their compositions shows the structural changes that had to be made to adjust these works to the needs of the new situation. The statements at the closing of the two longest compositions, the Krishan Avatar and Ram Avatar, carry thundering assertions of the futility of, worshipping Krishan and Ram. I can only explain them as addenda having been required to make these texts presentable at Anandpur. Ami P. Shah's ground-breaking translation of the Ugardanti in this issue makes it clear that in a somewhat similar fashion the goddess at the center of that poem "worships and recites the name of the formless and transcendent being referred to as Niranjan Purakh, Satguru, Hari, and Akal," and is expected to aid in "the destruction of the Hindu and Turk panths" and the elevation "of the tisar panth," the third community. Instead of explaining this literature as a marker of the Puranic sway over Sikh thinking at Anandpur, a view popular within current scholarship, I submit that it may be more useful to give attention to the way in which these texts reflect the local poets' adjustments to the needs of the Sikh court.¹³⁷ To me, the acceptance of the Sikh tamar patar by the three influential priestly seats in the region, Naina Devi, Kapal Mochan, and Kurukshetar seems to harmonize well with the erstwhile temple bards envisioning the fulfillment of the Puranic prophecies at Anandpur. This description of things seems to be applicable to the Charitaro Pakhian Granth too. The text is the creation

of more than one poet and falls in the genre of entertainment, which would have found a sympathetic audience in a town such as Anandpur. There were clearly no sanctions against the singing of this literature and it eventually found a place in records and anthologies of the Sikh courtly heritage. Its contents fit in well within the context of Anandpur as a thriving town and a rising center of a new power. This involved the arrival of seamy characters such as petty thieves and women of easy virtue. Both the Charitro Pakhayan Granth (episodes 21-22) and the rahitname take notice of them and alert the Sikhs to their tricks.¹³⁸

Since I referred to the recent use of the compositions in the Dasam Granth by scholars interested in gender studies, the introduction of a short poem (dohra) recorded on the opening folio of the Anandpur Birh may be of interest. It is addressed to Mata Jito and the poet records his name as Mangal.

The poem begins with a prayer that the Mata's glory may be like that of the sun and the moon, that her sons Jujhar and Zoravar live long, and that eternal life be granted to her husband Guru Gobind Singh, "the ruler of the three worlds. "She herself is announced as the Jagat Mata who grants wishes of all who come to her. Having said that, Mangal then requests financial support that will enable him to go to his native village, Pasrur, perform the wedding of his daughter, and return to Anandpur to take up a role in her service free of any anxiety.

The poem sheds interesting light on Mata Jito's position within the Sikh community at Anandpur, and seems to serve as a mirror image of the Guru's letters. The sovereign of Anandpur issues commands to his Sikhs to supply the town's requirements and also visit it personally and bring their offerings (kar bheta). It is understood to be an honor for Sikhs to follow the Guru's orders and avail themselves the opportunity to have audience with him. Those who live at Anandpur, however, appeal to his wife for support, and she, as the overseer of the community's normal routines, ensures every family's welfare.¹³⁹ Although no one has so far examined the image of the Guru's wife as a protector of the Sikhs and the mother of the Khalsa Panth, it is a powerful point of reference in discourses popular among the Nihang groups.¹⁴⁰

Finally, the issue of the presence of Guru Gobind Singh's

compositions in Dasam Granth as well as in Sri Sarab Loh Granth needs special attention.¹⁴¹ At this point in our research, the only thing that can be said with any degree of confidence is that we know relatively little about the precise corpus of the Guru's writings, the circumstances of their entry into these texts, and the history as well as the position of the Dasam Granth within the Sikh community. On the basis of my limited work, it is clear that the narrative currently in circulation in English writings does not have much supporting evidence in early texts.¹⁴²

For those interested in addressing these issues, important sources of information are available. We know that Guru Gobind Singh did not use the signature of "Nanak," his official entitlement, in his compositions; the implications of this decision need to be examined in detail. We also have evidence that some of his compositions, such as the Jap, were already recited as part of the morning prayers in the mid-1690s, and that the Chaupai and the Saviyyae were part of the ceremonial preparation of *khande di pahul*. These texts appear along with other compositions from the Guru Granth in anthologies of daily prayers (*gutkas*).¹⁴³ Furthermore, we have access to early manuscripts such as the Anandpur Birh (undated but compiled in the 1690s), Patna Birh (1698), and New Delhi Birh (1713), along with twenty plus undated manuscripts that were compiled in later times.¹⁴⁴ In addition, we have seven editions of the Dasam Granth that were printed during the last two decades of the nineteenth century. The circumstances that resulted in the rise of so many editions at just this point in time raise questions of their own and need to be looked at closely. While seemingly there were less than forty manuscripts produced between 1700-1885, what was the need of so many printed editions towards the close of the nineteenth century? The increasingly easy availability of print itself provides only a partial answer. Answers to these questions are significant, as they will help us make sense of the nature of scholarly debates that ensued, dominating the twentieth century.

With all this information at our disposal, one hopes that it may not be impossible to handle the discussion of Guru Gobind Singh's compositions as it relates to its larger literary context with both rigor and precision.

CONCLUSION

In this essay, I have pursued the goal of reviewing the sources that are available to reconstruct the life and period of Guru Gobind Singh. In the process, I referred to the sites that provide us information about the layout of his towns and the primary concerns that went into their planning. We saw his residential quarters constituting the center of Anandpur, being surrounded by the houses of his followers. They in turn were protected by a ring of forts and a set of natural barriers. We referred to contemporary evidence of the Guru's court (*ucha asthan*). The texts offer descriptions of how he sat on the throne (*takhat*), accompanied by his personal attendant (*hazuri taihilia*) waving the ceremonial flywhisk (*chaur*), and by the chamberlains (*ardasias*) who announced the visitors, as well as by scholars (*muktas*), poets (*kavi*), scribes (*likharis*), musicians (*dhadhis/rababis*), drummers (*nagarachis*), and flag-bearers (*jhanda bardar*). All these were expected to be in attendance (*hazir*). The sources we have mentioned also offer details about his administration (*karkhana*), with the officials (*mussadis*), who kept in contact with Sikhs being scattered along the trade routes from Dhaka in the east to Kabul in the west and from Kashmir in the north to Burhanpur in the south. Court chroniclers also kept records (*vahis*) of happenings in Anandpur and asked Sikhs living in distant places to supply the requirements of the center so as to ensure the running of the langar/deg there. Their texts also inform us that the Guru maintained an army and that his troops marched with elephants and horses led by the drums and by the pennants with the emblem of sword imprinted on them (*asdhuj/asiket*).¹⁴⁵ The Guru is said to have patronized Hindu and Muslim sacred sites, made treaties as well as fought battles with local chiefs when necessary.¹⁴⁶

We are given a picture of a majestic figure who during a phase of extreme stress, could walk into the Mughal court, exchange gifts and courtesies with Emperor Bahadur Shah with an élan that not only was taken note of by his own scribe (*Charhi kaman shashtar sabh sare, kalagi chhab hai apar apare*) but was registered by the royal chroniclers of the time.¹⁴⁷ Behind this dignified exterior and the regalia of a temporal authority was a person with deep spiritual leanings. As the Satiguru ("True Guru") of the Sikhs, he participated in daily prayers,

was immersed in wisdom enshrined in the Granth (Param Bibeki), and could quickly correct the singing of the Guru Granth if the need arose.¹⁴⁸ He is believed to have been able to recite the complete text of the Granth from memory, if we take mid-eighteenth century traditions at face value.¹⁴⁹

He must have learnt this early in his life, for the internalization of these verses and beliefs was reflected in his poetry. It is interesting that Emperor Bahadur Shah remembered the Guru as a dervish (“saintly figure”), an epithet that harmonizes well with the descriptions used by his own poets.¹⁵⁰ They report to us how their dervish was focused on the ideas of the divine court (Khiale Guru suie dargahe Rabb) and was dedicated to the service of the Sovereign of the universe (Bapishash sare bandaghi dashtam). They reveal how this service translated into his life’s mission of turning his followers into a community directly answerable to Vahiguru. They would work toward the establishment of the divine rule on the earth (Khalsa Raj), a regime in which the meek would be protected and the evil punished (Santan ki rachha kari dutan mario dhai/Khalsa soi nirdhan ko palai, Khalsa soi dushat ko galai).¹⁵¹

Guru Gobind Singh is clearly a complex and considerable figure, someone who has left a trail of sources that range from his towns, his forts, and his weapons to the writings of his court scribes as well as those of the royal chroniclers working for the Mughal emperor. A comprehensive understanding of his life is significant for Sikhs and their historians alike. With access to new sources and a somewhat modified approach to the ones already part of scholarly discussion, we may be at the threshold of being able to achieve this goal. What could be a better commemoration of the Guru’s death centennial, than for someone to work toward an authoritative biography of this Badshah-Dervish (“Royal Mystic”), a work that would capture the nuances of the noble exterior, the deep spiritual life that inspired it, and the prophetic vision that provided the ideological base and the institutional structures for the community of his followers? Here is a momentous opportunity and a challenge!

From the Guru Granth (1775), Punjab

Appendix: Guru Gobind Singh's Life and Early Sikh Sources

It is intriguing to synchronize the details of the Guru's life—his birth in 1666, his “creation” of the Khalsa in 1699, and his elevation of the Granth to be the Guru Granth in 1708—with the information available in early Sikh sources. Four eighteenth-century sources, Chaupa Singh (1700), Kesar Singh Chhibbar (1769), Sarup Das Bhalla (1776), and Sarup Singh Kaushish (1790) mention the year of his birth as 1661, and Sukha Singh (1797) records it as 1666.¹⁵² How 1666 came to be recognized as the authoritative year of the Guru's birth is an important issue that needs to be addressed, but for our purpose it may suffice to point out that the first reference to this appears in 1797.¹⁵³

Secondly, the description of the central event of the Guru's life as being the “creation of the Khalsa” implies the emergence of something new within the Sikh community. We know that the term Khalsa was in use within the seventeenth-century community and the early reports of this event are built around the Guru's declaration of the “total Sikh community” to be renamed as the Khalsa Panth.¹⁵⁴ Furthermore, the declaration's association with the Visakhi of 1699 appears for the first time in late-nineteenth-century sources.¹⁵⁵ References to the pahul in the hukamnama discussed in this essay and information in other eighteenth century sources point to the need for a reexamination of these issues. Finally, we know that the Gurgaddi Divas of the Granth served as the center of Sikh celebrations of 2008. The early reports of the Guru's passing away, however, tell us that he bequeathed his mantle of authority to the Khalsa Panth (Bakash kio Khalas ko jama), which was to locate its destiny according to the teachings of the Guru Granth.¹⁵⁶ This belief in the dual authority of the Granth and the Panth seems to have been in use during the Guru's own lifetime. Explaining the absence of any mention to the authority of the Guru Panth during the year long commemoration offers an interesting challenge to the historians of the Sikhs.¹⁵⁷

It may be a little disconcerting to realize that if there are such variations between the information available in early texts and the current understanding of a subject of such importance as that of the life of Guru Gobind Singh, then the situation in other areas that are not so central to the field and did not attract much scholarly attention

cannot be better. In my view, this discussion points to the simple fact that the field of Sikh Studies is at a nascent stage of development and more work is required before a critical mass of serious scholarship is reached.

Yet this observation should not be seen to diminish the importance of scholarly advances of the past decades. Major achievements have been made: many of the early textual sources are now available in print. These texts need to be further examined and the information in them correlated with findings about the Sikh material heritage that have become available in the past decades. These data need to be collected, sifted, assessed, and used toward the creation of authoritative narratives of Sikh history, which will draw their vital sap from indigenous sources, so to speak, and not from the easily accessible but inaccurate renderings of these events that were produced in later times!

Notes

- * The custodians of the documents and artifacts referred to as housed in "private collections" in the Punjab and the U.S. prefer to remain anonymous. I am deeply indebted to them for providing me access to their precious possessions. My personal gratitude goes to J.S. Grewal for his encouraging comments on the outline of this paper in Summer 2008, and to John Stratton Hawley for giving its final version the benefit of his magical touch that helped me crack through various points of opaqueness in its text. Thanks to Mohan Singh of Panjab University, Chandigarh, for the map of Anandpur.
- 1. J.S. Grewal and S.S. Bal, *Guru Gobind Singh: A Biographical Study* (Chandigarh: Panjab University, 1967) is generally considered to be an authoritative work on this subject. For the discussion around the happenings in 1699, see Shiv Kumar Gupta, ed., *Creation of the Khalsa: Fulfillment of Guru Nanak's Mission* (Patiala: Punjabi University, 1999), and Madanjit Kaur, ed., *Guru Gobind Singh and the Creation of the Khalsa* (Amritsar: Guru Nanak Dev University, 2000). On the elevation of the Granth to the office of the Guru, see Rattan Singh Jaggi, *Itihas Sri Guru Granth Sahib* (Patiala: Punjabi University, 2008), and his *Guru Manio Granth* (Nanderh: Takhat Sach Khand, 2008).
- 2. For single volume text, see *Dasam Sri Guru Granth Sahib Ji* (Mehro: Kalagidhar Printing Press, 1995), 1-1428, and *Sri Dasam Granth Sahib Ji* (Nanderh: Takhat Sach Khand Sri Hazur Sahib, 2002), 1-1428. For

annotated editions, see Rattan Singh Jaggi and Gursharan Kaur Jaggi, eds., *Sri Dasam Granth Sahib* 5 vols. (New Delhi: Gobind Sadan, 1997-2008), and Bhai Randhir Singh, ed., *Shabadarth Dasam Granth Sahib* 3 vols. (Patiala: Punjabi University, 1972-1987). Bhai Randhir Singh's edited text does not include the longest composition in the Dasam Granth entitled *Charitro Pakhian*. Other primary sources include Sainapati, Sri Gur Sobha, ed. Ganda Singh (Patiala: Punjabi University, 1967 [1711?]); Koer Singh Kalal, *Gurbilas Patishahi* 10, ed. Shamsher Singh Ashok (Patiala: Punjabi University, 1968 [1751?]); Kesar Singh Chhibbar, *Bansavalinama*, ed. Rattan Singh Jaggi (Chandigarh: Panjab University, 1972 [1769]) and ed. Piara Singh Padam (Amritsar: Singh Brothers, 1997); Sukha Singh, *Gurbilas Patishahi* 10, ed. Gursharan Kaur Jaggi (Patiala: Bhasha Vibhag, 1989 [1797]); Rattan Singh Bhangu, *Sri Gur Panth Parkash*, ed. Balwant Singh Dhillon (Amritsar: Singh Brothers, 2004 [1842?]); Bhai Santokh Singh, *Sri Gur Partap Suraj Granth*, ed. Bhai Vir Singh (Amritsar: Khalsa Samachar, 1963[1842]); and Giani Gian Singh, *Tvarikh Guru Khalsa*, ed. K.S. Raju (Patiala: Bhasha Vibhag, 1970 [1891]). In addition, see Ganda Singh's "The Major Sources of Early Sikh History," in J.S. Grewal and Indu Banga, eds., *The Khalsa over 300 Years* (New Delhi: Tulika, 1999), 8-18. This essay was written in 1938, and Ganda Singh deserves recognition for pioneering a discussion on the relevant sources for Sikh history.

3. The 1966 celebrations included a procession of the Guru's weapons that were loaned from descendents of Marquis of Dalhousie, Governor General India (1848-1856). See Shamsher Singh Ashok, ed., *Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee da Punjab Sala Itihas* (Amritsar: Sikh Itihas Research Board, 1982), 370, and Mohinder Singh, "The Relics of the Tenth Master," *The Khalsa: A Saga of Excellence* (Anandpur Sahib Foundation, 1999). For a detailed discussion of the activities of this period, see Anne Murphy, "The Material of Sikh History" (Ph D Dissertation, Columbia University, 2005), chapter 6. For the 1999 celebrations, see the online edition of *The Tribune*, at <http://www.tribuneindia.com/khalsa/index.htm>. For the 2008 celebrations, see *The Tribune*, October 28 to November 4, 2008.
4. In addition to note 2, see *Hukamname*, ed. Ganda Singh (Patiala: Punjabi University, 1967), *Guru Khalse de Nishan te Hukamname*, ed. Shamsher Singh Ashok (Amritsar: Sikh Itihas Research Board, 1967); *Hukamname: Sri Guru Tegh Bahadur*, ed. Fauja Singh (Patiala: Punjabi University, 1976); *Rahitname*, ed. Piara Singh Padam (Amritsar: Singh Brothers,

- 1995 [1974]); Prem Sumarag Granth, ed. Randhir Singh (Jalandhar: New Book Company, 2000 [1953]). For the other discussions, see Rattan Singh Jaggi, *Dasam Granth da Kritativ* (New Delhi: Punjabi Sahitt Sabha, 1966); and Piara Singh Padam, *Sri Guru Gobind Singh de Darbari Ratan* (Patiala: Kalam Mandir, 1976).
5. For translations of Farsi sources, see Makhaz-i Tvarikhe-i- Sikhan, ed. Ganda Singh (Amritsar: Sikh History Society, 1949); *Sri Guru Tegh Bahadur: Farsi Srot*, tr. Piar Singh (Amritsar: Guru Nanak Dev University, 1976); and *Sikh History from Persian Sources*, ed. J.S. Grewal and Irfan Habib (New Delhi: Tulika, 2001). W. H. McLeod has made an important contribution by making Punjabi sources available in English, as in his *Textual Sources for the Study of Sikhism* (Totowa: Barnes and Noble, 1984), *Chaupa Singh Rahit-nama* (Dunedin: University of Otago Press, 1987), *Sikhs of the Khalsa* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2003), and *Prem Sumarag* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2006). For my differences with his dating of the documents translated here, see note 97 below.
 6. For recent ones, see Surjit Singh Gandhi, *A Historian's Approach to Guru Gobind Singh* (Amritsar: Singh Brothers, 2004); Nikky-Guninder Kaur Singh, *The Birth of the Khalsa* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005); and Louis E. Fenech, *The Darbar of the Sikh Gurus* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2008).
 7. Fauja Singh Bajwa and Kapur Singh Ghuman, eds., *Guru Gobind Singh Marag* (Patiala: Bhasha Vibhag, 1973). For information about its extension, I am grateful to Dr. Balwant Singh Dhillon of Guru Nanak Dev University, who was a member of the team of scholars who surveyed this route in 2007.
 8. For major exhibitions around 1999, see Susan Stronge, ed., *The Arts of the Sikh Kingdom* (London: V&A Publications, 1999); B.N. Goswamy, ed., *Piety and Splendour* (New Delhi: National Museum, 2000); and Kavita Singh, ed., *New Insights into Sikh Art* (Mumbai: Marg, 2003).
 9. It is important to register that the conversation about Sikh sites and artifacts is not new. The narrator of the *Puratan Janam Sakhi*, a latesixteenth-century source, attempts to record the places sanctified by Guru Nanak's visits, the eighteenth-century texts sing of the importance of Anandpur and Amritsar, and late-nineteenth-century authors such as Tara Singh Narotam and Giani Gian Singh prepared lists of the places of possible Sikh pilgrimage and the historic artifacts present there. See their *Sri Guru Tirath Sangraih* (Kankhal: Sri Nirmal Panchayati Akhara, 1975, [1884]),

- and Tvarikh Gurduarian (Amritsar: Bhai Buta Singh Partap Singh, n.d. [1900?]), respectively. The use of the material heritage to reconstruct Sikh history is, however, new, and Anne Murphy deserves credit for this pioneering effort. See her “The Material of Sikh History.”
10. See Piar Singh, *Gatha Sri Adi Granth* (Amritsar: Guru Nanak Dev University, 1992); Balwant Singh, *Early Sikh Scriptural Tradition* (Amritsar: Singh Brothers, 1999); and Pashaura Singh, *The Guru Granth Sahib* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2000); and my *Making of Sikh Scripture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).
 11. For developments during the 1670s, see Piara Singh Padam, *Sri Guru Panth Parkash* (Patiala: Kalam Mandir, 1990 [1977]), 58; and my *Making of Sikh Scripture*, 82-85, and 121-125. For the generally accepted version, see Taran Singh, “Sri Guru Granth Sahib,” in *The Encyclopedia of Sikhism*, ed. Harbans Singh (Patiala: Punjabi University, 1996), 4: 239-252.
 12. A brief detour to explain the evolution of my own thinking may be in order. In the late 1980s, I began my research with Sikh scriptural manuscripts. Locating them, working out ways to access them, and then studying their contents expanded my horizons in three basic ways. First, the reverence assigned to these manuscripts by their custodians, as manifested in the process of putting them up for display, unwrapping them, and returning them to their places of rest, made me aware of the importance of the material dimension of these texts. Secondly, important historical texts kept on surfacing around the manuscripts in which I was initially interested in and it was hard to resist taking note of their dates and contents and familiarizing myself with them. Finally, the conversations I had with the custodians brought forth much information about early artifacts, the details of their history, and the nature of the reverence assigned to them. Over time, the photographs of these texts, artifacts, and sites have resulted in a small personal archive, which is always a source of joy when I return to it.
 13. “Dabistan Mazahib,” *Sikh History from Persian Sources*, 68.
 14. “Chaupa Singh Rahitnama,” *Rahitname*, 90.
 15. Gurbilas Patishahi Chhevin, ed. Joginder Singh Vedanti et al. (Amritsar: SGPC, 1998), 635; Tara Singh Narotam, *Sri Guru Tirath Sangraih*, 116-121.
 16. For details of these sites, see Gurbachan Singh Nayar and Sukhdial Singh, *Guru Gobind Singh* (Patiala: Punjabi University, 1989).
 17. The Charan Ganga is now reduced to a small rivulet that drains the rainwater

from the hills to the river Satluj.

18. Prem Sumarag Granth, 41, an important document of the period, prescribes Sikhs to eat the meat of seven types of fish and fourteen types of fowl. Ropar, which is fifteen some miles downriver from Anandpur, is one of three largest migratory birds resorts in the region.
19. Pilgrimage and trade seem to be closely related in Punjabi imagination—a local proverb goes *Nale devi de darshan nale vanjha da vapar*, “Have a glimpse of the goddess and bring back bamboos to make profit.”
20. The towns that appeared on this route included Bhadarwah, Chamba, Kangra, and Nadaunh, from which point one path came to Anandpur and Ropar and the other went to Nahan and Haridwar.
21. Chetan Singh, *Region and Empire* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1991), 237, note 31. Also see Michael Strachan, *The Life and Adventures of Thomas Coryate* (London: Oxford University Press, 1962), 257-258. I am grateful to Jim Lochtefeld of Carthage College for introducing me to this interesting work.
22. I am fully aware that the buildings presently standing on these sites were constructed later, but I work on the assumption that the newly erected structures maintained the architectural integrity of the ones they replicated.
23. Guru Ratanmal, ed. Gurbachan Singh Nayar (Patiala: Punjabi University, 1985), 156.
24. *Kahlur main bandhio ani Anandpur ganv*, “*Sarab Kal Ki Benati*,” Dasam Granth, 79. *Ani Kahilur main ap tahi samai Anandpur bandhi bisram kino, Sainapati, Sri Gur Sobha*, 73. This claim would place the founding of Anandpur in 1688, that is, after the Guru's return from Paunta. For the date of 1684, see Sarup Singh Kaushish, *Guru Kian Sakhian*, ed. Giani Garja Singh and Piara Singh Padam (Patiala: Kalam Mandir, 1986), 85. For an English translation of this text, see *Guru Kian Sakhian*, tr. Pritpal Singh Bindra (Amritsar: Singh Brothers, 2005). I am grateful to Mr. Bindra for the kind gift of his book.
25. *Je je nar taih na bhirhe dine nagar nikar, je tih thhaur bhale bhirhe tine kari pritpar*. “*Sarab Kal Ki Benati*,” Dasam Granth, 79.
26. Seva Das Udasi, *Parchi Patishahi Dasvin Ki*, ed. Piara Singh Padam (Patiala: Kalam Mandir, 1988). Episodes 20 to 24. There are also other references to this spot in this text, as well as in others of the period.
27. For the history of Anandpur, see Reeta Grewal's essay in this issue; Shalini Dharmani, “*Morphology of a Religious Town: Anandpur Sahib*” (M. Phil Dissertation, Panjab University, 2004); Sukhdial Singh, *Siri Anandpur Sahib* (Patiala: Punjabi University, 1998); and Harjinder Singh Dilgir,

- Anandpur Sahib (Amritsar: Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee, 1998). For a pictorial version, see Mohinder Singh, *Anandpur: The City of Bliss* (New Delhi: UBS Publishers, 2002). I find Holgarh an intriguing name. My impression is that this was the site of Holi/Hola celebrations, which later developed as the occasion for Sikh troops to stage mock battles amongst themselves. This fort's being built on the flat area served as a good ground for these army exercises. See Sarup Singh Kaushish, *Guru Kian Sakhian*, 134.
28. Guru Gobind Singh's hukamnama asks Dip Chand to ensure the safe passage of cannons from Kabul. This important document is presently in a private collection in New York. The poet of the Ugradanti sings: Tuhi top banduk gola chalanti, tuhi kot garh kau pasak sau urhanti /71/ , for more on it, see Ami P. Shah's essay on the Ugradanti in this volume. For later references to the topkhana at Anandpur, see Koer Singh Kalal, *Gurbilas Patishahi* 10, chapter 10, 140-159.
 29. "Dabistan-i-Mazahib," *Sikh History from Persian Sources*, 69.
 30. Dasam Granth, 77. There are references to Maimu Khan, a Jamadar commanding 100 soldiers in the Sikh army, in *Guru Ratanmal*, 41, and Hayat Khan, who left the Sikhs and joined the Garhwali army at Paunta, is mentioned in *Koer Singh Kalal, Gurbilas Patishahi* 10, 93.
 31. See my *Goindval Pothis* (Cambridge, Harvard Oriental Series, 51, 1996), 97. For the title, "Baba Patishah," see 81, and 83.
 32. See the writings of the Bhattas, in *Guru Granth*, 1385-1409.
 33. Darsan karai nit Khalsa khushi hot nit nit... Satigur raj chahu dis bhayo, *Sainapati, Sri Gur Sobha*, 116.
 34. "Chaupa Singh Rahitnama," *Rahitname*, 103.
 35. *Sainapati, Sri Gur Sobha*, 173-174.
 36. *Rattan Singh Bhangu, Sri Gur Panth Parkash*, 381-382.
 37. Bakhat Mal, "The Khalsa Nama," in *Sri Tegh Bahadur: Farasi Srot*, 73.
 38. Kankan writes: ...Tin ka sut Gobind Singh sabh guruan sirmaur. Jesai avitar mai Krishan saman na aur, *Das Guru Katha*, folio 26.
 39. *Damdama Guru Ji ki kashi hai* (74), *Visakhi dipmala Amritsar kare, Hola Aanndpur kare, Abchal Nagar jai kul sambuh tare* (75), in "Rahitnama Bhai Daya Singh;" and *Anandpur param suhavan, Amritsar shubh sabh man bhavan. Harimandar Patne me joi, Dakhani Abchali Nagar so hoi* (129), in "Rahitnama Bhai Daya Singh," *Rahitname*.
 40. For old manuscripts present in distant gurdwaras, see G.B. Singh, *Prachin Birhan Bare* (Lahore: Modern Publication, 1944).
 41. For the binding of the early texts, see my *Goindval Pothis*, 29-31.

42. See Hukamnama Mahala 3, MS 913 Airha, Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar, ff. 319-322.
43. B.N. Goswamy, *Piety and Splendour*, 43.
44. For the seat at Sur Singh, see "Dabistan-i-Mazahib," *Sikh History from Persian Sources*, 74.
45. See *Gurbilas Patishahi Chhevin*, 729-730. The date of its original composition is yet to be established. The text claims to have been written in early eighteenth century, but there are references in it, which in the eyes of many, date it in the early nineteenth century. More manuscript work is required to confirm the status of these references in the original text. Interestingly, the portraits available at Sur Singh closely resemble the Guru's portrait presently available at Bhai Rupa, Bhatinda, and Dehra Ramrai, Dehradun.
46. For a portrait of Guru Tegh Bahadur, see Kerry Brown, ed., *Sikh Art and Literature* (London: Routledge, 1999), plate 5.
47. For details, see Tara Singh Narotam, *Sri Guru Tirath Sangraih*.
48. See my *Making of Sikh Scripture*, 72. This list includes 9 manuscripts produced between 1676-1692. In addition seven others dated 1675 (Pindi Lala), 1682 (Mirzapur), 1685 (Dehradun), 1685 (Nanak Mata), 1685 (Banaras), 1687 (Pateta), and 1695 (Banaras) are referred to in G.B. Singh, *Sri Guru Granth Sahib dian Prachin Birhan*, 302, 150, 177, 281, 304, 310. I have seen ones prepared in 1695 (Sikh Reference Library, Amritsar), 1698 (Takhat Harimandar, Patna), 1701 (City Museum, Chandigarh), 1703 (MS 73, Guru Nanak Dev University), and 1705 (Anurag Singh, Ludhiana). In addition, we have on record an undated manuscript prepared by Haridas, who was a scribe at Anandpur. This precious manuscript was destroyed in Operation Blue Star in 1984.
49. Published in 1967, Ganda Singh's Hukamname includes thirty-four letters of Guru Gobind Singh.
50. Both these documents are presently in the custody of families in the U.S. I am grateful to them for their permission to reproduce these photographs here. I am particularly indebted to the custodians of the first document for sending their rare possession to me so that a high resolution photograph could be prepared. It was a unique experience for our Punjabi class at UCSB to attempt to decipher its inscription.
51. Kankan, *Das Guru Katha*, folio 29b, is perhaps the first writing that offers details of these five groups.
52. Hukamname, 168-176, include five letters and the sixth one with the same date is pasted in the Anandpur Birh.

53. Rattan Singh Jaggi, *Dasam Granth da Kritativ*, 133-135.
54. All these documents are in private custody in the Punjab and the U.S. The second in the sequence appears in the Anandpur Birh.
55. I am profoundly grateful to my friend there who informed me about the existence of the plate and then introduced me to its custodians.
56. For its early appearance, see *Hukamname*, 75.
57. The early sources present the Guru's visit as part of his preparation for elevating the Sikh community to be the Khalsa Panth. See Kankan, *Das Guru Katha*, folios 28-29, Kesar Singh Chhibbar, *Bansavalinama*, 130.
58. This episode appears in MS 90280 (1791?), Punjabi University, Patiala, ff. 14-15, and MS 504 (1858), Panjab University, Chandigarh, f. 11. Randhir Singh attributes this text to Sant Bhup Singh and dates it in the early nineteenth century (*Prem Sumarag Granth*, 16-17), but more work is needed to confirm its time of composition.
59. It took me some time to locate the Kurukshetar plate. The family in question lives at 727/1, Mohalla Guru Nanak Pura, Jhansa Road. Ravi Dar Sharma, the family patriarch, died in the summer of 2007. Usha Rani, his wife, and Chandar Parkash, his son, told me that the family had a tamar patar and a hukamnama. The officials of the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee, Amritsar, they said, took the hukamnama from them in the 1970s. As for the copper plate, it was in the possession of Ram Devi, an aunt of Chandar Parkash, who decided to put it up for display in the gurdwara in the neighborhood. As per their report, the plate disappeared from there in early 1980, and no one has heard of it since. Unfortunately, there is no picture of the plate, so nothing can be said about the contents of its inscription.
60. See *Sikh Rahit Maryada* (Amritsar: Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee, 1978 [1951]).
61. See episode 71, *Charitro Pakhian Granth*.
62. Mahesh Sharma of Panjab University, Chandigarh, kindly provided me this information. The break down of the 26 copper plates created between 1650-1725 is as follows: 1650-1675: 9 plates; 1675-1700: 7 plates; 1700-1725: 10 plates. Their spread is as follows: Chamba: 14; Kangra: 4 ; Kullu and Mandi: 3; and Bilaspur: 2. For the details of this discussion, see his *Western Himalayan Temple Records: State, Pilgrimage, Ritual and Legality in Chamba* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, forthcoming), chapters 1 and 4.
63. The possibility that these families created their plates to seek favors from the Sikh chiefs in the late eighteenth century did surface in my conversations

with some scholars, but I do not find this line of thinking convincing. In my view, making the public claim of possessing an artifact whose origins were falsified could not have been an option for three priestly families of this stature. Moreover, these people were too sophisticated not to appreciate the risk involved in such a plan.

64. For Guru Amardas' visit to Kurukshetar, see Guru Granth, M4, 1116-1117.
65. Episode 71, Charitro Pakhian Granth. The report begins with the description of a situation in which the Sikhs in the Guru's retinue fall short of turbans and are unable to acquire new ones. It is decided that pilgrims are the only source of supply and that the Sikhs should remove the turbans of whoever is caught urinating in the vicinity of the temple. The effort yields good results and a large number of turbans are collected by the end of the day. These are washed, dried, and then gifted to the needy by the Guru.
66. Contemporary Sikh descriptions present the Guru's succession as Raj kaj ham par jab aio, "Sarab Kal Ki Benati," Dasam Granth, 77; Karkhantoria chahie, "Chaupa Singh Rahitnama," Rahitname, 92; the Mughal sources follow in the same vein, see "Ibratnama," Sikh History from Persian Sources, 113-115.
67. "Chaupa Singh Rahitnama," Rahitname, 82, Sarup Singh Kaushish, Guru Kian Sakhian, 82-84.
68. The Anandpur Birh first surfaced in Amritsar in the 1890s. For information on this, see the Sodhak Committee Report (Amritsar: The New Anglo Gurmukhi Press, 1897); Mahan Singh, "Dasam Granth di khas hauzari te daskhati birh;" a hand written report presently available at Balbir Singh Sahitya Kendar, Dehradun; and Piara Singh Padam, Dasam Granth Darshan. I am grateful to Piara Singh Padam and Joginder Singh Ahulwalia of Richmond, California, for their encouragement to work on this manuscript.
69. Piara Singh Padam was the first scholar to publish these pictures. See his Dasam Granth Darshan. For a brief discussion of the first portrait, see Louis E. Fenech, The Darbar of the Sikh Gurus, 6-8.
70. Dr. Daljit, Sikh Heritage (New Delhi: Parkash Book Depot, 2004), 127, and K.C. Aryan, 100 Years Survey of Punjabi Painting (1841-1941) (Patiala: Punjabi University, 1975), 22. Kishan Singh's note as presented by Aryan reads: Sri Kalagidhar Sahib Guru Gobind Singh Ji Dasvin Patishahi chhabi jo vacate hayat vich tiyar hoi hai mutabik Patna Sahib vali banai.

71. See Sainapati, Sri Gur Sobha, 142, Kankan, Das Guru Katha, folios 26-27, verse 179.
72. Tara Singh Narotam, Sri Guru Tirath Sangraih, 127-207, Dr. Daljeet, Sikh Heritage, 115.
73. See note 28. Tara Singh Narotam refers to the shifting of cannons to Lahore in the nineteenth century. See his Sri Guru Tirath Sangraih, 155.
74. A set of arrows with gold rings around them is available at a gurdwara in Kapurgarh, Sirhind. Two arrows with gold welded to them are presently in the archives at Bhaini Sahib. I am grateful to Bhai Harpal Singh for arranging to show me these artifacts.
75. Donald J. LoRocca, *The Gods of War* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1997), 37.
76. For a long composition on this theme, see "The Shashtar Nammala," *Dasam Granth*, 1021-1165.
77. For reference to the seal during Guru Gobind Singh's period, see Seva Das Udasi, *Parchian Patishahi Dasvin Ki*, 63, and 84. It seems that the history of the seal goes farther back to the period of Guru Tegh Bahadur. A document dated 1675 (Samat 1732, Harh sudi puranmashi) carries the ninth Guru's seal and is presently at a gurdwara in Mukaronpur near Chandigarh. Although no nishan of the period has survived, there is firm evidence to support its presence at Anandpur. In the literature of the period, Vahiguru is referred to as one with "a sword on his banner" (asiket, asidhuj). The first depiction of this banner with sword (asi) and shield appears in a manuscript of the *Guru Granth* dated 1775 (folio, 814), presently at Lehra Mohabat, in the Malwa area (see Conclusion). For paintings of the nishan in subsequent period, see Dr. Daljeet, *Sikh Heritage*, 142, and B.N. Goswamy, *Piety and Splendour*, 209. In recent years, there has been an increased interest in Sikh numismatics: see John S. Deyell, "Banda Bahadur and the First Sikh Coinage," *Numismatic Digest* (June 1980), 59-67; Hans Herrli, *The Coins of the Sikhs* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 2004 [1993]); and Surinder Singh, *Sikh Coinage* (New Delhi: Manohar, 2004). Surinder Singh refers to Khushwakat Rai's claim that Guru Gobind Singh had struck coins at Anandpur, but dismisses this as untenable (see his *Sikh Coinage*, 30-31). I believe that the minting of coins at Anandpur fits well with other developments and deserves serious scholarly consideration. References to these items appear in both Sikh and Mughal accounts, see Sainapati, *Sri Gur Sobha*, 116, *Sri Sarab Loh Granth Sahib Ji* ed. [not mentioned but Harnam Das Udasi] (Anandpur: Shiromani

- Panth Akali Buddha Dal, Undated [1980s]), 2: 837; and "Ibratnama," Sikh History from Persian Sources, 113-115.
78. See Surinder Singh, *Sikh Coinage*, 83. If true, the minting of Sikh coins as a marker of sovereignty at Anandpur explains the Mughal attack in late 1704. The Mughals were not only supporting the hill chiefs against the Guru, but saw the Sikhs as a threat to their own authority. A coin attributed to Banda Singh dated 1712 is available at the American Numismatic Society, New York (<http://data.numismatics.org/cgi-bin/objectsearch?kw=sikh&header=simple&dep=any&fld=any&image=yes&orderby=objs.ce1%2Cobjs.ce2%2Cobjs.m&format=fullims>). Another dating to 1713 is in the possession of Saran Singh, a Malaysia-based collector. For a detailed discussion, see John S. Deyell, "Banda Bahadur and the First Sikh Coinage," 59-67.
79. For a comprehensive discussion of the Puratan Janam Sakhi, see Rattan Singh Jaggi, *Punjabi Sahitt da Srot-Mulak Itihas* (Patiala: Punjabi University, 2001), 4: 11-55.
80. Tara Singh Narotam, *Sri Guru Tirath Sangraih*, 35.
81. For a picture of the chariot at Bhai Rupa, Bhatinda, visit http://www.sikhcyber.com/gallery_new/destinationfolder/pages/chariotm_atangangaji_jpg.htm
82. Gurbilas Patishahi Chhevin, 379-380. 83. All three artifacts were present at Kiratpur until 2001, when the prayer book disappeared. Part of this text was published under the title "Sri Satigur Ji de Muhai dian Sakhian" in *Prachin Punjabi Gadd*, ed. Piara Singh Padam (Patiala: Kalam Mandir, 1978).
84. *Hukamname*, 120-123, *Rahitname*, 93.
85. Tara Singh Narotam, *Sri Guru Tirath Sangraih*, 159.
86. Rattan Singh Bhangu, *Sri Gur Panth Parkash*, 381-382. He refers to the place of Mata Gujari's death as "Mata da Buraj."
87. *Hukamname*, 196-231.
88. It is important to note that even the name of the poet who created the narrative of Guru Gobind Singh's life entitled "Sarab Kal Ki Benati" is not retained in the tradition.
89. Rattan Singh Jaggi, *Punjabi Sahitt da Srot-Mulak Itihas*, 4: 11-55. For the manuscript of Guru Nanak's times, see my *Making of Sikh Scripture*, 33-40.
90. The idea of the Granth as the Guru developed steadily during the seventeenth century. We have a note in a manuscript dated 1654 that claims: *Jo koi is Granth Sahib Ji de darshan karega us nun Guru Nanak Dev Ji ki deh ka darshan hoiga* ("whoever will see the manuscript will

see the body of Guru Nanak Dev”). This association reappears in 1697 with “Guru Khalsa maniahi...Guru manihai Granth, “Rahitnama Bhai Prihlad Singh,” Rahitname, 67, and the title in its full clarity appears in a manuscript of Seva Das Udasi’s Parchian Patishahai Dasvin Ki, folio 50, dated 1709. The use of the titles is based on the following: Location Date Scribe Title Kartarpur 1604 Not mentioned Pothi Patiala 1653 Gurdita Jateta Granth Destroyed (1984) 1688 Pakhar Mal Dhillon Granth Ji Takhat Kesgarh 1714 Not mentioned Granth Ji

91. In one of his compositions, Guru Nanak asks “how could I reflect on the divine with my mind out of control?” (Kiau simari sivrira nahi jai, M1, GG, 661). Guru Amardas answers the question in terms of divine grace being instrumental in peaceful reflection (Nadari kare ta simaria jai, M3, GG, 661). In the early manuscripts this composition is under Guru Amardas’ name, but later scribes and the creators of the printed editions changed the attribution to that of Guru Nanak.
92. Bhai Gurdas, Varan, ed. Gursharan Kaur Jaggi, (Patiala: Punjabi University, 1987) is considered the standard edition of this text.
93. For more on this issue, see Taran Singh, *Gurbanhi dian Viakhia Parnhalian* (Patiala: Punjabi University, 1980), 51-89. For the earliest manuscript of these writings, see MS 2306, Khalsa College. Its scribe claims that Hariji, son of Miharban, narrated this text in 1650 (Samat 1707), folio 165.
94. Seva Singh, Shahid Bilas, ed. Garja Singh Giani (Ludhiana: Punjabi Sahitt Academy, 1961). Gian Ratanavali, ed. Jasbir Singh Sabar (Amritsar: Guru Nanak Dev University, 1993), and Sikhian di Bhagatmal, ed. Tarlochan Singh Bedi (Patiala: Punjabi University, 1994) are attributed to him. For a brief introduction, see Taran Singh, *Gurbanhi dian Viakhia Parnhalian*, 191-204.
95. Beautiful portraits of both Bhai Gurdas and Bhai Mani Singh are available in Moti Bagh Museum at Patiala, for another portrait of Bhai Mani Singh, see Gurbachan Singh Nayar and Sukhdial Singh, *Guru Gobind Singh*, 108 and 109.
96. The list is entitled Panj kam kare panj na kare, and is recorded in manuscripts such as the Bahoval Pothi and the one associated with Bhai Painda. For the mid-seventeenth century literature see “Sri Satigur Ji de Muhai dian Sakhian,” in *Prachin Punjabi Gadd*, 66-85. The Sikhs were exhorted to do the following:
 1. Participation in congregational worship.
 2. Generosity to the needy, suffering, and poor.
 3. Arranging for the marriage of an unmarried Sikh.
 4. Assisting a non-Sikh join the Sikh fold.
 5. Praying for the welfare of all

with no ill will for anyone. And the five prohibitions included no stealing, no adultery, no slander, no gambling, no consumption of liquor and meat.

97. My dating of the rahit documents is based on the information that is available in the early manuscripts of these texts. Unlike others who are skeptical about the dates recorded in the printed editions they work with, I do not find any reason to be so. For instance, in his *Sikhs of the Khalsa*, McLeod does not take the colophons of these texts into serious consideration. Instead, his dating emerges from his overarching understanding that these texts represent the Khalsa rahit and thus by definition have to be post-1699 and preferably after the death of Guru Gobind Singh. I do not find any evidence in support of these assumptions. In my view, the rise of these documents at Anandpur makes lot more sense than would any other time during the eighteenth century. For the conversion of dates mentioned in these documents, I used Pal Singh Purewal, *Jantari* (Mohali: Punjab School Education Board, 1994), and I am also grateful to him for his help in sorting out some complicated details. Jasbir Singh Mann of Fullerton, California, kindly sent me a copy of the *Jantari*.
98. The ideas present in Nand Lal echo in "Sri Satiguru de Muhai dian Sakhian," *Prachin Punjabi Gadd*, 79. The concept of the Khalsa Raj appears in texts such as the *Sri Sarab Loh Granth* and others produced in the 1690s.
99. For the text, see "Rahitnama Bhai Prihlad Singh," *Rahitname*, 65-67. The day and the date coordinate perfectly if we register the claim that 1752 years have gone by and 1753 is presently transpiring. With this the Magh Sudi thit panchami falls on Ravivar (Sunday, January 17, 1697). The reference to its being an auspicious day indicates that it was Basant Panchami. I have copies of eight manuscripts of this text and only one of them, MS 1442F, Khalsa College, records the date as Samat satrai sai bhai basath baras nihar, magh vadi thit panchavi virbar subh var. It is worth looking into how this happened.
100. The earliest dated appearance of this unpublished text is in MS 770, Guru Nanak Dev University, prepared in 1718 (Samat 1775).
101. Two published editions are Piara Singh Padam, "Chaupa Singh Rahitnama," in *Rahitname*, and W.H. McLeod, *Chaupa Singh Rahitnama*.
102. I base this discussion on three manuscripts: MS 227 and MS 228 at Balbir Singh Sahitya Kendar, Dehradun, and MS 1018 at Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar. MS 1018 does not have a running pagination.

It begins with folio 1 and goes up to folio 20. The handwriting changes at this point and the pagination begins again with folio 1, running up to folio 177. The structure of this text is not entirely clear to me at this point in my research. The first two manuscripts open with the preface, which is missing in MS 1018. This preface is part of Padam's edition but not of McLeod's Gurmukhi text. McLeod, however, takes "the preface" from Padam's edition, translates it, and appends to his translation without registering its importance. See his *Chaupa Singh Rahit-nama*, 31.

103. This summary version of the context of its compilation comes from MS 227 and MS 228 at Balbir Singh Sahitya Kendar, Dehradun. It does not correspond entirely with the one available in Padam's *Rahitname*, 78, who either had a different source at his disposal or decided to simplify the original text.
104. Unfortunately, this concluding statement does not appear in McLeod's translation of the text. It is recorded in the Punjabi text (p. 78), but the numbering of the last two sentences and their translations seem to have gotten shuffled with other statements in the English version (*Chaupa Singh Rahit-nama*, 166).
105. The variation of the title between Prem Sumarag, Param Marag, and Parmasur Marag is enigmatic. The Prem Sumarag appears as the title of the text in most of the extant manuscripts, but the Param Marag is mentioned as the name at the closings of the chapters. The opening and the concluding sections of the text also emphasize the theme of the Param Marag, saying that it leads to Param Purakh, and Param Rup, and is superior to the Hindu and the Muslim paths. The Prem Marag appears once in the text along with a few references to the love of Vahiguru. For its published edition, see Randhir Singh, *Prem Sumarag Granth*. For its English translation, see W.H. McLeod, *Prem Sumarag*.
106. *Prem Sumarag Granth*, 13-27, and 53-54.
107. I have had access to several manuscripts of this text. Randhir Singh refers to a manuscript dated 1701 (see his *Prem Sumarag Granth*, 58) and I have a copy of a manuscript that claims to have been prepared in 1707. With the appearance of an early-nineteenth-century translation of the *Prem Sumarag Granth* in London, McLeod had to revise the dating of this text from "the first half of the nineteenth century" (his *Prem Sumarag*, 3), to the late eighteenth century ("Reflections on Prem Sumarag," *Journal of Punjab Studies*, 14:1, 123-124). His dating of the text is based on the belief that it is product of "a settled period of Sikh

history." I tend to agree with him except that I see this stability represented in the years around 1700 at Anandpur. Interesting details ranging from references to the compositions of Guru Gobind Singh in the *Bachitar Natak Granth* to the types of fish and fowl that the Sikh are encouraged to eat point to Anandpur as the context in which this text was produced.

108. See note 79.
109. The sectarian divisions within the growing Sikh community seemed to have resulted in the creation of their own versions of the *Janam Sakhi* of Guru Nanak. For the earliest manuscript of the version associated with the followers of Prithi Chand, see MS 2306, Khalsa College. Another version known as the *Bala Janam Sakhi* is associated with Baba Handal (d. 1648), a Sikh leader who left the community and created his own group. An illustrated manuscript of this text was prepared in 1658 and was extant in Faridabad until recently. The *Janam Sakhi* genre also expanded to include stories about Guru Nanak's successors. For the text of the stories in *Pothi Bibi Rup Kaur*, see Piara Singh Padam, *Prachin Punjabi Gadd*, 66-86. An independent tradition evolved around Guru Amardas, with the earliest manuscript being dated 1683 (MS 676, Central Public Library, Patiala). For its published edition, see Rajjasbir Singh, *Guru Amardas Srot Pustak* (Amritsar: Guru Nanak Dev University, 1986), 43-207. We also see the emergence of a narrative around Guru Arjan (undated, *Prichha Mahala Panjve Ka*, MS 2219A, Khalsa College, ff. 1-25).
110. I have studied four manuscripts, which are dated 1690, 1757, 1758, and 1772.
111. Makke Madine di Goshati, ed. Kulwant Singh (Patiala: Punjabi University, 1988), 190-191.
112. In scholarly studies the text is called the *Bachitar Natak*. In the early manuscripts, however, *Bachitar Natak Granth* is the name assigned to a large section that includes a string of compositions including this one, and comprised the opening part of the present-day *Dasam Granth*. Since this particular text appeared at the head of the *Bachitar Natak Granth*, it began to be called by this name.
113. Ganda Singh's edition of Sainapati's *Sri Gur Sobha* is considered the standard edition. For an important interpretation of this text, see Anne Murphy, "History in the Sikh Past," *History and Theory* 46 (October 2007), 345-365.
114. Reference to Sainapati does appear in *Guru Ratanmal*, 80. Although the name of *Sri Gur Sobha* is not mentioned, the description below may point to it: *Sainapati kavita kahe gurdarsan te par, Kare bhali va buri nit*

- Satiguru lai savar (Guru Ratanmal, 80).
115. A manuscript of the complete text of Sri Gur Sobha is available in a private collection in the Punjab, and some chapters of the text appear in large anthologies presently available at Balbir Singh Sahitya Kendar, Dehradun, Bhasha Vibhag, Patiala, and Sahitt Academy, Ludhiana.
116. Sainapati, Sri Gur Sobha, 5-6.
117. To support this date Ganda Singh invokes Sumer Singh's Sri Guru-Pad Prem Prakash [1882]. See Sri Gur Sobha, 5, 64. The explanation is that since the dates indicated by the words athavan (1701), and athanav (1741) do not fit, this must be a scribal error with the correct word being atahasath (1711). For the text of Guru-Pad Prem Prakash, see Achhar Singh Kahlon's edition (Patiala: Punjabi University, 2000).
118. See note 114. My reading of the closing sections of Sri Gur Sobha points to their being composed soon after the Guru's death in Nanderh. It is hard to imagine a poet of Sainapati's sensitivity to history singing about reviving Anandpur after Sirhind had fallen and Banda Singh had created the semblance of a center at Mukhlispur. I see Sainapati calling the Sikhs to gather at Mukhlispur and help Banda Singh establish the Khalsa Raj, if he was writing in 1711.
119. My observations here are based on two manuscripts: the first is dated 1709 (Samat 1766, aitvar, thit panchami) and is presently available in a private collection in the Punjab, and the second, MS 1737, ff. 169-284, is archived at Khalsa College, and dated 1783. For its printed edition, see Parchi Patishahi Dasvin Ki, ed. Piara Singh Padam. For its English translation, see Parchian Sewadas, ed. Kharak Singh and Gurtej Singh (Chandigarh: Institute of Sikh Studies, 1995).
120. Ganda Singh, Hukamname, 192 and 194.
121. Amarnama, tr. Ganda Singh (Amritsar: Sikh History Society, 1953) Kankan's Das Guru Katha, previously mentioned, come to mind.
122. The Krishan Avatar closes as follows:
Satrah sai paintali se savan sudi thiti dip.
Nagar Pavanta subh karan Jamuna bahe samip. (1688).
123. The Ram Avatar's date of completion is Samat satra sahis pachavan harh vadi pritham such davan. (1698).
124. The Charitaro Pakhian Granth ends as follows:
Samat satra sahas bhanijai ardh sahas phuni tin kahijai.
Bhadav sudi ashatami ravivara tir satdrav granth sudhara. (1696).
125. It might be useful to point out that though Randhir Singh annotated the Charitaro Pakhian Granth, the Punjabi University authorities decided against including this section in their edition (see note 2).

126. The Nihangs (literally, “carefree”), a small but colorful group within the Sikh community, attribute both the Dasam Granth and Sri Sarab Loh Granth to Guru Gobind Singh. They place the Dasam Granth on the right and Sri Sarab Loh Granth on the left side of the Guru Granth in their public worship. The ceremonial texts of the Dasam Granth and Sri Sarab Loh Granth have 1428 and 1216 pages, respectively. Chatar Singh Jiwan Singh, a commercial publishing house based in Amritsar, prepares these texts for use in the gurdwaras associated with the Nihangs.
127. See note 77. One has to go to the main centers associated with the Nihangs at Anandpur or Patiala to get this text.
128. Kahn Singh Nabha places it in the post-Guru Gobind Singh period: see his *Mahan Kosh* (Patiala: Bhasha Vibhag, 1981 [1930]), 167. W.H. McLeod seemingly pushes this further into the late eighteenth century, see his *Historical Dictionary of Sikhism* (Lanham, Md.: The Scarecrow Press, 1995), 188-189, and *Sikhs of the Khalsa*, 138-139. McLeod offers no manuscript evidence in support of this dating.
129. Sri Sarab Loh Granth, introduction, chh. It may be useful to mention that some of the manuscripts of this text contain a composition attributed to Gurdas Singh that concludes with *Sambat satra sai bhae barakh satvanja jan. Gurdas Singh puran kio sri mukh granth parmanh*. The dating of this important composition is yet to receive the attention it deserves. For its text, see *Varan Bhai Gurdas* (Amritsar: Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee, 1952), airha, and 436-451.
130. After the Sri Sarab Loh Granth, the text has a set of 39 folios recording twelve hikayats and two other compositions not known to me at this point.
131. To my knowledge, the title Dasam Granth begins to appear in the late nineteenth century—see Budh Singh, *Khalsa Shatak* (1876), in *Rahitname*, 162; also the Sodhak Committee Report (1897)—and then is taken up by Giani Bishan Singh in his “Dasam Granth Kis Ne Banhia” (1902), and Ranh Singh Akali in his *Dasam Granth Niranhaya* (Bhasorh: Panch Khalsa Diwan, 1918). Although the title Dasam Granth has become popular in scholarly literature, the most commonly used edition of the Dasam Granth in the Nihang gurdwaras is in fact entitled, *Dasam Sri Guru Granth Sahib Ji* (Mehro: Kalagidhar Printing Press, 2005[1995], 1-1428).
132. They range from the Prem Ambodh, which sings of both mythological and historical figures, to the translation of the Chanakaya Rajniti into Punjabi. The late-eighteenth-century texts also refer to the presence of other “large texts” such as the *Vidia Sagar* and the *Samund Sagar*, which

- were supposed to have been created at Anandpur but are no longer accessible. See Kesar Singh Chhibbar, *Bansavalinama*, 135.
133. "Chaupa Singh Rahitnama," *Rahitname*, 107-108.
134. Prem Sumarag Granth, 13-27, and 53-54.
135. Sri Sarab Loh Granth Sahib Ji, 2: 496-497, and 529-533; "Rahitnama Bhai Nand Lal," and "Rahitnama Bhai Prihlad Singh," *Rahitname*, 55, and 66.
136. Doris R. Jakobsh in her *Relocating Gender in Sikh History: Transformation, Meaning and Identity* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2003), 44-45, writes: Given the 'Pakhian Charitar's stark condemnation of what was understood to be implicit in womanhood, the wiles-of-women narratives must be viewed as essential in configuring the construction of gender during the time of the tenth guru, particularly in the light of the specific male construct initiated by the guru through the Khalsa order. Nikky-Guninder Kaur Singh in her *Birth of the Khalsa*, 119-120, presents the goddess compositions in the *Bachitar Natak Granth* as a marker of Guru Gobind Singh's "acknowledgement of the female power in society." Although both scholars claim to be dealing with the *Dasam Granth*, they are highly selective in what they cull from it. Jakobsh closes in on a string of compositions in the *Charitaro Pakhian Granth*, and Singh's discussion remains restricted to a set of compositions in the *Bachitar Natak Granth*. It is important not to miss the point that their arguments would have faced difficulties if other parts of these texts had been brought into their respective discussions.
137. See W.H. McLeod, *The Evolution of the Sikh Community* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), 13-14, and Jeevan Deol, "Eighteenth Century: Khalsa Identity: Discourse, Praxis, and Narrative," in Christopher Shackle, Gurharpal Singh and Arvindpal Singh Mandair, eds., *Sikh Religion, Culture and Ethnicity* (Richmond: Curzon Press, 2001), 30-35.
138. Seva Das Udasi, *Parchian Patishahi Dasvin Ki*, 74, "Chaupa Singh Rahit Nama," *Rahitname*, 94.
139. For more on Mangal, see Piara Singh Padam, *Sri Guru Gobind Singh de Darbari Ratan*, 129-134.
140. I am grateful to Baba Santa Singh's discourse on "Mat Bhagavati pita [A]Kal Purakh god lio hai Khal[sa] pali," from *Sri Sarab Loh Granth*, 2:496, which he shared with me during one of my meetings with him in Talvandi Sabo in the mid-1990s.
141. The details of Guru Gobind Singh's compositions were obviously clear to the compilers of the early manuscripts but following the upheaval

of the evacuation of Anandpur, the community's understanding of this issue seemingly got somewhat confused. During the twentieth century, efforts have been made to resolve this. In a meeting held on May 11, 1938, the Dharamik Salahakar Committee of the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee, Amritsar, recommended that the compositions in the Dasam Granth that carry the title of "Sri Mukhvak Patishahi 10" be regarded as belonging to Guru Gobind Singh, but simultaneously suggested that "more work needs to be done to assess the attribution of those writings that carry the same title but appear in other texts of the period." See Kirpal Singh, ed., *Panthank Mate* (Chandigarh: Man Singh Nirankari, 2002), 17. The past seven decades have seen no advance on this front. In my view, notice should be taken of the fact that the usage of the title "Sri Mukhvak Patishahi 10" in the Anandpur Birh, Patna Birh, and other early manuscripts do not correspond with the printed edition of the Dasam Granth. Based on my study of these variations, I submit that the title Sri Mukhvak Patishahi 10 is part of the language at the Sikh court and it may have developed as the Punjabi counterpart of the Farsi court term "mukhatib," meaning "addressed to." The appearance of this title at the head of a composition thus indicates that it was presented at the court and thus had the honor of having been addressed/dedicated to Guru Gobind Singh. This meaning will explain the context of a large number of compositions in the Dasam Granth as well as other texts of the period. I believe that the Sikhs have forgotten the original meaning of mukhvak, and this has proved to be extremely problematic for their understanding of the literature of the period of Guru Gobind Singh. I hope to address this issue in detail in my forthcoming writings.

142. For a summary of this understanding, see "Dasam Granth," in W.H. McLeod, *Essays in Sikh History* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2007), 54-65.
143. "Tankhahnama Bhai Nand Lal," *Rahitname*, 55, "Rahitnama Bhai Prihlad Singh," *Rahitname*, 66, "Rahitnama Bhai Daya Singh," *Rahitname*, 68, "Chaupa Singh Rahitnama," *Rahitname*, 80, 94. *Prem Sumarag Granth*, 3, 4, 15.
144. I am grateful to Joginder Singh Ahluwalia of Richmond, California, for providing me the films of the early manuscripts. In addition to the two dated eighteenth-century manuscripts that surfaced in my fieldwork, Randhir Singh mentions two others of 1765 and 1783: see his *Shabad-Murati* (Amritsar: Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee, 1962), 52.

145. See Ami P. Shah's discussion on the Benati Chaupai in her "Liturgical Compositions in the Dasam Granth" in this volume.
146. The Sikh center's relationship with Sufi seats at Ghurham and Sadhaura seems to have close parallels to that of Naina Devi and Kapal Mochan. This area of study is yet to be explored.
147. Sainapati, Sri Gur Sobha, 156. The fact that the Guru was armed when he met Emperor Bahadur Shah was not lost on the court chronicler who mentions it in his report. See "Reports from Bahadur Shah's court, 1707-1710," Sikh History from Persian Sources, 106.
148. Seva Das Udasi, Parchian Patishahi Dasvin Ki, 62, 103.
149. Kesar Singh Chhibbar reports that when denied access to the Kartarpur Pothi, Guru Gobind Singh dictated the Granth from his own memory (Apni rasana thi uchar hor banaia). See his Bansavalinama, 126.
150. When approached with the question of what to do with the Guru's considerable property after his death, the emperor categorically ordered that the authorities should not interfere "with the property of dervishes." "Reports from Bahadur Shah's court, 1707-1710," Sikh History from Persian Sources, 107.
151. Amarnama, 21 and 24; Sainapati, Sri Gur Sobha, 73; and Rahitname, 59.
152. Samat 1718, Magh de mahine, krishan pakh thit satvin, ravivar, "Chaupa Singh Rahitnama," Rahitname, 92. Samat 1718, Dhneshta nichhatar tijhe charan, ravivar mahina magh thit Ashatami, Kesar Singh Chhibbar, Bansavalinama, 125; Bahut kal satigur rahe Patane dhar avatar, baras duadas so adhik karat bilas bihar, Sarup Das Bhalla, Mahima Parkash, f. 398 MS 176 , Khalsa College, Amritsar; Samat 1718, Pokh mas sudi saptami, budhvar, Sarup Singh Kaushish, Guru Kian Sakhian, 53; Samat 1723, Samat satarah sahas bhanije, bis tine sang barakh ganhijai, Sukha Singh, Gurbilas Patishahi 10, 34. Other eighteenth century sources such as Kankan, Das Guru Katha; Mahima Parkash (Vartak), ed. Kulwinder Singh Bajwa (Amritsar: Singh Brothers, 2004), do not mention the year of the Guru's birth. The date of Samat 1723, Samat again bisanto muni sasi janmat bhal is also available in Koer Singh Kalal, Gurbilas Patishahi 10, 34.
153. Leading scholars such as Piara Singh Padam have supported the Guru's birth in 1661: see his Dasam Granth Darshan (Patiala: Kalam Mandir, 1990 [1968]), 14, and his Sri Guru Gobind Singh de Darbari Ratan, 268. In addition, see G.B. Singh and Des Raj Narang, 1661 or 1666: Correct Date Of Birth of Guru Gobind Singh (New Delhi: Himala Publishers 2001 [1993]), and Pal Singh Purewal's response to their position, Guru Kian Sakhain, tr. Pritpal Singh Bindra, 22-24. I am grateful

- to Mohinder Singh of National Institute of Punjab Studies, New Delhi, for sending me the pamphlet by Singh and Narang.
154. Sarab sangat adi anti mera Khalsa; Sagal Sikh bhai Khalsa sunie sach bichar; Sarab Khalsa laini sidhio; Sainapati, Sri Gur Sobha, 81, 100, and 153.
 155. The dates appear as follows in the early sources: 1697. Samat 1754 savan din sat, "Rahitnama Chaupa Singh," Rahitname, 94; 1698. Samat 1755, Prem Sumarag Granth, 2; 1697. Samat 1754, Kesar Singh Chhibbar, Bansavalinama, 127; 1698. Samat 1755 Visakhi, Sarup Singh Kaushish, Guru Kian Sakhian, 111; 1689. Samat 1746, Koer Singh Kalal, Gurbilas Patishahi 10, 134; 1695. Samat 1752 Visakhi, Seva Singh, Shahid Bilas, 67; 1695. Samat 1752 Visakhi, Ratan Singh Bhangu, Sri Gur Panth Parkash, 33; 1699. Samat 1756 Visakhi, Giani Gian Singh, Tvarikh Guru Khalsa, 879. For Ganda Singh's discussion of this issue, see Sri Gur Sobha, 19.
 156. Sainapati, Sri Gur Sobha, 170. The interweaving of authority between the Granth as the repository of the divine word (shabad) and the Khalsa Panth, representing the Guru's form (rup), appears in several writings of the 1690s. See Rahitname, 55-60, 65-67, 112, and 147, and Sri Sarab Loh Granth Sahib Ji, 2: 496-497, and 529-533.
 157. As part of the 2008 celebrations, Punjabi University, Patiala, and Takhat Sach Khand, Nanderh, invited Rattan Singh Jaggi, the leading scholar of early Sikh literature to write on the Guru Granth (see his Itihas Sri Guru Granth Sahib, and Guru Manio Granth). J.S. Grewal has recently completed his book on the Guru Granth, which he hopes to publish soon.

JAP SAHIB
TRANSLATION & INTERPRETATION (PAURIS 6 TO 19)

PROF KULWANT SINGH*

It is in continuation with the introduction to this verse, part of daily morning Sikh prayer as prescribed vide Article IV, subsection 2 of Rehat Maryada vide SGPC Resolution no 97, February 3, 1945 and the sample transliteration and English Translation of the first five verses of this 199 verses texts in the October 2025 issue of Abstracts of Sikh Studies. We give below a similar rendering of the next fourteen verses from verses from 6 to 19 in Bhujang Prayat Chhand and a gist of these verses.

In these verses, Guru Gobind Singh pays his obsequiousness to the Sole Divine Cosmic power and extends his felicitations and salutations to it as he recounts its implicit Divine attributes since it is invisible yet immanent, formless, casteless, all pervasive, eternal, immortal, almighty, sovereign and inscrutable as described in the opening verse of this text.

Some of these Divine attributes of this cosmic power derived from these Fourteen verses consist of:

1. Its monotheistic, immortal, eternal existence and presence beyond time and space.
2. Its formless, indestructible, uniform existence
3. Its self-existent, primordial existence without any birth and death in the biological sense.
4. Its impartial, immune and neutral response to any kind of religious-oriented worship and religiously prescribed, repetitive, meditational practices and ritualistic modes of supplication
5. Its unfathomable, inscrutable, immeasurable extent and

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magnitude.

6. Its complete freedom from any caste, family lineage identity markers, signs and symbols or any prescribed, visible dress code.
7. Its indestructible, unchangeable, forever abiding, existence.
8. Its unconquerable, fearless and indomitable existence and presence.
9. Its universally monotheistic, all pervasive existence.
10. And its uniform, benevolent, compassionate and indiscriminately generous disposition without any favour or prejudice to any object of its creation irrespective of its high or low material status.

Visualising these Divine attributes integrated in a rainbow like spectrum, Guru Gobind Singh's spiritually enlightened mind pays a glorious tribute in the form of repeated salutations to Divine Cosmic power governing its entire creation. These verses are a sort of ode and panegyric tribute to the ultimate Divine entity. Since the expression of almost similar Divine attributes are discernible in the rest of the nine verses from (20-28) narrated in the same literary poetic mode named: Bhujang Paryat Chhand, their translation of this English translation will be published in the next issue of Abstracts of Sikh Studies, April 2006 with this above written introduction serving both these two sections of this Bhujang Paryat Verse.

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ਨਮਸਤੰ ਅਜੀਤੇ ॥ ਨਮਸਤੰ ਅਭੀਤੇ ॥  
 ਨਮਸਤੰ ਅਬਾਹੇ ॥ ਨਮਸਤੰ ਅਢਾਹੇ ॥੬॥  
 namustun ajitai, namustun abhitai  
 namustun abahai, namustun adhahai. ||6||

ਨਮਸਤੰ ਅਨੀਲੇ ॥ ਨਮਸਤੰ ਅਨਾਦੇ ॥  
 ਨਮਸਤੰ ਅਛੇਦੇ ॥ ਨਮਸਤੰ ਅਗਾਧੇ ॥੭॥  
 namustun anilai, namustun anadai  
 namustun achaidai, namustun aghadhahi. ||7||

ਨਮਸਤੰ ਅਗੰਜੇ ॥ ਨਮਸਤੰ ਅਭੰਜੇ ॥  
 ਨਮਸਤੰ ਉਦਾਰੇ ॥ ਨਮਸਤੰ ਅਪਾਰੇ ॥੮॥  
 namustun agunjai, namustun abhunjai  
 namustun oodharai, namustun aparai ||8||

ਨਮਸਤੰ ਸੁ ਏਕੈ ॥ ਨਮਸਤੰ ਅਨੈਕੈ ॥  
 ਨਮਸਤੰ ਅਭੂਤੇ ॥ ਨਮਸਤੰ ਅਜੂਪੈ ॥੯॥  
 namustun so aikai, namustun anaikai  
 namustun abhootai, namustun ajoopai. ||9||

ਨਮਸਤੰ ਨਿਕਰਮੇ ॥ ਨਮਸਤੰ ਨਿਭਰਮੇ ॥  
 ਨਮਸਤੰ ਨਿਦੇਸੇ ॥ ਨਮਸਤੰ ਨਿਭੇਸੇ ॥੧੦॥  
 namustun nirkarmai, namustun nirbharmai  
 namustun nirdeasai, namustun nirbhaisai. ||10||

ਨਮਸਤੰ ਨਿਨਾਮੇ ॥ ਨਮਸਤੰ ਨਿਕਾਮੇ ॥  
 ਨਮਸਤੰ ਨਿਧਾਤੇ ॥ ਨਮਸਤੰ ਨਿਘਾਤੇ ॥੧੧॥  
 namustun nirnamai , namustun nirkamai  
 namustun nirdhatai, namustun nirghatai ||11||

ਨਮਸਤੰ ਨਿਰਧੂਤੇ ॥ ਨਮਸਤੰ ਅਭੂਤੇ ॥  
 ਨਮਸਤੰ ਅਲੋਕੇ ॥ ਨਮਸਤੰ ਅਸੋਕੇ ॥੧੨॥  
 namustun nirdhootai, namustun abhootai  
 namustun alokai, namustun asokai. ||12||

Salutation to the Divine Lord;  
 Who is unconquerable and fearless.  
 Salutation to the Divine Lord;  
 Who is immovable and infallible. ||6||

Salutation to the Divine Lord;  
 Who is without any complexion and beginning.  
 Salutation to the Divine Lord;  
 Who is impenetrable and unfathomable. ||7||

Salutation to the Divine Lord;  
 Who is indestructible and indivisible.  
 Salutation to the Divine Lord;  
 Who is generous and infinite. ||8||

Salutation to the Divine Lord;  
 Who is both united as well as diversified.  
 Salutation to the Divine Lord;  
 Who is free from five elements as well as any bondage. ||9||

Salutation to the Divine Lord;  
 Who is free from any illusions and rituals.  
 Salutation to the Divine Lord;  
 Who is free from any domicile and outward appearance. ||10||

Salutation to the Divine Lord;  
 Who is without any identity/name and desire.  
 Salutation to the Divine Lord;  
 Who is beyond elements and physical damage. ||11||

Salutation to the Divine Lord;  
 Who being without elements is irreplaceable;  
 Salutation to the Divine Lord;  
 Who being invisible is beyond any grief. ||12||

ਨਮਸਤੰ ਨ੍ਰਿਤਾਪੇ ॥ ਨਮਸਤੰ ਅਥਾਪੇ ॥  
 ਨਮਸਤੰ ਤ੍ਰਿਮਾਨੇ ॥ ਨਮਸਤੰ ਨਿਧਾਨੇ ॥੧੩॥  
 namustun nirtapai, namustun athapai  
 namustun tirmanai, namustun nidhanai. ||13||

ਨਮਸਤੰ ਅਗਾਹੇ ॥ ਨਮਸਤੰ ਅਬਾਹੇ ॥  
 ਨਮਸਤੰ ਤ੍ਰਿਬਰਗੇ ॥ ਨਮਸਤੰ ਅਸਰਗੇ ॥੧੪॥  
 namustun aghahai, namustun athahai  
 namustun tirbargai, namustun asargai. ||14||

ਨਮਸਤੰ ਪ੍ਰਭੋਗੇ ॥ ਨਮਸਤੰ ਸੁਜੋਗੇ ॥  
 ਨਮਸਤੰ ਅਰੰਗੇ ॥ ਨਮਸਤੰ ਅਭੰਗੇ ॥੧੫॥  
 namustun parbhogai, namustun sojogai  
 namustun arungai, namustun abhungai. ||15||

ਨਮਸਤੰ ਅਗੰਮੇ ॥ ਨਮਸਤਤਸਤੁ ਰੰਮੇ ॥  
 ਨਮਸਤੰ ਜਲਾਸਰੇ ॥ ਨਮਸਤੰ ਨਿਰਾਸਰੇ ॥੧੬॥  
 namustun aghumai, namustsat rumai  
 namustun jalasrai, namustun nirasrai. ||16||

ਨਮਸਤੰ ਅਜਾਤੇ ॥ ਨਮਸਤੰ ਅਪਾਤੇ ॥  
 ਨਮਸਤੰ ਅਮਜਬੇ ॥ ਨਮਸਤਤਸਤੁ ਅਜਬੇ ॥੧੭॥  
 namustun ajatai, namustun apatai  
 namustun amujbai, namustsut ajabai. ||17||

ਅਦੇਸੰ ਅਦੇਸੇ ॥ ਨਮਸਤੰ ਅਭੇਸੇ ॥  
 ਨਮਸਤੰ ਨ੍ਰਿਧਾਮੇ ॥ ਨਮਸਤੰ ਨ੍ਰਿਬਾਮੇ ॥੧੮॥  
 adaisun adaisai, namustun abhaisai  
 namustun nirdhamai, namustun nirbamai. ||18||

ਨਮੋ ਸਰਬ ਕਾਲੇ ॥ ਨਮੋ ਸਰਬ ਦਿਆਲੇ ॥  
 ਨਮੋ ਸਰਬ ਰੂਪੇ ॥ ਨਮੋ ਸਰਬ ਭੂਪੇ ॥੧੯॥  
 namo sarb kalai, namo sarb dayalai  
 namo sarb roopai, namo sarb bhoopai. ||19||

Salutation to the Divine Lord;  
 Who being beyond established is beyond any suffering.  
 Salutation to the Divine Lord;  
 Of three worlds and treasure house of all virtues | | 13 | |

Salutation to the Divine Lord;  
 Who is unfathomable and immovable.  
 Salutation to the Divine Lord;  
 Who being beyond birth is beyond three human aspirations. | | 14 | |

Salutation to the Divine Lord;  
 Who is Supreme Consumer, being immanent in all species.  
 Salutation to the Divine Lord;  
 Who being unidentifiable Colourless is indestructible. . | | 15 | |

Salutation to the Divine Lord;  
 Who is unfathomable and all pervasive.  
 Salutation to the Divine Lord;  
 Who though sustainer of oceans needs no support Himself. | | 16 | |

Salutation to the Divine Lord;  
 Who is beyond any caste and family lineage;  
 Salutation to the Divine Lord;  
 Who being without any religious is wonder of wonders. | | 17 | |

Salutation to the Divine Lord;  
 Who neither belongs to any place nor wears any garment.  
 Salutation to the Divine Lord;  
 Who being unborn of woman has no domicile. | | 18 | |

Salutation to the Divine Lord;  
 Who being eternally omnipresent is universally compassionate.  
 Salutation to the Divine Lord;  
 Who being universally immanent is universally sovereign. | | 19 | |

## ON THE ISC FRONT

KANWAL PAL SINGH\*

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The fourth quarter, October – December 2025, was marked by significant outreach and commemorative initiatives undertaken by the International Sikh Confederation (ISC). The Confederation continued to strengthen its governance framework and expand its engagement with national and international stakeholders.

A joint meeting of the **Global Sikh Council (UK)**, the **International Sikh Confederation (ISC), Chandigarh**, and **Kendri Sri Guru Singh Sabha, Chandigarh** was held on 5th December, 2025, at the ISC Headquarters to deliberate on pressing Panthic issues and formulate a collaborative strategy. The meeting, graced by Senior Advocate Navkiran Singh, brought together key representatives including Amritpal Singh Sachdeva, Dr. Birendra Kaur, Sardar Kanwal Pal Singh, Dr. Khushhal Singh, Dr. Jaspal Kaur Kaang, and Sardar Inderpreet Singh. Participants expressed deep concern over the challenges confronting the Sikh community and unanimously agreed to work jointly for safeguarding the interests of the Panth, promoting awareness, and evolving effective solutions for Punjab and the global Sikh diaspora. The meeting also discussed the framework for uniting Sikh bodies on a common platform to enhance coordination, representation, and strategic advocacy, concluding with a commitment to formalize an actionable joint programme in the near future.

An important highlight of this quarter was the series of communications and representations made to dignitaries and institutions regarding the 350th Martyrdom Anniversary of Guru Tegh

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Bahadur Sahib, who sacrificed his life to uphold the principles of freedom to religion, compassion, and human dignity. The ISC has undertaken significant initiatives to commemorate the same:

- The ISC has advanced two proposals to the Hon'ble Prime Minister of India, Shri Narendra Modi, to honour the supreme sacrifice of Guru Tegh Bahadur Sahib on the occasion of his 350th Martyrdom Anniversary. In its communication, ISC has respectfully urged the Government of India to institutionalize an **annual Kirtan Darbar at the Red Fort, New Delhi**. Such an event would serve as a lasting homage to Guru Sahib's legacy, while fostering interfaith harmony, reflection of cultural, and national unity.
- In a further initiative, ISC has sought the Prime Minister's support in proposing to the United Nations that **24th November be observed as an International Day** to mark Guru Tegh Bahadur Sahib's martyrdom. Suggested titles included *International Day for Freedom to Religion/ Faith* and *International Day to Stop Forced Conversions*, both reflecting the Guru's unparalleled stand for human dignity, pluralism, and universal rights. These proposals underscore ISC's commitment to ensuring that Guru Sahib's timeless message of compassion and courage receives recognition not only at the national level but also on the global stage, positioning India as a champion of religious freedom and moral conviction.
- A proposal has been submitted to Shri Gulab Chand Kataria, Hon'ble Governor of Punjab and Administrator of Chandigarh, for the organization of a Kirtan Darbar at a prominent public venue, such as, Leisure Valley or near the Chandigarh Emblem. This spiritually significant event, featuring renditions of Gurbani by eminent ragis and scholars, is envisioned as a solemn tribute to Guru Sahib's legacy and as an opportunity to reinforce Chandigarh's identity as a city that celebrates diversity, spirituality, and cultural heritage.
- ISC also proposed commemoration of the 350th Martyrdom Anniversary of Guru Tegh Bahadur Sahib to **HWPL (Heavenly Culture, World Peace, Restoration of Light)**, a South Korean-

based International peace NGO known for promoting World Peace and advocating for International law, notably the Declaration of Peace and Cessation of War (DPCW). HWPL graciously honoured this request during its Interfaith Dialogue Meeting on 25<sup>th</sup> November, 2025, with diverse Faith representatives participating therein. HWPC paid tribute to Guru Sahib's legacy as below:

The 350<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Guru Tegh Bahadur's sacrifice marks one of the most extraordinary events in human history. He gave his life not only for his own community but also to protect the religious freedom of those from another faith, defending freedom of religion and conscience, centuries before the United Nations defined Fundamental Human Rights.

His sacrifice is more than a religious event - it is a historic demonstration that every human being has the right to choose their belief and faith freely. For this reason, he is honored not only within Sikhism, but across various religions, academic fields, and international institutions.

- The ISC also took a proactive role in safeguarding the sanctity of Sikh values in public discourse. A formal representation was submitted to *The Tribune*, expressing concern over its misleading headline on 26th November, 2025, titled "*Operation Sindoor legacy of Guru's valour: Modi.*" distorting the legacy of Guru Tegh Bahadur Sahib. ISC emphasized the responsibility of the press to uphold accuracy and respect in matters of faith and heritage.
- A landmark initiative by the International Sikh Confederation (ISC): the launch of a Series of Conclaves titled, "*The Way Forward*".

In solemn tribute to the 350th Martyrdom Anniversary of Sri Guru Tegh Bahadur Sahib, the first Conclave was held on 20th December, 2025, at the People's Convention Centre, Chandigarh, which focused on the pressing issue of **Religious Conversions in Punjab**.

This gathering brought together a distinguished panel of eminent personalities from diverse fields, i.e., former judges, senior advocates, journalists, scholars, and Sikh institutional leaders. The Conclave was

graced by Singh Sahib Prof Manjit Singh, Former Jathedar Sri Akal Takht Sahib, as Chief Guest. The deliberations were rooted in Sikh ethos and constitutional values, aiming to explore constructive responses to the growing concerns around religious conversions.

The Conclave reaffirmed Guru's legacy as the eternal beacon of religious freedom. The deliberations emphasized the need for institutional accountability, urging Sikh institutions to actively guide the youth and wider public in translating Sikh values into everyday life. Panelists highlighted the vital role of Sikh thinkers and preachers in responsibly shaping public understanding for promoting communal harmony as per Guru's powerful message.

The Conclave further recommended that the Government of Punjab strengthen communities through education, cultural engagement, and economic empowerment as safeguards against exploitation. Any move towards an anti-conversion law stands fundamentally at odds with Sikh philosophy, which upholds freedom of conscience, dignity of choice, and respect for all faiths. Sikh teachings reject coercion in matters of belief and affirm that spirituality must arise from inner conviction, not external factors.

In his concluding remarks, Prof Manjit Singh, emphasized the importance of upholding Sikh values and strengthening our institutions. He further said that an individual's character is shaped by three pillars – Family, School, and Religious places. He urged that these must be made strong if we wish to instill Sikh values in the coming generations. He stressed that our preachers be made conversant with recent technologies, including AI. He appealed for unity beyond ego and self promotion, so that efforts may truly serve the Panth. He further envisioned that organizations should unite to form a caravan, moving forward with shared purpose and commitment to the Panth and its future.

## PEASANTS TO WARRIORS: A TRAVELOGUE OF SIKH SOLDIERING OVER 250 YEARS

A REVIEW BY MANPREET KAUR\*

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*Author: Lt. Gen. Rajinder Singh Sujlana*  
*Publication: The Variety Book Depot, New Delhi*  
*Year: 2025; Page : 485*

Lt. Gen. Rajinder Singh Sujlana, the current President of the Institute of Sikh Studies (from 2025), has authored *Peasants to Warriors: A Travelogue of Sikh Soldiering over 250 Years*. A distinguished officer of the Sikh Regiment, he has been decorated with PVSM, AVSM, and VSM. Coming from a family with four generations of military service, Sujlana brings both professional expertise and personal inheritance to his writing.

The book primarily addresses a central question: **why and how a peace-loving community adopts the path of soldiering**. Structured into six parts, the work attempts to answer this question by tracing the evolution of Sikh militarisation over 250 years. This is not Sujlana's first contribution to the field; his earlier works — *Along Came a Warrior: Banda's Dharam Yodh* and *The Sikh Theory of Just War* — demonstrate his sustained interest and specialisation in Sikh military history. In the present volume, he aims to consolidate the evolution of Sikh soldiering into a single, comprehensive narrative.

The concept of “peasants to warriors” implies a transformation of an agrarian community into a martial one. The book unfolds this transformation in multiple stages.

The first part outlines the core principles of Sikhism — its

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\* Assistant Professor, Akal University, Talwandi Sabo & Research scholar, Panjab University, Chandigarh

ideology, expansion, and the symbolic adoption of the sword. The foundation of Sikhism lies in the teachings of Guru Nanak Dev, who proclaimed, “*There is no Hindu, no Mussalman,*” emphasizing universal humanity, and humbly expressed, “*I crave for the dust of the feet of those who love God.*”

If we consider the birthplace of Sikhism, Punjab’s geographical position as India’s northwestern frontier exposed it to repeated invasions, fostering a culture of resistance and soldiering. The narrative of Sikh militarisation begins with the martyrdom of the Gurus. Guru Arjan Dev is credited with initiating organised security by appointing 5,000 men for the protection of the Harmandir Sahib. Guru Hargobind emerges as the first Sikh military leader, emphasising ethical warfare, strategic battleground selection, and disciplined conduct. Guru Har Rai adopted defensive strategies by residing in hilly terrain to safeguard Amritsar. Guru Tegh Bahadur, who chose not to wield arms, became a martyr for religious freedom by resisting forced conversions, thereby positioning himself as a defender of Hinduism as a universal faith. It shows how peace-loving followers of Guru Nanak and his successors were converting into a soldier class.

On the other hand, the rise of Guru Gobind Singh at Anandpur Sahib marks a decisive phase. The author characterises this era with phrases such as “*hearts had to be steeled to counter tyranny*” and “*rusting swords had to be unsheathed.*” Facing hostility from hill rajas and Brahmanical elites, Guru Gobind Singh established a military training base at Paonta Sahib and founded the Khalsa Panth. The formation of the Khalsa by the Guru embodied secularism, spiritual socialism, participatory democracy, and a transformation from *Charan Pabul* to *Khande ki Pabul*. *Khande Ki Pabul* symbolises militarily within the Khalsa Panth.

Following Guru Gobind Singh’s death, Sikh soldiering entered a new phase under Banda Singh Bahadur. This phase is known for a large level of participation of the peasant class in militarism. Banda Singh Bahadur also transitioned from a farmer to an ascetic before becoming a devoted follower of Guru Gobind Singh. Entrusted with leadership, Banda pursued administrative and military reforms, symbolising the republican ethos of Sikhism. His forces, largely

composed of peasants, were highly mobile and relied on both traditional weapons and agricultural tools. Banda Singh Bahadur abolished the mansabdari and zamindari systems which was relief for the peasants. His military strategies earned him recognition as the first Sikh empire-builder. After his execution, the Sikhs reorganised into the Dal Khalsa and later into the Misl.

One of the Misl, the Sukarchakiya Misl, was the strongest, from where Maharaja Ranjit Singh ultimately consolidated Sikh power by modernising the Khalsa Army. The author compares him to Emperor Akbar, highlighting their shared illiteracy paired with exceptional political acumen. Ranjit Singh is portrayed as a risk-taker, strategist, and the most formidable Indian ruler encountered by the British. His reforms encompassed centralised administration, grievance redressal systems, agricultural security, and a modern military structure, including the *Fauj-i-Ain* and *Fauj-i-Khas*. In this way during Ranjit Singh's time, Sikh militarism become formalised. Following his death, the narrative concludes with the Anglo-Sikh Wars and the annexation of Punjab in 1849.

The author encapsulates the essence of Sikh soldiering with the statement:

“The sword that carved the Khalsa's path to glory was undoubtedly forged by Gobind, but the steel was provided by Nanak.”

The author frequently employs comparative analysis, juxtaposing Sikh ideals with global historical developments. He equates Sikh principles of equality and fraternity with those of the American and French Revolutions and interprets the institution of *langar* (community kitchen) as an early form of Corporate Social Responsibility. The Sikh war cry, “*Jo Bole So Nihal, Sat Sri Akal,*” is presented as a precursor to humanitarian ideals akin to the Red Cross.

He presents the Sikh Gurus as true nationalists, noting that the Guru Granth Sahib refers to *Hindustan* as the homeland rather than Punjab. He analysed the Sikh concept of *Dharam Yudh* (Just War), emphasising warfare solely for the protection of faith, the oppressed, and moral righteousness.

From a critical perspective, the book primarily emphasises

**military evolution, strategy, administration, and warfare**, rather than the socio-economic transformation of peasants into warriors. While chapter headings such as “*Rise of the Peasants*” and “*Peasant-Soldier Endures*” suggest agrarian analysis, the content largely remains focused on military developments. Sikhs are consistently portrayed as **saint-soldiers**, but the peasant dimension is not sufficiently theorised.

Traditionally, a travelogue refers to a first-hand account of an individual’s journeys and experiences, usually narrated in the past tense. Although the author does not physically “travel” through time, his lifelong service in the Indian Armed Forces enables him to connect contemporary Sikh military traditions with their historical roots. The author also used this word figuratively, not literally. Another meaning of travelogue is a journey through time. Book consist the journey from Guru Nanak to Ranjit Singh.

Nevertheless, despite some limitations, *Peasants to Warriors* stands as one of the most comprehensive and well-compiled works on Sikh soldiering. The author skillfully interweaves past and present, covering nearly 250 years of Sikh soldiering

## NEWS & VIEWS

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### **S GURBIR SINGH ELECTED AS IOSS PRESIDENT**

The members of Institute of Sikh Studies (IOSS), Chandigarh have unanimously elected S Gurbir Singh as the President for the year 2026. Members also appreciated the work done by the outgoing committee headed by Lt Gen (retd) R.S. Sujlana.

S Gurbir Singh has nominated the Executive Committee for 2026 and placed the members under various committees which would be engaged in specific areas.

He has nominated the following Executive Committee for year 2026:

|                             |                 |
|-----------------------------|-----------------|
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THE CANADIAN SIKH LAWYER WHO REFUSED TO SWEAR OATH TO KING CHARLES – AND GOT THE LAW CHANGED

When Prabjot Singh Warring was preparing to enter the legal profession in Alberta, he encountered a requirement that placed him at the centre of a constitutional and cultural debate. Like all prospective

lawyers in the province, he was expected to swear an oath of allegiance to the reigning monarch, now King Charles III. For Warring, an initiated Sikh, that oath posed a serious conflict with his religious beliefs.

Rather than quietly comply or abandon his legal career, Warring chose to challenge the rule in court. His case, first filed in 2022, ultimately reached the Alberta Court of Appeal. On December 16, 2025, the court ruled in his favour, concluding that the mandatory oath violated freedom of religion under the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and ordering the province to change the requirement.

At the time, Alberta required all new lawyers to swear an oath of allegiance to the monarch as a condition of being admitted to the bar. While similar oaths exist elsewhere in Canada, most provinces do not make them mandatory or allow alternative affirmations.

Warring argued that the requirement forced him to choose between his religious obligations and his ability to practise law. He maintained that this amounted to an infringement of his Charter right to freedom of religion.

A lower court initially dismissed Warring's case in 2023, characterising the oath as largely symbolic and not a meaningful infringement on religious freedom. Warring appealed that decision, taking the matter to Alberta's highest court.

In December 2025, a unanimous three-judge panel of the Alberta Court of Appeal overturned the earlier ruling. The judges found that the oath was not merely symbolic and that it placed a real and substantial burden on Warring by conditioning his professional future on violating his faith.

What the court decided: The Court of Appeal ruled that the mandatory oath violated section 2(a) of the Charter, which protects freedom of conscience and religion. The court declared the requirement to be of no force or effect and ordered the province to fix the issue within 60 days.

Judges suggested several possible remedies, including abolishing the oath altogether, making it optional, or amending its wording to remove compulsory allegiance to the monarch.

Who is Prabjot Singh Warring: Prabjot Singh Warring is a Canadian

lawyer based in Edmonton, Alberta. He earned his law degree from Dalhousie University and was completing his articling requirements when the oath issue arose. Warring is an Amritdhari Sikh, meaning he has formally undergone Sikh initiation and follows a strict religious code of conduct.

As part of his faith, Warring believes he can swear allegiance only to Akal Purakh, the timeless divine being in Sikhism. He argued that pledging “true allegiance” to the King would contradict a prior, absolute religious oath, something his faith does not permit.

Broader reactions and debate: The decision triggered strong reactions across Canada. Civil liberties organisations welcomed the ruling as a clear affirmation that religious freedom must not be compromised by professional requirements. Supporters argued that the judgment brought Alberta into line with other provinces and reflected Canada’s pluralistic society.

Critics saw the ruling as an erosion of Canada’s constitutional traditions. They argued that as a constitutional monarchy operating under the Westminster system, legal authority ultimately flows from the Crown, making the oath a meaningful civic commitment rather than a symbolic gesture. (Courtesy : Times of India, December 16, 2025)

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