

ੴ ਸਤਿਗੁਰ ਪ੍ਰਸਾਦਿ

Price ₹ 45/-

THE SIKH REVIEW

Vol. 74:01

Date of Publication : 1ST JANUARY 2026

No. 865



ਤਖਤ ਸ੍ਰੀ ਹਰਿਮੰਦਰ ਜੀ, ਪਟਨਾ ਸਾਹਿਬ

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THE SIKH REVIEW

A theological, educational and socio-cultural Monthly founded in 1953

Vol. 74.01

JANUARY 2026

No. : 865

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Ph: 91-33-2229-9656 / 4505-0980 • Email: sikhreview@gmail.com

INTERNET EDITION: <http://www.sikhreview.org>

Price :
₹45.00

For Subscription Rates, Please see Page No. 84

THE SIKH REVIEW

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MEDITATION

The One Who Frees From Bondage

ਧਨਸਰੀ ਮਹਲਾ ੫॥

ਬੰਧਨ ਤੇ ਛੁਟਕਾਵੈ ਪ੍ਰਭੂ ਮਿਲਾਵੈ ਹਰਿ ਹਰਿ ਨਾਮੁ ਸੁਨਾਵੈ ॥
ਅਸਥਿਰੁ ਕਰੇ ਨਿਹਚਲੁ ਇਹੁ ਮਨੂਆ ਬਹੁਰਿ ਨ ਕਤਹੂ ਧਾਵੈ ॥੧॥
ਹੈ ਕੋਊ ਐਸੋ ਹਮਰਾ ਮੀਤੁ ॥
ਸਗਲ ਸਮਗ੍ਰੀ ਜੀਉ ਹੀਉ ਦੇਉ ਅਰਪਉ ਅਪਨੋ ਚੀਤੁ ॥੧॥ਰਹਾਉ ॥
ਪਰ ਧਨ ਪਰ ਤਨ ਪਰ ਕੀ ਨਿੰਦਾ ਇਨ ਸਿਉ ਪ੍ਰੀਤਿ ਨ ਲਾਗੈ ॥
ਸੰਤਹ ਸੰਗੁ ਸੰਤ ਸੰਭਾਖਨੁ ਹਰਿ ਕੀਰਤਨਿ ਮਨੁ ਜਾਗੈ ॥੨॥
ਗੁਣ ਨਿਧਾਨ ਦਇਆਲ ਪੁਰਖ ਪ੍ਰਭ ਸਰਬ ਸੂਖ ਦਇਆਲਾ ॥
ਮਾਗੈ ਦਾਨੁ ਨਾਮੁ ਤੇਰੋ ਨਾਨਕੁ ਜਿਉ ਮਾਤਾ ਬਾਲ ਗੁਪਾਲਾ ॥੩॥੧੪॥

[SGGS: 674]

Translation*

[The One] who frees from bondage, who unites with the Supreme Being, who helps us hear the Wisdom of Nam, who stills the restless mind, preventing it from wandering.

Do I have such a friend? To such a friend, I would give all my possessions, my life-breath, and my heart. I would even offer my consciousness.

Do not attach your affection to these: coveting another's wealth, another's body, or slandering anyone. The mind awakens when praise of the Har-Self is sung, in the company of awakened ones - hearing their discourse.

O treasure of virtue! O kind being! O Supreme One! You are the kind source of all peace and joy. Like a child beseeching its mother, Nanak begs for the gift of Nām.

*Translation by : S. Ravinder Singh Taneja

Welcoming The New Year 2026

As we step into 2026, it is fitting to reflect on the significant events that shaped the past year—events that brought both spiritual upliftment and serious challenges, while also reminding us of the responsibilities that lie ahead.

A Transformative November

November 2025 proved especially momentous, marked by the 556th Parkash Purab of Guru Nanak Dev Ji, the somber 41st anniversary of the November 1984 massacre, and the 350th Martyrdom Year of Guru Tegh Bahadur Sahib, along with his companions Bhai Mati Das Ji, Bhai Sati Das Ji, and Bhai Dayala Ji. The commemoration of Guru Tegh Bahadur Ji inspired worldwide participation: Sehaj Paths in gurdwaras and homes, widespread recitation of Salok Mahalla 9—

ਭੈ ਕਾਹੂ ਕਉ ਦੇਤ ਨਹਿ ਨਹਿ ਭੈ ਮਾਨਤ ਆਨ ॥
ਕਹੁ ਨਾਨਕ ਸੁਨਿ ਰੇ ਮਨਾ ਗਿਆਨੀ ਤਾਹਿ ਬਖਾਨਿ ॥੧੬॥

One who does not frighten anyone, and who is not afraid of anyone else -

says Nanak, listen, mind: call him spiritually wise. || 16 || (SGGS Pg. no. 1427)

And major processions concluding at Anandpur Sahib. Academic institutions across India held seminars, with a significant gathering at Vigyan Bhawan on 27th November.

A Joint celebration by the Punjab Government and SGPC was held at Anandpur Sahib, where S. Bhagwant Singh Mann, Chief Minister of Punjab, along with state functionaries, were present. Punjab Government, as a token of remembrance, has declared the Three Holy Cities – the walled city of Amritsar in district Amritsar, the city of Sri Anandpur Sahib in district Rupnagar, and the city of Sri Talwandi Sabo (Sri Dam Dama Sahib) in district Bhatinda.

A Year of Thoughtful Reflection

The Sikh Review marked the 350th Martyrdom Anniversary with a special issue that received widespread appreciation and increased demand from readers and institutions across the globe.

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Sikh history illustrates that major commemorative years have often resulted in the establishment of lasting institutions—from Guru Nanak Dev University in 1969 to Virasat-e-Khalsa in 1999, the Maharaja Ranjit Singh Panorama in 2001, and the redevelopment of Nanded in 2008. Against this backdrop, despite the scale of events held in Delhi—including the impressive Light & Sound show at the Red Fort—the absence of a permanent, world-class memorial to Guru Tegh Bahadur Sahib in Delhi the very city of his martyrdom remains a significant gap.

The announcement by the Chief Minister of Haryana to establish a Sikh Museum in Kurukshetra is a welcome development. Yet Delhi, as the historical site of Guru Sahib's supreme sacrifice, deserves an enduring institution of its own.

A Call to the Delhi Government

There is a compelling need for the creation of a permanent, internationally recognised centre in Delhi honouring Guru Tegh Bahadur Ji. Such an institution — whether a Museum-cum-Memorial, Guru Tegh Bahadur Institute for Higher Learning (A deemed University under the Delhi Government) comprising a Global Research Centre, an Interfaith Dialogue Centre in Central Delhi/Dwarka — would preserve Guru Sahib's universal message for future generations and serve as a beacon of harmony and coexistence.

Other Milestones of 2025

The year also marked 30 years since the disappearance of Bhai Jaswant Singh Khalra, renewing reflection on his courageous commitment to human rights.

Punjab faced unprecedented floods, which caused widespread devastation. The response — from volunteers, the State Government, global Punjabi communities, corporate groups, and notably the Muslim community — demonstrated collective compassion in a time of crisis. Recovery efforts remain ongoing.

Towards the year's end, Punjab confronted further challenges with government proposals affecting Punjab University's governance and Chandigarh's administrative status. Strong public unity compelled the temporary halt of both measures. The lesson is unmistakable: Punjab's political leadership must act cohesively to safeguard the state's interests.

Looking Ahead

As 2026 begins, may the spirit of Chardikala guide us toward peace, progress, and purposeful action. The coming year offers an opportunity to strengthen our institutions, honour our legacy, and build a more secure and harmonious future.

S. Partap Singh, DIG (Retd.)
Editor-in-Chief

“Ardaas”: The Concept of Prayer in Sikhism

DR. SHAMSHER SINGH*

Abstract:

Communion with the Divine has been the subject of reflection ever since the human being became aware of his metaphysical faculties. The holy scriptures of the Guru Granth Sahib console the Sikh disciple that his sincere prayer shall not go in vain. This faith in-Ardaas is the very basis of the Sikh dynamics.

The prayer and its various aspects had been differently explained by eminent scholars. At many places, the word "worship" was used to describe a single activity. Worship (puja) is not prayer. Puja is generally that of a sanctified Icon, the aroma in which divine life has been inspired through specified rituals. Worship is an act of homage, including that of entertainment. A devotee does not pray for a thing, but the desire is expected to be fulfilled by the efficacy of the worship rite or yajna. It is the icon that is the source of prayer. There is no change in the mental attitude of the individual asking for a boon. So the basic elements of a prayer, service, meditation, and self-surrender are lacking in these traditions.

Then what is prayer? Prayer is a sincere of the sensitive, sensitive pouring out of the nucleus soul to God. It is the nucleus of all religions. Prayer is not merely uttering or muttering mantras. Soul yearns to merge with the divine Essence. It needs infinite faith and absolute surrender of the Self. A prayerful heart requires full submission on our part. So long as we are not reduced to cipher, we cannot pray with sincerity. Complete absorption in prayer must mean complete exclusion of physical activities till prayer possesses the whole of our being, we rise superior to the world, and are completely detached from physical functions.

(i) Prayer (ardaas): Origin and Development

Bhai Kahn Singh Nahha traced the origin of the word 'ardaas' from Persian 'ardaasht', meaning to pray, or to beg. Giani Partap Singh bifurcated the word

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'ardaasht' into 'arz' act of praying, and 'dasht', meaning the prayer. Bhai Kapur Singh took the word 'ardaas' from the Sanskrit word 'ard' to ask, to beg, to pray, and as a means of wish, hope, or desire. To ask for what you desire is 'ardaas'.

(ii) Significance of Prayer

In general, prayer is an act of communication by man with the sacred or holy God. Almost all the living faiths of the world recognised the need for prayer and emphasized its importance in religion. God and men are essentially one; the difference is not in essence but in degree, a prayer is a devout supplication or a humble entreaty to God. In other words, to pray is to expose oneself to the prompting of God and to become less susceptible to the low persuasion of the world. Prayer of the highest order is the union of the part with. It is the soul speaking to the universal soul. This is true blessedness. It is not the reward of any virtue but virtue itself.

Prayer is an instinct springing from man's sense of his own weakness and limitations, the greatness, and from his recognition of the universe in which he dwells. Man is a creature of the Creator. His self-centeredness (ego) separated him from God, and his egoistic activities made him incomplete, limited, and impure. God is a complete, unlimited, and pure one.

The instinct of longing to fill the gap between the lower self and the higher self is named prayer. It brings the devotee near to his Creator. Any ritual observation designated to bring man into near relation with the unseen power of nature is prayer.

Prayer provides a mental consolation, as a troubled mind finds a console in a friend to whom all things can be poured out freely. William James writes, 'prayer is the intercourse with an ideal companion. In this attitude, all mental problems are left in the hands of a higher power...and the mind is relieved of all tensions'. Therefore, almost all the thinkers of this path agree with the view that prayer has always been recognised as the most powerful cure for all the ills of the soul, and its need is proved by its universality.

Prayer and Religion

Prayer and religion are both identical and considered an essential part of human life. They are both important to make the life of man meaningful. Religion itself has no meaning until it inspires a man to fulfill his life with the aim. Without prayer, the recitation of religious scriptures may reduce the ceremony to mere rituals and

mechanical performance. Religion was brought into existence by prayer. In fact, prayer is the supreme proof of the importance of religion as an element in human life.

Constant prayer strengthens and ennobles our life, which quickens into action by the light and heat we receive from those who have left their traces on the pages of history. Its (prayer) deepest impulses stirred up, providing strength to meet all problems of life heroically. Thus, prayer is essential for success. Tennyson says that more things are brought by prayer than this world dreams of.

Beginning of Prayer

Prayer is perhaps as old as man himself. Fear and ignorance created gods for the primitive man, and prayer naturally was its naturally was its concomitant... Death, diseases, draught... and wild animals frightened him, as he had no means to control, he set about appeasing, Prayer and religion and worshipping them. These unseen and unknown supernatural powers attracted the God-fearing people to bow before them. With the result, sacrifices and offerings were undertaken to ward off calamities. In their (Aryans') eyes, a rich offering was much more efficacious than a sincere prayer. In the early Vedic religion, as the worship of natural forces, so-called mysterious prayers of the stupid and unthiing variety that had reduced God and religion to utter mockery. Diderot says: Ignorance and fear created gods, fancy enthusiasm and deceit adorned of disfigured them. Custom respects and tyranny supports them to make the blindness of men serve its own interest. Many instances are available in old religious scriptures to testify to this thought, as mentioned below.

In its simplest and most primitive form, prayer is the expression of desire, cast in the form of a request to influence some or power conceived as supernatural. Some of the prayers, even up to this day, are of the nature of magic mantras, believed to possess in some inexplicable way mysterious powers of satisfying worldly objects. This was all deemed necessary to explain, as it was prevalent in the time of Guru Nanak. Prayers were offered to so-called gods and goddesses. Babur, the Mughal Emperor, invaded India in 1521 A.D. Instead of facing the challenge of the invader, the people offered prayers before their deities to stop the invader. Guru Nanak writes:

*When they heard the invasion of the emperor
Babur then had millions of religious leaders failed to halt him....
No Mughal became blind, and no one wrought any miracle*

Here viewpoint of the Sikh religion differs. Guru Nanak and succeeding Gurus condemned these man-made gods and deities. They are incompetent to protect themselves, how can they protect their devotees? Guru Nanak says:

*One worshippeth gods and goddesses, but
What can one demand of them?
One washeth the stone gods in water
Yeah, they that sink themselves,
then how can they ferry others across?*

To Whom the Prayer be offered

Sikhism has firm faith in one qualified monotheistic God. He is Omnipresent, Omniscient, and Omnipotent. He is the only Creator, Sustainer, and Destroyer of the Universe. Offering any kind of prayer except Him is strictly forbidden in Sikhism. Guru Ram Das says:

God is Omniscient. He is Omnipotent. He can right that which hath gone wrong. Nanak therefore advises, in humility before Him, and stand up and pray not others.

This was a unique thing of Sikh prayer advocated by the Sikh Gurus. God is above all, powerful, and competent in prayers. All other creatures begging from beggars will be long-term. Guru Arjan says:

*He who has the power to confer fearlessness,
and solace, before Him pray.*

Another instance that occurred in the life of Guru Arjan is quotable here establishes the thought well. Infuriated, Pirthi Chand, the elder brother of Guru Arjan, pursued Sulhi Khan to attack on (Guru) Hargobind Sahib Ji. Different proposals were planned and put to avoid this unhappy incident, but Guru Ji declined all offers and left all on the Almighty God to protect. Gurbani proves this faith in the following holy verse:

The Lord has protected me from the attack of Sulhi.

For he could not carry out his foul design, and he, the defiled one, died in disgrace. The Lord chopped off his head with his mighty axe. He thought evil of me, and evil consumed him in its fire.

With the advent of monotheism, a new thought arises in the field of religion. Sikhism contributed much to this aspect. The idea was acceptable at the universal level, as quoted below:

With the advent of monotheism, prayer reaches a new dignity and power. Belief in One...sovereign in the Universe carries with it a sense of security and elevation which has an ennobling influence on thought and life. It makes a man free in the world.

Prayer and Sikh Religion:-

The Sikhs are particular about prayer. They always start their new business, a new project, by remembering God...offering something for common welfare or needy persons, and then praying for success, even the day's routine business is started with prayer...so in Sikhism, service, meditation, and prayer go hand in hand. In fact, the majority of the hymns in Guru Granth Sahib are in the form of prayer, all addressed to God. In the Sikh tradition, two things are firmly established, having the sanction of the Gurus: first, every prayer or ceremony, religious or social, ends with an 'ardaa' or supplication to God invoking His grace, Secondly, morning and evening prayers and remembrance of God form an essential part of the Sikh discipline prescribed at the time of the initiation ceremony.

The following popular stanza of Guru Ram Das is recited by every Sikh before starting their new work:

'Ask thy Lord of thou wanted the work done through the true Guru's word. He accomplished the tasks.

Prayer is an essential part of daily Sikh life. Sikhism is a religion of prayer and prayer-minded people. Prayer is the very breath of Sikh life; The Sikhs believe in its efficacy.

Kinds of Prayer

Two kinds, individual and congregational prayers, are popular in Sikhism. The personal individual prayer, covers too the collective welfare of the Sikh Panth as well as that of the whole of mankind. The Sikh prayer is communal not only in the composition of its language but also in its subject matter. The Sikh, while offering it, is made to realise that he is a part of the corporate body, called the panth or the Khalsa.

Guru Nanak, during his four big travels to distant lands, established congregational centres. By the time of Guru Arjan, these centres had become big propagating centres of the Sikh faith. The Sikh congregational prayer has developed through various stages of Sikh history as a result of the consensus of Sikh opinion. The

Sikh religion was revealed to Guru Nanak at an individual level, but it reached and flourished at the congregational and universal level.

Mohsin Fani writes, "By the time of Guru Hargobind, the Sixth successor of Guru Nanak, when places of worship had been organised, and a definite Book of faith had been installed in them. It became an established rule together for the purpose of praying in congregation. When anybody wanted a gift from heaven, he would come to such an assembly of Sikhs and ask them to pray for him. Even the Guru asked his Sikhs to pray for him. Baba Budha Ji, a God-oriented man, is quotable here. Guru Arjan sent his wife, Ganga Ji, to Kathu Nangal, who requested Baba Budha Ji with full submission, to pray for a child. (Guru) Hargobind was born with the prayer of Buddha. Guru Arjan advocated this thought in Gurbani. The prayer of man never goes in vain.

The Method of Prayer

The method of Sikh prayer is quite simple as well as effective. Everyone present in the congregation is expected to stand before the Guru Granth Sahib with folded hands. Though it is not prescribed in the Sikh 'Rahit Maryada', yet the following verse of the fifth Guru is read before the commencement of prayer:

*Thou art the Master, to Thee I pray, O Lord.
For this life and body are thy gifts.*

Teja Singh writes, 'The Sikh has to bring himself into a prayerful mood before he addresses himself to God.' The custom of offering the prayer with folded hands. Hands are available in the early records of Sikh Janamsakhis. At the departure of Guru Nanak, Rai Bular, an early admirer of Guru Ji, requested Guru Ji to advise on something. Guru Nanak said:

O, Rai, I have only one who will listen to God with folded hands when you feel that all your efforts have failed and powers have proved helpless.

Another point in the method of prayer needs clarification. Here either it (prayer) be read loudly or silently. Except at the individual level, it had to be read audibly only to attract the attention of the members present. The Omniscient God knows everything, whether we speak it loudly or silently. He is the master of all hearts. Such of prayer requires only sincerity and devotion of the prayer holder. Guru says:

The Inner-knower knoweth all about all and, without our uttering (the plaint), feeleth our emotions.

A loving adoration brings close intimacy with God. It confirms His presence not only in this world but in all three worlds. The living God of Sikhism hears the prayer even of those (devotees) who are unable to utter a single word. Guru Arjan says:

I know not how to contemplate my Lord. Only I utter His Name or the Guru's.

The man spiritually bankrupt in the present material age is putting different questions. His atheistic attitude and lack of confidence deny not only the existence of God but also in himself. All this brings the following questions :

Is the prayer heard and answered by God?

Dr Balbir Singh replies to this question:

Prayer must never be answered. If it is, it ceases to be prayer and becomes a correspondence.

Swami Vivekananda too says:

It is our own will that answers for the soul has infinite powers.

Some Fundamental Characteristics of Prayer

Devotion is the backbone of prayer. Without devotion, prayer may reduce to a simple ritualistic ceremony. What then is devotion?

'One must free his heart from all other thoughts and regard himself as standing in the presence of God...and bring himself into a devotional frame of mind, and then he must pray quietly. The soul is to be laid bare in all sincerity and in perfect humility. The mind of a prayerholder is to be made empty of all desires to experience the peace of the soul. Perserverance in prayer yields (good) results. Every honest prayer that is offered through complete surrender and with full faith (in God) is always fulfilled. When we actually pray, we stand face to face with God.'

True prayer demands the sacrifice of all selfish interests. Prayer does not mean a mere physiological union with God and undisturbed rest in him. It means an active yearning of the soul to feel one with God. Who is always active, always patient. Who is always hopeful, prayer should, therefore, refresh our spirit and make us ready to do God's will. An ideal Sikh offers not only his own belongings but also sacrifices himself in the name of his Guru.

O God, I pray to Thee with joined palms for my soul, body, and riches belong to Thee. Thou alone art my Master, my Creator-Lord.

Concentration of the mind is equally important in prayer. The mind of man is restless and fickle. Its stillness is a prerequisite of prayer. Guru Nanak established this thought in a dialogue with a Qazi at Sultanpur. When the Nawab of Sultanpur called on Guru Nanak to join with them in the Namaz (prayer), Guru Nanak assented, but as the Nawab engaged in prayer, Guru Nanak stood aloof. On being questioned why he had not joined in the prayer, the Guru promptly replied:

How could I join you when you were wandering in Kabul buying horses, and Qazi was all the time thinking of his colt, lest it should have fallen into a well.

Needless to say that the Nawab and Qazi were both silenced by this frank and fearless answer of Guru Nanak.

In Guru Granth Sahib, the idea of concentration has been mentioned at many places. Guru says:

Contemplate, with the single mind. The Beneficent Lord, the God.

Another aspect that requires a little explanation here is that the Sikh prayer is more concerned with the heart than of head. Prayer requires not the bombastic language. In the words of Dr Ganda Singh, 'Sikh prayer is a thing more of the heart than of the tongue, and its effect does not exclusively lie in the beauty of its expression, but in the humility and earnestness of the heart.'

True religion is neither a dogma ceremony but a matter of inner life and profound experience. True repentance and prayer must come from the heart.

Condition for a prayer holder

Besides these characteristics, there are certain conditions laid down for a true prayer holder. Raghbir Singh Bir laid down that the prayer-holder in the true sense must be theistic, have full faith in the Almighty God. His prayer should be genuine, and it should be performed with humility and submissiveness, and finally, the devotee should have confidence in its fulfillment. As the spirit of altruism prevails in the Sikh prayer, the motive of prayer should be good. The aim should not be evil, injustice, and cruelty towards anybody.

The Impact of Prayer

Guru Nanak's religion, a practical way of life, was for all people without any distinction of caste, colour, creed, or community. Before Guru Nanak, religion was a monopoly. In Sikhism everyone, even of the priest class woman is competent to lead in prayer. The Shudras were banned from entering the worship places and reading the holy scriptures. In the Sikh congregational prayer, everyone can join. Uniqueness of Sikh prayer, is a combination of Sikh history, religion, and philosophy. It covers the span of five hundred years of the Sikh faith. No other prayer covers the history of its respective faith. The above combination made it unique in the history of world religious prayers. When the Mughal invaders were determined to wipe out the Sikh nation to its roots and branches, it was only the Sikh prayer that proved as a shield to save it from all types of disastrous effects.

Before Guru Nanak, prayer was at the individual level and for personal emancipation only. Guru Nanak introduced it in the holy Sangat. A true devotee of the Sikh faith invokes the divine spirit of God for his own welfare, for the welfare of Khalsa Panth, and for humanity at large-Sarbat da Bhalla.

An Ideal Man's Prayer

The Almighty God of Sikhism is a living force. He is the bestower of all virtues. All ideal men got illumination through prayer. An ideal man knows that this transitory world is not everlasting. He never indulges in worldly pursuits. He demands from God the necessities of life as means, simply to maintain life. Saint Dhanna prayed to God for all things needed for life. Contentment means providing optimism and a harmonious life to an ideal man.

Dr Avtar Singh emphasized another aspect of the ideal man's prayer, which we feel here necessary to be mentioned. 'A Sikh (idealman) should seek the blessings of God in his acts. The supplication, which requires him to pray for the good of all, is meant to remind him that he should desist from acts that are inconsistent with this prayer. The prayer is meant also to reinforce his will and exert a healthy moral effect on his activity and conduct.

It has already been explained that Sikh prayer provided a shield at critical times. Sikh Gurus directed their brave Sikhs to seek the blessings of God through prayer in hard times. This confidence always provided them always moral courage.

Guru Gobind Singh vested Banda Bahadur with the authority to complete his work of national struggle in Punjab... He was given an advisory council of five devoted Sikhs. He was supplied with a standard and a drum as symbols of temporal authority. Guru gave him his own sword, green bow, five arrows from his quiver, and directed him to follow strictly 'Sikh Rahit Maryâdâ' and offer prayer to God at hard times.

The Sikh troops under the command of Akali Phula Singh took an expedited attack to capture Naushehra. Maharaja Ranjit Singh, on seeing the enemy well equipped, suggested that the Sikh leader retreat, Akali Phula Singh refused to do so and said:

Now there is no question of retreating back, we had offered prayers, Guru surely will bless us with victory. Such is the belief of the Sikh Panth and its followers. (ਨਿਸਚੈ ਕਰ
ਅਪਨੀ ਜੀਤ ਕਰੋ)



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Slok Mahala 9: Guru Tegh Bahadur's Dohas of Eternal Wisdom

PROF. DR. SURJIT SINGH BHATTI*

Abstract:

This article offers a comprehensive exploration of Slok Mahala 9, the concluding set of 57 dohas composed by Guru Tegh Bahadur Sahib in the Sri Guru Granth Sahib. These concise yet profound couplets present a distilled spiritual philosophy rooted in detachment from worldly illusions, moral integrity, fearlessness in adversity, and unwavering faith in the Divine. Through vivid metaphors drawn from nature and human experience, Guru Tegh Bahadur exposes the transient nature of material wealth, power, and relationships, urging the seeker toward inner equanimity and divine remembrance. The article highlights the Guru's emphasis on righteous action, rejection of caste and ritualism, and affirmation of universal human dignity, values reflected in his unparalleled martyrdom for religious freedom. It also analyzes the unique lyrical and metrical structure of the doha form, demonstrating how these rhythmic, easily memorized verses continue to serve as timeless spiritual signposts guiding seekers toward self-realization and ethical living.

Introduction

Slok Mahala 9th are short spiritual verses of Guru Tegh Bahadur Sahib, the 9th Guru Sahib, based on an orderly poetical system rooted in rhymed and rhythmic couplets, the Doha (or Dohra). Doha is a poetic meter, consisting of two lines. Doha of the 9th Guru Ji addresses questions concerning all human beings, somewhat like an algorithm following a codified set of Instructions. They are the guiding principles for an ideal life and serve as an Epilogue to the Sri Guru Granth Sahib (SGGS). Some of these issues are discussed in this article.

The document explores how Guru Tegh Bahadur employs powerful imagery, from fleeting dreams to crumbling sand walls, to reveal the impermanence of human

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possessions and the futility of ego-driven pursuits. It also highlights his emphasis on vairaag ਵੈਰਾਗ (detachment), the transient nature of worldly existence, fearless moral conduct, rejection of empty ritualism, and affirmation of human equality, themes reflected in his historic martyrdom for religious freedom. By examining the lyrical structure, spiritual depth, and ethical significance of these dohas, this article seeks to illuminate the enduring relevance of Slok Mahala 9 as a guide for contemporary seekers striving for clarity, resilience, and inner awakening.

Detachment (Vairaag) from worldly illusions, remembrance of the creator at every moment and facing the world bravely are the foundations of Guru Sahib's philosophy. Vairaag is Equanimity, not the renunciation of life's struggles. It is being free from the bondage to desires and evils like lust, violence, greed, attachment and ego. It is the true source of 'Peace of Mind' achieved as a responsible householder, not as a weak and timid recluse.

ਜਿਹਿ ਬਿਖਿਆ ਸਗਲੀ ਤਜੀ ਲੀਓ ਭੇਖ ਬੈਰਾਗ ॥ ਕਹੁ ਨਾਨਕ ਸੁਨੁ ਰੇ ਮਨਾ ਤਿਹ ਨਰ ਮਾਥੈ ਭਾਗੁ ॥੧੭॥

One who has forsaken all sin and corruption, who wears the robes of neutral detachment -says Nanak, listen, mind: good destiny is written on his forehead. ||17||

ਜਿਹਿ ਮਾਇਆ ਮਮਤਾ ਤਜੀ ਸਭ ਤੇ ਭਚਿਓ ਉਦਾਸੁ ॥ ਕਹੁ ਨਾਨਕ ਸੁਨੁ ਰੇ ਮਨਾ ਤਿਹ ਘਿਟ ਬੁਹਮ ਨਿਵਾਸੁ ॥੧੮॥

One who renounces Maya and possessiveness and is detached from everything - says Nanak, listen, mind: God abides in his heart. ||18|| (SGGS, p. 1427)

Such a person is unperturbed, in a stable and peaceful state of mind, is above all transitory joy and experiences no pain when in grief. Neither praise nor criticism affects his equilibrium of mind. He is not attached to worldly vices and temptations. Gold appears as insignificant as iron to such persons. Divine knowledge dwells in them, and they treat friends and foes alike. These fortunate people are one with the creator and understand the true secret of life.

ਸੁਖ ਦੁਖ ਜਿਹ ਪਰਸੈ ਨਹੀ ਲੋਭੁ ਮੋਹੁ ਅਭਿਮਾਨੁ ॥ ਕਹੁ ਨਾਨਕ ਸੁਨੁ ਰੇ ਮਨਾ ਸੋ ਸੂਰਤਿ ਭਗਵਾਨ ॥੧੯॥

One who is not touched by pleasure or pain, greed, emotional attachment and egotistical pride - says Nanak, listen, mind: he is the very image of God. ||19||

ਉਸਤਤਿ ਨਿੰਦਿਆ ਨਾਹਿ ਜਿਹਿ ਕੰਚਨ ਲੋਹ ਸਮਾਨਿ ॥ ਕਹੁ ਨਾਨਕ ਸੁਣਿ ਰੇ ਮਨਾ ਮੁਕਤਿ ਤਾਹਿ ਤੈ ਜਾਨਿ ॥੧੪॥

One who is beyond praise and slander, who looks upon gold and iron alike - says Nanak, listen, mind: know that such a person is liberated. ||14|| (SGGS, p. 1427)

The transient nature of worldly existence is emphasized in Guru Sahib's verses. For this, he uses exquisite imagery from nature and daily life, such as an unreal dream, a fleeting cloud, or a crumbling wall of sand. He says that wealth, power, and relationships are temporary, as none of them will be of help or accompany anyone (after death). We should not be proud of such false possessions, as they neither belong to us nor elevate us in attaining freedom from futile distractions.

ਧਨੁ ਦਾਰਾ ਸੰਪਤਿ ਸਗਲ ਜਿਨਿ ਅਪੁਨੀ ਕਰਿ ਮਾਨਿ ॥ ਇਨ ਮੈ ਕਛੁ ਸੰਗੀ ਨਹੀ ਨਾਨਕ ਸਾਚੀ ਜਾਨਿ ॥੫॥

Your wealth, spouse, and all the possessions which you claim as your own -none of these shall go along with you in the end. O Nanak! Know this as true. ||5||

(SGGS, p. 1426)

ਝੁਠੈ ਮਾਨੁ ਕਹਾ ਕਰੈ ਜਗੁ ਸੁਪਨੇ ਜਿਉ ਜਾਨੁ ॥ ਇਨ ਮੈ ਕਛੁ ਤੇਰੋ ਨਹੀ ਨਾਨਕ ਕਹਿਓ ਬਖਾਨਿ ॥੪੧॥

Why do you take such false pride in yourself? You must know that the world is just a dream. None of this is yours; Nanak proclaims this truth. ||41|| (SGGS, p. 1428)

ਜਗ ਰਚਨਾ ਸਭ ਝੂਠ ਹੈ ਜਾਨਿ ਲੇਹੁ ਰੇ ਮੀਤ ॥ ਕਹਿ ਨਾਨਕ ਬਿਰੁ ਨਾ ਰਹੈ ਜਿਉ ਬਾਲੁ ਕੀ ਭੀਤਿ ॥੪੯॥

The world and its affairs are totally false; know this well, my friend. Says Nanak, it is like a wall of sand; it shall not endure. ||49|| (SGGS, p. 1429)

Fearlessness and courage in the face of suffering are the essential elements of Guru Teg Bahadur Sahib's lyrics. Despite life's impermanence, he stresses active engagement against the prevailing injustice and oppression in the world, while remaining detached from its perversions. He is revered for his first-ever Defence of Human Rights and the Sacrifice of his life for the Religious Freedom of all. His vision was global and not limited to any particular community.

ਭੈ ਕਾਹੂ ਕਉ ਦੇਤ ਨਹਿ ਨਹਿ ਭੈ ਮਾਨਤ ਆਨ ॥ ਕਹੁ ਨਾਨਕ ਸੁਨਿ ਰੇ ਮਨਾ ਗਿਆਨੀ ਤਾਹਿ ਬਖਾਨਿ ॥੧੬॥

One who does not frighten anyone, and who is not afraid of anyone else, says Nanak, listen, mind: call him spiritually wise. ||16|| (SGGS, p. 1427)

ਚਿੰਤਾ ਤਾ ਕੀ ਕੀਜੀਐ ਜੋ ਅਨਹੋਨੀ ਹੋਇ ॥ ਇਹੁ ਮਾਰਗੁ ਸੰਸਾਰ ਕੋ ਨਾਨਕ ਬਿਰੁਨ੍ਹੀ ਕੋਇ ॥੫੧॥

People become anxious when something unexpected happens. This is the way of the world, O Nanak; nothing is stable or permanent. ||51||

ਬਲੁ ਹੋਆ ਬੰਧਨ ਛੁਟੇ ਸਭੁ ਕਿਛੁ ਹੋਤ ਉਪਾਇ ॥ ਨਾਨਕ ਸਭੁ ਕਿਛੁ ਤੁਮਰੈ ਹਾਥ ਮੈ ਤੁਮ ਹੀ ਹੋਤ ਸਹਾਇ ॥੫੮॥

My strength has been restored, and my bonds have been broken; now, I can do everything.

Nanak: Everything is in Your hands, Lord; You are my Helper and Support. ||54|| (SGGS, p. 1429)

Moral integrity is the hallmark of Guru Sahib's spiritual vision, which advocates truthfulness in every aspect of human thought, words, and conduct. He condemns the falsehood and hypocrisy practised by some self-styled holy people, who call themselves members of higher castes. Rejection of the egotistic caste system and blind ritualism in the name of religion are the other cornerstones of his logical concept of virtuous life and social equality.

ਤੀਰਥ ਬਰਤ ਅਰੁ ਦਾਨ ਕਰਿ ਮਨ ਮੈ ਧਰੈ ਗੁਮਾਨੁ ॥ ਨਾਨਕ ਨਿਹਫਲ ਜਾਤ ਤਿਹ ਜਿਉ ਕੇਚਰ ਇਸਨਾਨੁ ॥੪੬॥

Those who make pilgrimages to sacred shrines, observe ritualistic fasts and make donations to charity while still taking pride in their minds -O Nanak! Their actions are useless, like the elephant, which takes a bath and then rolls in the dust. ||46||

(SGGS, p. 1428)

Unwavering Faith in God is the only true human refuge; duality has no place in his roadmap. He rejects Agnostic Atheism, which does not claim certainty about the existence of God. He also rejects Agnostic Theism, which has uncertainty about proof. Rooted in humility, his teachings advise unflinching faith in the creator. All other supports will vanish with time. He emphasizes that honesty, compassion and

humility lead to faith and are essential prerequisites for understanding Godly virtues.

ਜਿਹ ਘਿਟ ਸਿਮਰਨੁ ਰਾਮ ਕੋ ਸੋ ਨਰੁ ਮੁਕਤਾ ਜਾਨੁ ॥ ਤਿਹਿ ਨਰ ਹਰਿ ਅੰਤਰੁ ਨਹੀ ਨਾਨਕ ਸਾਚੀ ਮਾਨੁ ॥੪੩॥

That person, who meditates in remembrance of the Lord in his heart, is liberated - know this well. There is no difference between that person and the Lord: O Nanak! Accept this as the Truth. ||43|| (SGGS, p. 1428)

ਸੰਗ ਸਖਾ ਸਭਿ ਤਜਿ ਗਏ ਕੋਊ ਨ ਨਿਬਹਿਓ ਸਾਬਿ ॥ ਕਹੁ ਨਾਨਕ ਇਹ ਬਿਪਤਿ ਮੈ ਟੇਕ ਏਕ ਰਘੁਨਾਥ ॥੫੫॥

My associates and companions have all deserted me; no one remains with me. Says Nanak, in this tragedy, the Lord alone is my Support. ||55|| (SGGS, p. 1429)

The Lyrical and Liturgical Context of Slok Mahala 9th differs from that of the other verses. His other 59 Shabads in SGGS are set in 15 Ragas. These verses have lyrical beauty, making them suitable for devotional singing. However, his 57 Dohey at the end of SGGS are primarily recited rather than sung. They have two lines per Slok (rarely three or fourlines), each of regular, comparable syllabic length, are rhythmic, and have appealing sounds at the ends that usually rhyme.

Doha has a steady number of beats per line, based on the medieval North Indian convention of 'counts' of short and long syllables (matra). It's well-structured, and the recognizable rise and fall give a different lyrical flow. Each line has a natural pause that helps memorization and recall over centuries. Though small in number, in Sikh liturgy, their recitations are intoned as the essence of spiritual compositions at the end of the divine universal Sikh scripture.

Guru Teg Bahadur Sahib's Dohey are not merely literary artifacts, but Living Lights for us, a rare synthesis of a unique poetic form and eternal spiritual sign posts for inner illumination. They are for self-realization by Naam-Simran (continuous remembrance of the Divine). They inspire resilience in the face of oppression and encourage standing firm with dignity, courage, and righteousness. His martyrdom gives resonance to his words.

The Doha system inspires Sikhs and seekers worldwide, affirming the enduring relevance of his Philosophical Message. Their special structure makes them ideal for

remembering and carrying their sublime message into daily life. This format helps Guru's teachings reach diverse audiences, transcending caste, class, and regional boundaries. These are austere and independent aphoristic verses whose stress is on meaning and appeal to logic.

They are concise, self-contained couplets that offer advice or insight into life, rather than long storytelling or description. Despite their brevity, they are profound.

They do not have ਰਾਉ (rhwau), ਛੇਦ (CMd), ਵਾਰ (vwr,) and ਪਉੜੀ (pauVI). These verses are so simple that even illiterate people can memorize and repeat them, as they are crafted in a melodious rhythm. They help us to meditate, focus on the realities of human existence and find solutions to our problems, applicable to all cultures.

Conclusion

Slok Mahala 9 stands as one of the most remarkable spiritual legacies in the Sri Guru Granth Sahib, offering profound guidance in a distilled poetic form. Guru Tegh Bahadur Sahib's dohas illuminate the essential truths of human existence: impermanence, moral responsibility, inner resilience, and the liberating power of divine remembrance. Their brilliance lies not only in the depth of their spiritual insight but also in their elegant economy of expression. Through vivid metaphors and accessible language, the Guru addresses universal human concerns: attachment, ego, suffering, injustice, and the search for meaning. His teachings advocate a balanced life rooted in detachment without disengagement, courage without aggression, humility without weakness, and faith without superstition.

The article highlights how the structural simplicity of the doha form, memorable rhythm, balanced meter, and aphoristic clarity make these verses timeless and widely accessible across cultures and generations. Beyond literary compositions, these slokas serve as ethical signposts, inspiring introspection, righteous action, and spiritual awakening. Guru Tegh Bahadur's martyrdom gives unparalleled moral authority to his words, reinforcing their message of universal human freedom and dignity. Today, these verses continue to resonate as living lights, offering seekers worldwide strength, clarity, and spiritual direction. □

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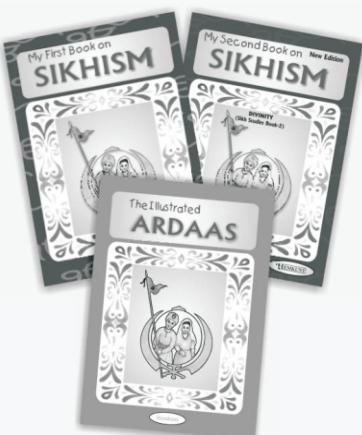
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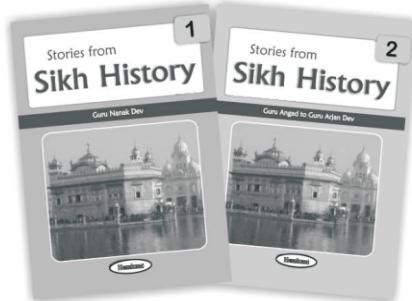
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Playing a Different Game

EK ONG KAAR KHALSA MICHAUD*

Abstract:

Game theory provides a framework for understanding how individuals behave when attempting to win in economic or political situations. Yet, Guru Tegh Bahadur's teachings and actions call his followers to play a different game, one that involves the non-human player of the Divine. This theme is explored through the events surrounding Dhir Mal's attempted assassination of Guru Tegh Bahadur, as described by Dr. Trilochan Singh in his book *Guru Tegh Bahadur*.

Keywords: Game Theory, Guru Tegh Bahadur, Dhir Mal.

This November, the Sikh community remembers the 350th anniversary of Guru Tegh Bahadur's sacrifice to protect freedom of conscience and belief for all people. Yet while Guru Tegh Bahadur endured martyrdom to protect religious freedom, he also sought to inspire a certain consciousness within his own followers.

One compelling story from his life that demonstrates this happened in the first days after the public recognized him as a Guru.

My favorite book on the 9th Master is *Guru Tegh Bahadur* by Dr. Trilochan Singh, published in 1967 by the Gurdwara Parbandak Committee, Sis Ganj, Chandi Chowk, Delhi. Dr. Trilochan Singh offers a moving description of this event. My recounting of the tale relies heavily on the details provided in this book.

Dhir Mal, the nephew of Guru Tegh Bahadur through the Guru's older brother, Baba Gurditta, had presented himself as the rightful heir to the Guru's throne. When the ship trader Makhan Shah came to Bakala to give an offering to the true Guru for protecting his ships during a storm, Dhir Mal and 21 other pretender Gurus failed the test. Guru Tegh Bahadur alone knew the inner secret of Makhan Shah's heart, that he

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had promised 500 dinars to the Guru for charitable purposes, should his ship be spared from a storm.

Dhir Mal watched as his grip on the minds, hearts, and money of the Sikhs began to slip away. At the urging of a conspirator named Shihan, Dhir Mal set in motion a plot to assassinate Guru Tegh Bahadur and steal the gifts offered to the Guru by the sangat. Shihan and Dhir Mal planted spies in Guru Tegh Bahadur's court, seeming devotees who mapped the comings and goings of the Guru's guards. At a particular moment of vulnerability, Shihan led about 100 armed men into the Guru's court, with Dhir Mal in the rear. Shihan shot at Guru Tegh Bahadur, attempting to kill him, but the Guru was protected by the Divine. The bullet simply grazed his shoulder. In the chaos that ensued, Dhir Mal ordered the armed men to plunder as much as they could gather and bring back to his residence.

With the Guru mildly wounded, other Sikhs hurt during the attack, and the Guru's durbar ransacked, the Sikh warriors furiously wanted to strike back. The Guru's guards, along with Makhan Shah and his men, planned and executed their revenge. They stormed Dhir Mal's home, arrested the masands, bandits, Shihan, and Dhir Mal, seized their property, and brought everything and everyone back to Guru Tegh Bahadur for judgment. Dhir Mal and Shihan wept and repented of their actions, and Guru Tegh Bahadur ordered their immediate release.

Guru Tegh Bahadur was not pleased with what his Sikhs had done.

"When they were gone, (Guru Tegh Bahadur) told Makhan Shah and Kirpal Chand that it was not proper for them to stoop to the very type of battle for wealth, power, and superiority, to which Dhir Mal and his masands had abandoned themselves, in utter ignorance and madness. Hasn't Sheikh Farid said,

*Return good for every wrong you suffer,
In your mind, no wrath entertain.*

*Free from agony will be your vesture,
All blessings of life you will gain.*

Sheikh Farid – Sloka, 78." (Singh, Page 154)

In economics and politics, there is a branch of applied mathematics called game theory, which examines how people, in interdependent situations, make decisions in

order to succeed. These interdependent situations can be cooperative, competitive, or a combination of the two.

Game theory was originally developed by Hungarian-born American mathematician John von Neumann and his Princeton University colleague Oskar Morgenstern, a German-born American economist, to solve problems in economics. Simply put, game theory examines the rivalries between competitors with mixed interests. It explores how the players of a game make choices, how those choices interact with one another, and what outcomes are affected by those choices.

What does game theory have to say about this moment in the Guru's life?

The throne of the Guru, viewed from an earthly perspective, endowed its possessor with wealth, territory, and influence. Because of the desire for these benefits, the players in this story attempted to secure that throne by earthly means. At first, this depended on intrigue and alliances. The pretender Gurus in Bakala all claimed the throne for themselves, and each attracted their supporters and followers. Yet when the hand of the Divine intervened and revealed the True Guru, the game changed. The choices that the pretenders faced were to either leave the throne to Guru Tegh Bahadur or pivot to war-games of spies, violence, seizure, and assassination.

The secret, of course, is that spiritual authority has a non-human player involved. One name for that non-human player is Kartaa Purakh: The One who Does everything and who Protects everything. While many people profess to follow a faith or spiritual tradition, believing in something is not necessarily the same as total surrender and trust. This is the key difference.

Surely, Guru Tegh Bahadur knew his identity long before Makhan Shah appeared in Bakala. Yet the Guru did not need to outwardly proclaim his identity or display it. The Guru's throne is a spiritual seat of authority, and even though it has a worldly component, the point isn't the power, the influence, or the wealth. The purpose is to be a source of wisdom to elevate people's minds.

Dhir Mal, Makhan Shah, and others played the earthly game of fighting to secure property and territory – as if that was what would secure the claim to the Guru's throne. Guru Tegh Bahadur sought to play a different game. One that attempted to bring his

Sikhs to their higher senses: don't just believe in the Divine, have absolute trust that the One will take care of things.

"Return good for every wrong you suffer...All blessings in life will you gain."

Returning good for wrong is so difficult to do. When we feel attacked, our earthly nature instinctively reacts and lashes out to protect itself. Returning good for wrong requires tremendous self-restraint. It demands emotional intelligence and some level of spiritual maturity. The strength to restrain oneself comes from relying on that Higher Being, of trusting that Kartaa Purakh will protect and provide.

When Makhan Shah and the warrior Sikhs brought what they had reclaimed from Dhir Mal's house before the Guru, Guru Tegh Bahadur noticed items which had never been in his court. He questioned the Sikhs about these items. Makhan Shah explained that they took items from Dhir Mal's home that "should have come" to the Guru if Dhir Mal hadn't pretended to the throne.

Guru Tegh Bahadur rejected this reasoning. He ordered that everything – even the items originally stolen by Dhir Mal's men – should be given to Dhir Mal. Nothing that had been taken by force from Dhir Mal's place, regardless of its origins, should remain with them.

In this moment, the Guru embodied the values espoused in Sheikh Farid's shabad. He returned good for wrong.

The Sikhs obeyed the Guru's instructions. Except for the essential property of the durbar and some particular offerings from the sangat, everything else was given to Dhir Mal. The next day, humiliated by these events, Dhir Mal left for Kartarpur.

The attack of Dhir Mal's armed men did not disturb his state of mind. The bullet fired at him by Shihan did not seriously wound him. Yet the violent actions of his own followers caused him to withdraw into solitude. His spiritual ancestors, Guru Angad and Guru Amar Das, had similarly withdrawn when fighting, insults, and political gamesmanship had arisen around the earthly territory of the Guru's throne.

For four days, no one knew the whereabouts of Guru Tegh Bahadur. "Mata Gujari, the Guru's wife, knew that he had gone into elected silence once more, and it might take time to persuade him to forgive all transgressors who had hurt him." (Singh, Page

156). Parties were formed to search the forests, to see if the Guru had gone hunting. Messengers were sent to nearby villages to inquire whether the Guru had decided to visit. Everyone searched for him. Five days passed. A farmer was driving his cattle into a thick, grassy grove. The cattle refused to enter. When the farmer investigated, he found the Guru.

“For five days, Guru Tegh Bahadur had been sitting there in silent meditation, without having taken any food or water.” (Singh, Page 156).

Humans desire luxuries, treasures, and physical prosperity. The Creator has created these gifts for humans to enjoy. But when people fight over wealth, argue over territory, plot and scheme to grab power, when people prefer the Game of Thrones to the Game of Consciousness, suffering ensues, and the Guru withdraws.

Followers of these teachings can choose to play a different game. By developing trust in the One, people can discover another way to live. This chapter from Guru Tegh Bahadur’s life demonstrates the road he asked his Sikhs to follow.



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Guru Tegh Bahadur's Travels and Message of fearlessness: with special reference to travels in Malwa

AMARJIT SINGH NARANG*

Abstract:

The article brings out how Guru Tegh Bahadur following the footsteps of Guru Nanak's vision of spiritual persons responsibility to confront injustice and oppression preached and practiced the values of equality, freedom, justice and fearlessness against oppression, apart from other means by long travels also. After Guru Nanak, Guru Tegh Bahadur travelled more than any of his predecessors. He began travelling much before assuming Guru Gaddi, including during his stay in meditation at Bakala. Taking his message of fearlessness and compassion he toured most parts of India setting up Sangat (Sikh centers). After assuming the charge, Guru Tegh Bahadur departed for extended journey first in Punjab, then to east India and later in Malwa in Punjab. During his travels apart from his missionary works and conveying the message and values of Sikhism, the Guru helped the villagers in many ways including bringing them out of fear and superstitions. His mission was to rouse the dormant energies of the people so that by understanding the transitional nature of this world -play, they could be motivated to great deeds without fear of death.

In view of the above Guru Tegh Bahadur's activities during his travels, as also of his early life makes it clear that he was not Vairagi in the sense of renunciation of the family, society and political process.

Guru Tegh Bahadur's martyrdom in 1675 was not just for the protection of Hindu dharma or even the Sikh faith. What was essentially at stake was the freedom of religious belief as such or freedom of conscience. This undisputedly was unparalleled in world history (Grewal 2007), Almost two and a half centuries before the dawn of European enlightenment, Guru Nanak had advocated the values of human equality

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(SGGS 2,6, 349, 504, 730), social justice (SGGS 74, 723, 1240), gender equality (SGGS 474), human rights (SGGS 141), self-respect (SGGS 142), and speaking truth to power by raising once voice against tyranny (Paushara Singh 2021) and devoid of enmity Nirbhau-Nirver (ਨਿਰਭਾਉ ਨਿਰਵੇਰ)

As is well known that in Guru Nanak's system, for a spiritual person to be a disinterested onlooker of the world and life is just out of question. All spirituality has to be lived in the form of conduct and work. Emphasis clearly is on the spiritual man's responsibility to confront injustice and oppression, that is, to raise a voice against tyranny, particularly of the rulers. Guru Nanak, as such, laid the foundation of what in Sikh tradition came to be Miri- Piri (ਮੀਰੀ ਪੀਰੀ) in two most divine attributes of being fearless and devoid of enmity. Looking at that background and analyzing Guru Tegh Bahadur's early life, his period of guruship, his travels, and his compositions in totality, it clearly comes out that he was a spiritual guru as well as a temporal leader who had a specific role to protect righteousness (dharma) in its holistic perspective as envisioned by Guru Nanak. We here take a look at the nature and importance of his travels, particularly in the Malwa region of Punjab, to preach the Sikh ethics and instill a sense of fearlessness among the suppressed and coerced.

Guru Tegh Bahadur's Travel

After Guru Nanak, Guru Tegh Bahadur travelled more than any of his predecessors. Following the footsteps of Guru Nanak, he toured most parts of India, setting up Sangat (Sikh centers). As per some Sikh documents, Guru Tegh Bahadur had begun his travels much before assuming the Guru Gaddi. Gurmukh Singh (2005), quoting Bhagat Vahis, writes that after moving to village Bakala in early 1644, he had maintained regular contacts with Guru Har Rai. Both had been meeting each other. It is mentioned that early in 1656, Guru Har Rai delegated Teg Bahadur ji's responsibility for the propagation of Sikhism in Malwa, Haryana, and eastern India. It is mentioned that Tegh Bahadur ji with his group visited Kartarpur, Kurukshetra, Hardwar, Patna, Prayag Raj, Banaras, Sasaram, Gaya, etc., and returned back Punjab more than two years after the demise of Guru Har Rai. On his way back, he is reported to have met Guru Har Krishen in Delhi in May 1664.

To properly understand the importance and appreciate the travels, it is important to understand the socio-political conditions of that time. It is well known that Guru Nanak

and his successors had made the Sikh Panth a kind of strong socio-spiritual organization.

Common people, particularly the Jat peasantry, to express their opposition to Rajput land lords and Muslim rulers, found an effective medium in the essentially mystic and non-sectarian philosophy of Gurus. By the time of the fifth Guru, the Sikhs began to call the Guru "Sacha Pat Shah" "(the true King). From their own political perspective, from Jahangir onward, Mughal rulers felt concerned with the fearless ideology of freedom-loving and began the process of their persecution that included the execution of Guru Arjan Dev. The process of persecution begun by Jahangir was continued by Shah Jahan and practiced more rigorously by his successor Aurangzeb, which Guru Tegh Bahadur had to confront.

Aurangzeb, partly by his commitment to the orthodox Sunni Muslim sect and partly to justify his coming to the throne after imprisoning his father and killing his siblings, had adopted the religious fanaticism of an extreme type sanctioned by those like Sheikh Ahmed Sirhindi (1569-1624) of the Naqshbandi order.

With Sikhs in general and Guru Tegh Bahadur in particular, he was quite jealous. During the battle for succession, he was informed that Guru Har Rai had blessed and assisted the escape of his elder brother Dara Shekhon. On Guru Har Rai's swearing his relation with his son Ram Rai for distorting the lines from Adi Granth to please Aurangzeb, the later gave him shelter to use him when required. At the time of Guru Har Gobind passing over guruship to his younger son Har Krishan, Aurangzeb encouraged Ram Rai in his pretensions to guruship. Furthermore, Dhir Mal, who earlier did not accept Guru Har Rai as the guru, put forth his own claim to be the successor of Guru Har Gobind. Some massands, along with followers of Prithi Chand and his son Miharban, were also pro-establishment. After assuming the Gaddi, Guru Tegh Bahadur took upon the task to restore the Sikh society to its previous grandeur, founded on the teachings of the previous gurus. And for that one important way, his choice was extensive travels and journeys both in Punjab and outside.

Travel in Punjab

Soon after sitting on Gur Gaddi, Guru Tegh Bahadur, accompanied by many Sikhs, including his family and Makhan Shah Lubana, left for travel in Punjab. He travelled and preached at the main Sikh centers of Amritsar, Tarn Taran, Khadur Sahib, and Goind Val. Crossing the Bias and Sutlej rivers, he arrived in Malwa. He visited Zira, Moga, and Darauli and then sojourned in the Lakhia Jungle, a desolate tract comprising

mainly the present-day districts of Bhatinda and Faridkot, and reached Talwandi Sabo (Dam Dama sahib). During this journey, wherever he went, the Sikhs acclaimed him as their Guru as Nanak 9, in the tradition of ' jyot ohh, Jugat saee (ਜੋਤ ਉਹ ਜੁਗਤ ਸਾਈ) (same Guru Light of Guru Nanak – and the same approach, method, and manners). The guru encouraged his followers to be fearless in their pursuit of a just society. (Gurmukh singh 2005). In June 1665, Guru Tegh Bahadur established a new settlement in the village Makhowal in the vicinity of Bilaspur and named it Chak Nanki, after his mother. Later, it came to be known as Anandpur Sahib.

As mentioned earlier, by this time, Aurangzeb's religious policy had become extremely severe and punitive. He had imposed Islamic laws and taxes on non-Muslims throughout the empire. According to Saqi Mustaad Khan, on 8 April 1669, the emperor had issued a general order to all provincial governors in which he decreed that all schools and temples of non- Muslims were to be demolished. (Masari-i-Alamgir quoted by several historians). Aurangzeb ordered the temples of Sikhs also to be destroyed and the Guru's agents (massands) to be expelled from the cities. (Gopal Singh 1988). There were isolated rebellions against the emperor, but those were crushed mercilessly.

In such a period, Guru Tegh Bahadur, in the middle of 1665, to restore the confidence of Sangats and spread the message of fearlessness, again went on long journeys, including in far-flung areas in the east and Mughal provinces of the Gangetic plain. During his journey towards the east, the emperor, apprehensive of the Guru's motives, got him arrested by Alam Khan Rohila, who brought the Guru to Delhi on 8 November 1665. Kanwar Ram Singh, the son of Mirza Raja Jai Singh, became a surety of the Guru, and he was released on 17 December 1665. Mata Gujari, being on motherhood, he left his family at Patna and moved to Monghyr, where he got the news of the birth of his son (Guru Gobind Singh) at Patna on December 22, 1666. From Monghyr, Guru Tegh Bahadur moved to Dacca, where Raja Ram Singh joined him early in 1668, whom he helped in bringing reconciliation with the rebellious Ahoms in Assam (Grewal 1990). After spending about three years in the region, the Guru returned to Patna to join his family.

Travel to Malwa

Guru Tegh Bahadur did not spend much time with his infant son Gobind Rai. Urgent messages were asking him to return to the Punjab. He left his family at Patna and, in April 1671, came back to Makhowal. He found the Hindus and Sikhs of the

Punjab in a state of nervous agitation. Aurangzeb had embarked on a policy of religious persecution. There were stories of the demolition of temples, forcible conversions, and imposition of taxes (Khushwant Singh 1977). In the town called Buriya in the Sarkar of Sarhind, the Sikh temple was demolished by the local administration in accordance with the imperial order, and a mosque was built in its place. Aurangzeb felt annoyed with the quazi and the muhtasib of the place. This incident reveals the tension created by imperial orders. (Grewal, 1990).

It was a matter of deep concern for the Guru that the religious freedom of the masses was being compromised, music and poetry were banned, and the voice of scholars was stifled. Equally serious was the exploitation of the innocent masses by the priestly classes, who, in an endeavor to retain their elitist status in society, provided religious /scriptural justification to all unjust and immoral acts of the emperor (Dharam Singh 2021). Guru Tegh Bahadur, thus, took on himself to instill confidence among people.

From the middle of 1672, Guru Tegh Bahadur undertook an extensive tour of the Malwa region and the Banger countryside. During those days, this region, compared to Majha and Doaba, was socially and economically quite backward and neglected. It was inhabited by the Jat Kisan tribes. They were hard-working but poor, deprived of basic amenities, including fresh drinking water and sufficient food. The region was largely sandy very difficult to dig wells. To fulfill their requirements, tribesmen used to go to neighboring areas to extort money and goods. As such, they possessed arms, horses, camels, etc. (Sukh Dyal Singh 1997). They obviously lacked education and were superstitious, too. In terms of demography, large parts were Muslim dominated. The central land that is Sarhind was a strong center of the Naqshbandi Sunni sect. Prominent Naqshbandi Sheikh Ahmad Sirhandi had given to Aurangzeb the honorific title of "Mujaddid-i-Alf-i-Sani, meaning the savior of the second millennium of the Islamic era (Gurmukh Singh 2005). Simao in Bangar was a very important Islamic center inhabited by Maulanas and Maulvis, much reputed even outside for their interpretation of Islam. (Sukh Dayal Singh). Overall, geographically, socially, and politically, the region was quite hostile for the Guru's travel. Yet Guru Tegh Bahadur moved from village to village with great courage and conviction, assuring and helping the Sangat.

Travelling through towns such as Ropar, Banur, and Rajpura, Guru Tegh Bahadur reached Saifabad, which is now Bahadurgarh near Patiala. Here, Muslim Nawab Saifud-Din Mahmud, also known as Saif Khan, who had held the office of governor of

Agra, but had become a devotee of the Guru, finding spiritual peace in his company, served him with devotion. He hosted the Guru's entourage for three months (Encyclopedia Vol. IV 2002). From Saifabad, the Guru came to Patiala, where now there are Gurdwara Dukh Nivaran Sahib and Moti Bagh. Travelling through villages of Sekha, Handhai, Dhilvan, Pandhaian, Aisher, Joga, Bhupali, Khiva, etc., he reached Siamao. Further, he travelled through Bhatinda, Sulisar, Bada Pind, Bashoana, Gobindpura, Guma, Makrod, and other villages. After a tour of the Malwa region, Guru Tegh Bahadur also travelled through the area of Banger, now in the state of Haryana, to reach Dhamtan near Jind, a well-established Sikh center. Towards the end of 1674, he returned to Chakk Nanaki.

During his travels apart from his missionary works and conveying the message and values of Sikhism, the Guru helped the villagers in many ways. To cope with the scarcity of water, he got and encouraged people to dig wells, ponds, and chappars. At Talwandi Sabo, he got a sarovar constructed. Trees were planted on barren stretches. He also helped people with the treatment of diseases. The Guru also focused on education and the elimination of superstitions. It was Guru Tegh Bahadur who called Talwandi Sabo as Guru ki Kashi. At village Maur Kalan, the Guru lodged in the open under a Jund tree considered haunted by evil spirits and demons, thus making people overcome their illusion. He preached the lessons of hard work coupled with charity, thus prepared them for self-reliance and to face Aurangzeb's coercion boldly. He established many new centers for preaching. Malwa today has become a very significant center of Sikhism. It goes without saying that Guru Tegh Bahadur was highly revered by the Sangat everywhere, to the extent that many followers of the Muslim outfit Sakhi Sarvar entered into Sikhism. His message had a deep impact on his audience (Paushara Singh 2020)

In view of the above, Guru Tegh Bahadur's activities during his travels, as also of his early life, make it clear that he was not Vairagi in the sense of renunciation of the family, society, and political process. Here, it may be mentioned that Guru Tegh Bahadur actively participated in political affairs during his travels. According to historian A.C. Banerjee, Guru's possession of a sword with his name engraved on it, his gift of arrows to some of his favorite followers even the use of the word Bahadur, which was reserved only for nobility of the Muslims. Obviously, therefore, the Guru's whole activity creating a stir in the Malwa region was suspect in the eyes of state news writers, who perceived it as a danger to established authority. They sent alarming reports to the emperor. An adversary Muslim historian, Gulam Hasan, in his "Siyar-ul-Mutakherim," wrote:

"Tegh Bahadur, the eighth successor of (Guru) Nanak, became a man of authority with a large number of followers. (In fact) Several thousand people used to accompany him as he moved from place to place. His contemporary Hafiz Adom, a faqir belonging to a group of Sheikh Ahmed Sirhandis following had also come to have a large number of murids. Both men used to move about in Punjab, adopting a habit of coercion and extortion. Tegh Bahadur used to collect money from Hindus, and Hafiz Adom from Muslims. The royal Waqia Navis (news reporter-cum intelligence agents) wrote to emperor Alamgir of (their) manner of activity and added that if their authority increased, they would become even refractory."

It is clear that Gulam Hasan, for obvious political reasons, distorted the voluntary contributions of the Sangat, which were used for the community's welfare, and called it extortion. There is no doubt that the Guru was moving with a large retinue, including armed men. The biased reports, however, were considered as if Guru Tegh Bahadur was a political threat rather than a religious figure. Aurangzeb, who was already furious with the Guru, took note of that. Soon after the end of the travels in the close of 1674, in May 1675, when Guru Tegh Bahadur took up the cause of Kashmiri Pandits, the Emperor used the opportunity to get him executed. But here again, Guru Tegh Bahadur's martyrdom was a significant victory of spiritual over temporal power. As Guru Gobind Singh mentioned:

ਤਿਲਕ ਜੰਘੂ ਰਾਖਾ ਪੜ ਤਾ ਕਾ ॥ ਕੀਨੇ ਬਡੇ ਕਲੁ ਮਹਿ ਸਾਕਾ ॥

"For the protection of the sacred thread and frontal mark of Hindus, Guru Tegh Bahadur performed a tremendous deed in the Dark Age (Kalu). For the sake of righteousness(dharma), he performed a unique act by giving his head but not his resolve (to defend the freedom of faith). He performed this sacrifice for the pious (sadhan) and did not lose his composure while sacrificing his head."

As such, Guru Tegh Bahadur's primary objective during his life journey, travels, and finally in seeking martyrdom was to confront Aurangzeb with his evil deeds, including the mass murder of thousands in the name of one religion. It was almost certain that Aurangzeb would not change his policy of religious persecution, but the Guru, following in the footsteps of his martyr grandfather, Guru Arjan, would give his life but not his belief in the principle that all had the right to practice their own religion (Gurmukh Singh 2005). Therefore, his Bani, which generally is described as reclusion, if understood in this background, reveals him as a prophet of reassurance in a trying situation (Grewal 1982).

While Guru Tegh Bahadur makes us aware of the reality of the world where nothing is permanent, and everything happens according to the divine will, and therefore, we should not forget to pay our complete obedience to the Almighty at every time he does not preach renunciation in any way. His mission was to rouse the dormant energies of the people so that by understanding the transitional nature of this world-play, they could be motivated to great deeds without fear of death. As J.S. Grewal (1990) suggests, he himself prepared for the worst possible eventualities. Guru Tegh Bahadur wanted others also to face life with courage. Life is short; it hastens away, but it provides opportunity for those who would take it. At the same time, participation without entanglement is the ideal that can be realized only through the conquest of fear. The Sikhs, therefore, are asked to acknowledge him alone as truly wise who is not afraid of others and who inspires no fear in others. □

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The Sacred Identity: The Spiritual and Cultural Significance of Hair and Turban in Sikhism

DR STUTI MALHOTRA*

Abstract:

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

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

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The Sikh reverence for unshorn hair (from head to toe of the body)—kesh—begins with the belief that the human body is fashioned in perfect wisdom by the Creator. Guru Nanak Dev Ji emphasized the beauty and completeness of human creation, urging people to live in a state of acceptance rather than modification. Keeping it in its natural form becomes an act of spiritual surrender—a quiet acknowledgement that the Creator has made no mistake. In maintaining uncut hair, a Sikh affirms this divine trust, choosing to live in harmony with nature rather than subjecting it to vanity or worldly trends.

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

The significance of hair was further deepened by Guru Gobind Singh Ji when he formalized the identity of the Khalsa in 1699. By instructing Sikhs to keep their hair unshorn, he offered them a symbol of dignity and spiritual sovereignty. At a time when oppressive systems sought to erase identity and crush freedom, the Guru gave Sikhs a form of resistance that was both peaceful and powerful. Hair became a symbol of fearlessness. To keep it uncut, even when persecution loomed, was to declare—without speaking a word—that one's faith could not be shaved away. The Sikh identity, therefore, grew not through coercion but through courage, not through conformity but through conviction.

To protect this sacred gift, Sikhs began tying the turban—the dastaar—a crown of cloth that came to embody honour, responsibility, and inner nobility. Traditionally in South Asia, the turban was a sign of royalty or high social standing. The Sikh Gurus, however, democratized this symbol, placing it not on the heads of kings alone but on the heads of all who walked the path of truth. The turban elevated ordinary men and women into bearers of extraordinary dignity. A farmer, a soldier, a merchant, a poet—anyone who tied a dastaar took on a regal presence, not because of worldly power, but because of the moral authority it signified.

The Sikh turban carries within its folds a deep ethical calling. It reminds its wearer that with honour comes responsibility. To tie the dastaar is to pledge oneself to truth, compassion, justice, and courage. A Sikh walking in public with a turban is unmistakable, and this visibility is purposeful. It prevents anonymity and demands accountability. When you wear the Guru's crown, you must walk the Guru's path.

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

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

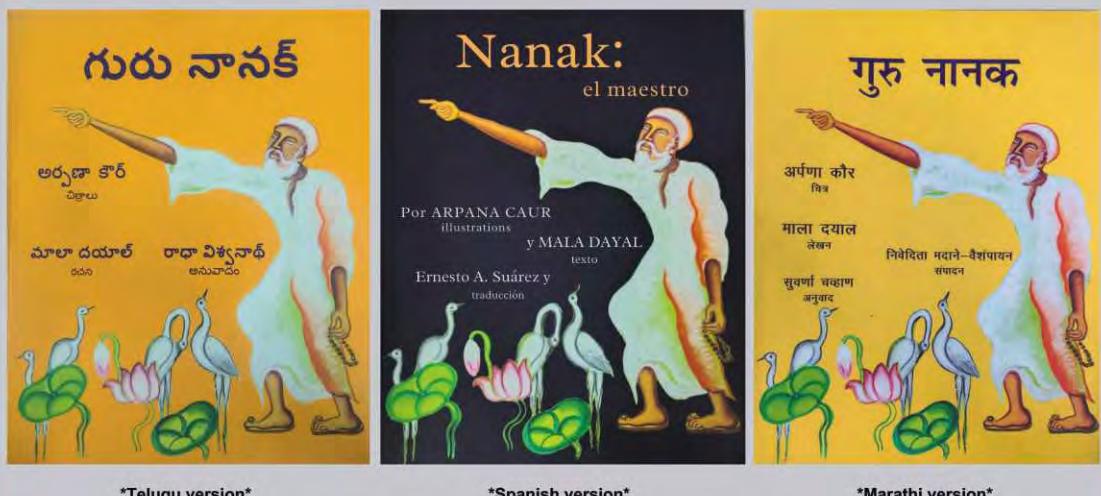
Ultimately, the importance of hair and turban in Sikhism cannot be reduced to external markers or cultural customs. They form a living spiritual practice—one that shapes character, strengthens resolve, and reflects the essence of Sikh teachings. The Sikh Gurus envisioned a humanity marked not by caste or social status, but by equality, courage, and devotion. Kesh and dastaar stand as the physical embodiment of this vision, reminding every Sikh that they carry Divine dignity upon their heads and sacred responsibility upon their shoulders.

And to walk through the world with both is to honour the timeless Sikh commitment to truth, service, and freedom. □

The Sikh Cultural Centre - The Sikh Review

Guru Nanak Dev Ji's ideology centered on the oneness of God, equality of all humans regardless of caste, creed, or gender, and the importance of earning an honest living, sharing with others, and meditating on the divine name to achieve spiritual liberation.

Earlier to mark the 550th Birth Anniversary of Guru Nanak special initiative was taken to educate children about the teachings of Guru Nanak through a beautiful and informative pictorial publication title: **Nanak - The Guru**. The book was published in Punjabi, Hindi, English, Telugu, Tamil, Marathi, Oriya, Spanish and German languages, under sponsorship from philanthropists, and distributed among children free of cost. The book is available on the TSR website for worldwide readership.



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Bhai Vir Singh and the Celestial Beauty of Kashmir: A Mystic's Tribute in Verse

DR JASBIR SINGH SARNA*

Abstract:

This paper explores Bhai Vir Singh's profound poetic engagement with the natural and spiritual landscapes of Kashmir, illuminating how the region became a living metaphor for divine presence in his works. Revered as the father of modern Punjabi literature, Bhai Vir Singh (1872–1957) infused Sikh mystical thought with lyrical sensitivity, transforming the valleys, springs, and ruins of Kashmir into sites of metaphysical reflection and spiritual yearning. Through close readings of poems from Matak Hulare (Celestial Vibrations) and evocative compositions on Ichhabal, Martand, and Nishat Bagh, the study reveals how his nature poetry transcends aesthetic admiration to embody a deeper quest for union with the Creator. His verses portray flowing springs as symbols of unending longing, ancient ruins as testaments to sacred resilience, and gardens as royal courts of divine beauty. By framing Kashmir as both paradise on earth and a spiritual homeland of humanity's highest aspirations, Bhai Vir Singh elevates the region into a universal sanctum of contemplative experience. This paper thus positions his Kashmiri poetry as an enduring testament to the ethical, aesthetic, and mystical dimensions of his literary genius.

Bhai Vir Singh (1872–1957), revered as the father of modern Punjabi literature, was not only a saint-poet but a visionary mystic who gave new spiritual and aesthetic dimensions to the Punjabi language. Deeply rooted in Sikh philosophy and shaped by the poetic ethos of Guru Nanak, Bhai Vir Singh's pen became a vessel through which the divine beauty of nature—especially the sublime landscapes of Kashmir—was eternally etched into literature.

Bhai Vir Singh's vision reminds us of Kashmir's sacredness—not just as paradise on earth, but as a spiritual homeland of humanity's deepest aspirations.

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ਗਰ ਫਿਰਦੋਸ ਬਰ ਰੂ - ਜੇ ਜਮੀਨ ਅਸਤ
 ਹਮੀਨ ਅਸਤ ਓ, ਹਮੀਨ ਅਸਤ ਓ, ਹਮੀਨ ਅਸਤ

*“Gar firdaus bar ru-ye zamin ast
 Hamin ast-o, hamin ast-o, hamin ast.”*

(“If there is paradise on earth, it is here, it is here, it is here.”)

The poetry of Bhai Vir Singh transcends mere admiration for nature; it resonates with spiritual yearning, metaphysical longing, and mystic union. In Kashmir, he found not only a place of physical beauty but a realm where the presence of the Creator shimmered in lakes, echoed in springs, and lingered in the silence of valleys. His celebrated collection Matak Hulare (Celestial Vibrations) captures these experiences with rare lyricism and transcendental intensity.

A poignant example is his reflection at the spring of Ichhabal:

ਸੰਝ ਹੋਈ ਪਰਛਾਵੇਂ ਛੁਪ ਗਏ ਕਿਉ ਇਛਾਬਲ ਤੂ ਜਾਰੀ ?
 ਨੈ ਸਰੋਦ ਕਰ ਰਹੀ ਉਵੇਂ ਹੀ ਤੇ ਟੁਰਨੋਂ ਵੀ ਨਹਿ ਹਾਰੀ

*“Sanjh hoi parchanve chhup gaye,Kyon Ichhabal toon jaari?
 Na sarod kar rahi ohh-ve hi, Te turno bhi nahin haari.”*

(“It is dusk, the shadows have faded.

Ichhabal, why do you still flow?

The lute has fallen silent,

Yet your steps do not tire.”)

The spring answers in a metaphor of divine love:

ਸੀਨੇ ਖਿਚ ਜਿਨ੍ਹਾਂ ਨੇ ਖਾਧੀ ਓਹ ਕਰ ਅਰਾਮ ਨਹੀਂ ਬਹਿੰਦੇ॥
 ਨਿਹੁੰ ਵਾਲੇ ਨੈਣਾਂ ਕੀ ਨੌੰਦਰ ਓਹ ਦਿਨੇ ਰਾਤ ਪਏ ਵਹਿੰਦੇ॥

*“Seene khich jina ne khadi, O kar araam nahin bhende,
 Nehon wale naina ki neender, Oh din raat pae vahende.”*

(“Those whose hearts burn with longing

Know no rest.

Eyes filled with deep love

Do not sleep—

Their tears flow, day and night.”)

In the poem Martand de

Khanda, the poet says:

ਮਾਰ ਪਈ ਜਦ ਮਾਰਤੰਡ ਨੂੰ ਪਥਰ ਰੋ ਕੁਰਲਾਣੇ : ਪਥਰ ਤੋੜੇ? ਦਿਲ ਪਏ ਟੁਟਦੇ! ਦਿਲ ਕਾਬਾ ਰਬਾਣੇ
ਲਾਇਂ ਹੱਥੋੜਾ ਸਾਨੂੰ? ਪਰ ਤਕ! ਸਟ ਪਏ "ਰਬ ਘਰ" ਨੂੰ ਘਟ ਘਟ ਦੇ ਵਿਚ ਵਸਦਾ ਜਿਹੜਾ! ਤੂੰ ਕਿਨੂੰ ਰਬ ਸਿੰਘਾਣੇ?

“Maar paiajjad Martand nu, Pathar roh kurlaane:

“Pathar tordein? Dilan paye tutdein —

Dil, Kaaba, raabaane. Laaye hathora saanu? Partak

Satt paiaj "Rabb - ghar" nu,

Ghatt ghatt deh wich vasda jehraa

Tuu kinnu rab sijhaaney

(When the blows struck Martand,

Even the stones wept aloud:

“You're breaking stones? Hearts are shattering —

The heart, the Kaaba, is shaped by God.

You wield the hammer on us?

But tell us — who do you count as God?”

The strike fell upon the “house of God,”

That house, which dwells in every home. (Ruins of Martand)

In another poem, “Nishat Bagh,” the poet says:

ਡਲ ਦੇ ਸਿਰ ਸਿਰਤਾਜ਼ , ਖੜਾ ਨਿਸਾਤ ਤੂੰ ਪਰਬਤ ਗੋਦੀ ਵਿਚ ਤੂੰ ਹੈਂ ਲੇਟਿਆ॥

ਟਿਲੇ ਪਹਿਰੇਦਾਰ ਪਿਛੇ ਖੜੇ ਹਨ ਅਗੇ ਹੈ ਦਰਬਾਰ ਡਲ ਦਾ ਵਿਛਿਆ॥

ਸਜੇ ਖੜੇ ਰਾਹ ਸੁਫੈਦੇ ਵੇੜਿਆ ਦਿਸਦੀ ਖੜੀ ਸਿਪਾਹ ਜਾਂਦੇ ਚੁਬਦਾਰ ਹਨ॥

"Dal de sir sartaaj, kharra Nishat tuu Parbat goodi vich tuu hai laeteya
— illian pehredaar, Pichhe khare han— agge hai Darbaar Dal da vichhaya
Saaje khabey raah, sufede vairahaaya Disdi khari sipah, Jyyon chubdar haan.
"The crown of Dal's head stands Nishat,
Cradled in the arms of the mountains.
Yes, grand—guarded on hillocks,
Behind—never ahead.
This is Dal's own royal court!" (Nishat Bagh)

Such verses are not merely poetic observations—they are revelations, where water flows like eternal longing, and valleys echo with the music of separation and union. The poem Matak Hulare itself is a song of nature swaying in spiritual ecstasy:

*"Kavita di sunder hai
Nachae nachharri vasdi
Aapne sangeet lahre
Apne Parkash lasdi"
(“The beauty of poetry
Dances with nature’s rhythm,
Flowing in waves of music,
Shining in its own divine light.”)*

To Bhai Vir Singh, Kashmir was not just a place—it was a metaphor of divine presence, a living scripture in the landscape. Gulmarg’s serenity and Pahalgam’s grace became sites of inner stillness and mystical absorption. His verses offer not only aesthetic joy but also ethical counsel—to revere nature as sacred and preserve it as a legacy of divine artistry.

Sri Chattopadhyay rightly called him the “Sixth River of Punjab,” and he was hailed as the “Sikh of the Century.” His poetic Kashmir remains an immortal tribute—where celestial vibrations still echo, and every whisper of the breeze carries the fragrance of prayer. □

Interpretation of Article 25 of the Constitution and Sikh Identity

DR. KASHMIR SINGH*

Abstract:

Article 25 of the Constitution confers freedom of conscience and right to freely profess, practise and propagate religion. Its clause (2)(b) provides that freedom of religious practice will not come in the way of laws meant for throwing open Hindu religious institutions of a public character to all classes and sections of Hindus; and Explanation II to this Article elaborates that reference to 'Hindu' is to be construed as inclusive of persons professing the Sikh, Buddhist and Jain religions. Explanation I which was added at the instance of S. Harnam Singh, states that 'the wearing and carrying of Kirpans shall be deemed to be included in the practice of Sikh religion'. Both the Explanations explicitly accept Sikhism, Buddhism and Jainism as independent and distinct religions highlighting their separate status from Hinduism.

But inclusion of Sikhism in Explanation II is totally misplaced and irrelevant. The Sikhs are justified to agitate over their unjust clubbing with Hindus as it reflects distorted view of their religion. This gives wrong impression that Sikhism is also an orthodox religion requiring State help to abolish caste-based restrictions on entry into the Hindu religious shrines. It is an aspersion on the fair name of Sikhism. Sikh representatives in the Constituent Assembly failed to point out this anomaly. Further, insertion of Hindu religion in the main provision and of Sikhism and others in the Explanation seems to be an attempt to assert that Hinduism is the main or superior religion and others are subsidiaries. Term 'Sikh', being misplaced, needs deletion from Explanation II of Article 25 through an amendment of the Constitution.

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Article 25 of the Indian Constitution, providing for freedom of religion, has been a subject of discussion in the Sikh circles for a long time. The provision and its likely impact on the identity of the Sikh religion can be better analyzed by reference to its retrospective and judicial interpretation.

Retrospect: The Sikhs resolved, at a specially convened meeting at Amritsar in June 1946, to boycott the Constituent Assembly (CA) because the Cabinet Mission Proposals did not provide for any special safeguard for the Sikh minority in the new setup, as was done for the Muslims. The Secretary of State explained.¹

It is, however, essential that the fullest consideration should be given to their (Sikhs') claims, for they are a distinct and important community, but on a population basis adopted they lose their weightage. We have represented to the two major parties, who were both most receptive in this matter, that some special means of giving the Sikhs a strong position in the affairs of the Punjab or the N.-W. A group should be devised.

On the advice of Mohan Chand (Mahatma) Gandhi and Abul Kalam Azad, the Congress Working Committee appealed to the Sikhs through its resolution of August 9, 1946, to participate in the Constituent Assembly and assured them all possible support to redress their legitimate grievances and to secure adequate safeguards for the protection of their just interests. The Sikhs reconsidered their position and agreed to participate.²

The Constituent Assembly, whose members were elected by the members of the Provincial Legislative Assemblies, first met on December 9, 1946, in Delhi. The members presented their credentials and signed their names in the Register on that day. These comprised 12 members from Punjab, including four Sikhs, namely S. Partap Singh, S. Ujjal Singh, S. Kartar Singh, and S. Harnam Singh; all except the last one were Punjab M.L.A.'s. S. Jogendra Singh, an M.L.A. from the United Provinces, S. Sochet Singh Aujla of Kapurthala, and S.B. Ranjit Singh, a businessman of Delhi representing Patiala State, were also members of the CA.

The Objective Resolution, unanimously adopted by the Constituent Assembly on January 22, 1947, resolved to draw up a Constitution for India's future governance, "Wherein shall be guaranteed and secured to all the people of India justice, social, economic, and political; equality of status, of opportunity, and before the law; freedom of thought, expression, belief, faith, worship, vocation, association and action, subject

to law and public morality; and wherein adequate safeguards shall be provided for minorities, backward and tribal areas, and for depressed and other backward classes."

On 24th January, the CA elected the Advisory Committee on Fundamental Rights, Minorities and Tribal and Excluded Areas, consisting of 52 members (SC-7, Muslim-7, Sikh-6, Anglo-Indians-3, Christians-3, Parsi-3) and S.Vallabhbhai Patel as its chairman. The Sikh members of CA, along with S. Baldev Singh, were elected as members of this Committee.

The Advisory Committee constituted five Sub-Committees, one of which was to deal with Fundamental Rights. The Sub-Committee on Fundamental Rights³ Considered various drafts and prepared a list of Fundamental Rights. Religious Freedom, contained in the draft articles submitted by KM Munshi and Ambedkar, was first discussed on March 26, 1947. The right to profess and practise religion was extended to all persons instead of restricting it only to citizens. The Sub-Committee subjected 'the right to profess and practise religion' to public order, morality, and health, and to the other provisions relating to fundamental rights. Explanation I, added at the instance of S. Harnam Singh, provided: "The wearing and carrying of Kirpans shall be deemed to be included in the practice of the Sikh religion." The Sub-Committee submitted its final report to the Chairman of the Advisory Committee on April 16, 1947.

The Advisory Committee, on the recommendation of the Sub-Committee on Minorities, provided additional right to 'propagate' along with the right to freely profess and practise religion. It also decided to add an Explanation providing that the freedom of religious practice would not debar the State from enacting laws for social welfare and reform. The Advisory Committee submitted its interim report relating to justiciable fundamental rights to the Constituent Assembly on April 23, 1947.

The CA accepted the amendment moved by KM Munshi to ensure that the freedom of religious practice did not come in the way of laws for throwing open Hindu religious institutions of a public character to all classes and sections of Hindus.⁴

The Constitutional Advisor made a few minor changes and drafting adjustments to include the provision relating to religious freedom in his Draft Constitution. The Drafting Committee, with a few modifications of drafting nature, reproduced it in its Draft Constitution as Article 19:

19. (1) Subject to public order, morality and health and to the other provisions of this Part, all persons are equally entitled to freedom of conscience and the right freely to profess, practise and propagate religion.

Explanation- The wearing and carrying of Kirpans shall be deemed to be included in the profession of the Sikh religion.

(2) Nothing in this article shall affect the operation of any existing law or preclude the State from making any law-

(a) regulating or restricting any economic, financial, political, or other secular activity which may be associated with religious practice;

(b) for social welfare and reform, or for throwing open Hindu religious institutions of a public character to all classes and sections of Hindus.

The Constituent Assembly was also to act as the interim Parliament. It, therefore, became anomalous that provincial MLAs, who were elected as members of the CA, would also be acting as MPs. So they were given the option to withdraw either from membership of the provincial legislature or of CA. Thus, all the Sikh members from Punjab were replaced. S. Hukam Singh, S. Bhopinder Singh Mann, S. Baldev Singh, Defence Minister of India, and S. Gurmukh Singh Mussafir took over as members of the CA. None of these members participated in the discussion on the provision relating to religious freedom in the CA, though Mr. Mann and Hukam Singh made impressive speeches on the minority issue⁵ and refused to sign the final draft of the Constitution^{6A} on November 26, 1949, for the non-inclusion of safeguards for the Sikh minority community.^{6B}

Many suggestions were received when the Draft Constitution was circulated for eliciting opinions. One of the suggestions was to widen the scope of sub-clause (b) of clause (2) to permit the throwing open of all religious institutions and not merely those of Hindus.⁷

Draft articles on religious freedom were discussed in the CA on December 3, 6 & 7, 1948. Dr. Ambedkar proposed the replacement of the word 'preclude' with the word 'prevent' in clause (2) of the draft article. Prof. K. T. Shah moved an amendment in sub-clause (b) of clause (2) of article 19 to read as-

".....for social welfare and reform or for throwing open Hindu, Jain, Buddhist or Christian religious institutions of a public character to any class or section of Hindus."

He said why this right or obligation of throwing open to the public should be restricted only to Hindu Religious institutions. The clause should be more generalised and made applicable to all the leading religions of this country, whose religious institutions are more or less cognate.⁸ Prof. Shah was sagacious enough not to suggest the inclusion of Sikhs in the provision, as their religious shrines were already open to everybody.

Shri K. M. Munshi suggested:

The word 'Hindu' used in this section should be widely defined. The Hindu Bill, which is now before this House in its legislative capacity, has defined 'Hindu' to include the various sub-sections, but it will be more appropriate to have this definition in the interpretation clause than in this.⁹

Later at the revision stage, the Drafting Committee inserted a new Explanation II to the draft article providing that reference to Hindus shall also include the persons professing the Sikh, Jain, or Buddhist religion; and renumbered draft article 19 as article 25. Mr. KM Munshi,¹⁰ who played a major role in the drafting of Article 25, was able to highlight Hinduism as a prominent religion by placing it in the main provision and showing Sikhism, Buddhism, and Jainism as subsidiary religions by putting them in Explanation II. He cunningly avoided putting all religions on par in sub-clause (2)(b) as suggested by Prof. Shah. Thus, Sikhs were unfairly clubbed with Hindus and others by inclusion in Explanation II to Article 25.

It will be relevant to mention that attempts to bring Sikhism and other denominations within the ambit of Hinduism had started from the last quarter of the 19th century, when Swami Dayanand started his shudhi movement. The Hindu Sabha further consolidated it at the beginning of the last century, which had the support of Arya Samaji, Sanatani, and Congress Hindus, including Gandhi, Malviya, Lajpat Rai, Raja Narendra Nath, GC Narang, Ganpat Rai, etc. It aimed to consolidate the Hindu identity, and it defined Hinduism by including Sikhs, Buddhists, and Jains into it.¹¹ The same viewpoint led to the insertion of Explanation II to Article 25.

The Revised Draft of the Constitution was finally put before the CA and passed in November 1949.

Finally, Article 25 of the Constitution reads as under:

25 (1) Subject to public order, morality and health and the other provisions of this Part, all persons are equally entitled to freedom of conscience and the right freely to profess, practise and propagate religion.

(2) Nothing in this article shall affect the operation of any existing law or prevent the State from making any law-

(a) regulating or restricting any economic, financial, political, or other secular activity which may be associated with religious practice;

(b) providing for social welfare and reform, or the throwing open of Hindu religious institutions of a public character to all classes and sections of Hindus.

Explanation I- The wearing and carrying of Kirpans shall be deemed to be included in the profession of the Sikh religion.

Explanation II- In sub-clause (b) of clause (2), the reference to Hindus shall be construed as including a reference to persons professing the Sikh, Jains, or Buddhist religion, and the reference to Hindu religious institutions shall be construed accordingly.

Article 25 provides for freedom of conscience and the right to freely profess, practice, and propagate religion, subject to a number of limitations. Freedom of conscience refers to the mental process, i.e., belief in one religion or another or none. It includes both freedom of religion and freedom from religion. The right to freely profess, practice, and propagate refers to external action or manifestation in pursuance of that belief. Freedom of conscience will be meaningless unless supplemented by the right to profess, practice, and propagate religion.

Right to profess religion means the right to state, affirm, admit, or declare one's creed, faith, or religion openly in public by words of mouth or conduct. Expression or articulation of inner freedom of conscience amounts to professing a religion. Explanation I to Article 25 provides that wearing and carrying of Kirpan is included in the profession of the Sikh religion. Similarly, wearing of Kara (steel bangle) and turban by the Sikhs and Janeoo (sacred thread) or tilak (vermillion mark) by the Hindus amounts to professing their religion.

Right to practise religion denotes the overt performance of religious rites, rituals, and ceremonies, including participation in religious processions, assemblies, and worship. However, only those observances and ceremonies are

protected that are essential and integral parts of religion. Recital of sacred texts, offering food to idols and oblations to sacred fire by Hindus, calling azan and performing Hajj by Muslims, partaking of amrit and reciting keertan by Sikhs are examples of practicing religion.

Right to propagate means to spread and publicise one's faith to others. Even anti-religious propaganda is allowed unless it outrages the religious feelings of others. It allows spreading one's religion by exposition of its tenets and persuasion without any coercion or fraud.

Limitations on the Freedom: A peculiar aspect of Article 25 is that it gives primacy to the restrictions and not to the fundamental right, unlike other provisions in the Fundamental Rights chapter. Besides, the freedom of religion is not subjected only to the usual categories of public order, morality, and health but also to a unique category, i.e., other provisions in the Fundamental Rights chapter. It makes the freedom of religion the weakest of all the fundamental rights. Restrictions on the freedom of religion can be read on ground(s) of- (i) public order (ii) morality (iii) health (iv) other fundamental rights (v) regulating or restricting any economic, financial, political or other secular activity associated with religious practice (vi) providing for social welfare and reform or (vii) throwing open of Hindu religious institutions of a public character to all classes and sections of Hindus. We shall elaborate only on the last-mentioned limitation on the freedom of religion.

Throwing open of Hindu Religious Institutions- This limitation included in the second part of Article 25 (2)(b) protects the existing and future laws relating to "throwing open Hindu religious institutions of a public character to all classes and sections of Hindus." The protective provision is, however, specifically extended also to the religious institutions of a public character belonging to Sikhs, Buddhists, and Jains by Explanation II. It empowers the State to make laws for the removal of temple-entry restrictions based on untouchability and the caste system of the Hindu religion. It is submitted that this aspect was already covered under equality, non-discrimination, and anti-untouchability provisions in Articles 14, 15, and 17, and also under the words 'equally' in clause (1) and 'social welfare and reform' in clause (2)(b) of Article 25. 'Social reform' could very well ensure equal rights for everyone to enter the temple premises without any discrimination. Not only this, Explanation II to Article 25 unnecessarily clubs egalitarian religions like Sikhism, which treat everyone equally in its religious shrines, with Hinduism, having temple entry restrictions.

Sikh Objections to Exp. II: Apparently, both the Explanations to Article 25 recognize the distinct identity of Sikhism by making a specific mention of it as a separate religion. But the inclusion of Sikhism in Explanation II is totally misplaced and irrelevant. The twin objections are as follows.

i. Distorted View of Sikh Religion: Second part of sub-clause (b) of Article 25(2) and Explanation II classify religions in two categories. Four (Hindu, Sikh, Jain, and Buddhist) religions, which find mention herein, are deemed to need legislation for throwing open their public religious institutions to the adherents of those religions. The second category of religions, like Islam, Christianity, Parsi, and Jewish, which are not included in it, are considered not to have any problem as regards entry, implying their shrines are already open for their followers and do not require any legislation or State help for the purpose. Sikhism is erroneously classified by putting it in the wrong category. Neither the necessity has ever arisen for the State to pass any law for free entry in the Sikh Gurdwaras, making use of sub-clause (2)(b) of Article 25, nor is there any such likelihood in the future. The very definition of Gurdwara means free access of one and all into its portals.

The Constitution-makers simply included all the religions of Indian origin in the Explanation without following any criterion for the purpose. Inclusion of Sikhism is totally misplaced because Sikh Gurdwaras are open to one and all, even to the non-Sikhs, a stage at which even the legislation under Article 25 (2)(b) does not and cannot envisage to reach. The Sikhs are justifiably agitated over their unjust clubbing with Hindus, as it reflects a distorted view of their religion. This gives the wrong impression that Sikhism is also an orthodox religion, oblivious of the principles of equality, liberty, and fraternity. In fact, the Sikh Gurus denounced the caste system and untouchability stoutly and did their best by precept and practice to root out these evils from society. So inclusion of the Sikh religion in Explanation II is an aspersion on the fair name of this religion. It is either due to the ignorance of the Constitution-framers about the lofty ideals of Sikhism or their wickedness in presenting a distorted view of it. Sikh representatives in the Constituent Assembly failed to point out this anomaly.

ii. Subordinates Sikh Religion to Hindu Religion: Despite confirming Sikhism as an independent and separate religion twice by Article 25, its misplacement in Explanation

II and misinterpretation give the wrong impression. Insertion of the Hindu religion in the main provision and of the other three religions, including Sikhism, in the Explanation allows Sikh-detractors to assert that Sikhism is not at par with Hinduism but a part, subsidiary, branch, or an offshoot of it. Though such an assertion is factually incorrect but apprehension arises in view of some remarks of the Supreme Court in two of its judgments, though in obiter dicta.

Explanation II to the Article says that reference to Hindus in clause (2)(b) shall be construed as including a reference to persons professing the Sikh, Jain, or Buddhist religion, and the reference to Hindu religious institutions shall be construed accordingly. Whether Explanation II adversely affect the religious identity of these three religions? Does it declare Sikhs, Jains, and Buddhists to be Hindus? Does it amount to amalgamating three religions in Hinduism? The answer to all these questions is emphatic 'No'.

Obviously, Article 25(2)(b) empowers the State to abolish caste-based restrictions on entry into the Hindu religious shrines. Explanation II extends this power to Sikh, Buddhist, and Jain shrines. So it is a total misconception that Explanation II treats Sikhs, Jains, and Buddhists as Hindus. The Explanation makes specific mention of these three as religions when it says 'persons professing the Sikh, Jain, and Buddhist religion'. Thus, Article 25 considers Sikhism, Jainism, and Buddhism independent religions like Hinduism. It is quite evident from the reading of Explanation II.

In the absence of Explanation II, clause (2)(b) was to confine to the "Hindu religion" alone. This would not have covered the institutions of religions other than those of Hinduism. In Explanation II, the reference to "persons professing the Sikh, Jain, or Buddhist religion" meant that persons following these religions were not legally considered persons following the Hindu religion. They would not have come within the ambit of Article 25(2)(b) but for Explanation II. The object of Explanation II, therefore, was to widen the scope of clause (2)(b) and to bring the religious institutions belonging to Sikhism, Jainism, and Buddhism, all being separate religions, within the purview of this provision, along with Hindu religious institutions. Because Sikhism, Jainism, or Buddhism are separate religions, they could not have been included among the Hindus in Article 25(2)(b), and, therefore, it became necessary to insert Explanation II to extend the provision to their religious institutions also, along with those of the

Hindus. Thus, the mere insertion of Explanation II is evidence of the separate and independent status of the three religions mentioned therein.

The Constitution-framers, including Dr. Ambedkar, a Buddhist and Chairman of the Drafting Committee, and the Sikh members of the Constituent Assembly, could never envision the effacement or subordination of their religions by allowing the insertion of Explanation II.

Prof. Tahir Mahmood¹² aptly comments:

A confusion, indeed not warranted by the words of Explanation II to Article 25, seems to have gone round that the Constitution declares Buddhists, Jains, and Sikhs to be "Hindus". Most certainly, it does nothing of the sort. Read as a whole, Article 25 only says that the state shall have the same powers in respect of Buddhists, Jains, and Sikhs' religious institutions of a public character as regarding Hindu religious institutions of such nature The provision of Explanation II in Article 25 has no religious connotation. Instead of saying the same thing four times for four different religious communities - Hindus, Buddhists, Jains, and Sikhs- Article 25 (2)(b) says it once, for the Hindus, and then adds that the same provision be read in the Constitution for three other communities as well- the Buddhists, the Jains, and the Sikhs. Makers of the Constitution did not intend to merge the Buddhists, Jains, and Sikhs into the Hindu religion; nor were they indeed competent to do so. Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, and Sikhism remain, under the Constitution and the law of India, four different faiths; and their followers four different religious communities.¹³

The same author opines at another place, "By no dint of imagination can, however, this provision be interpreted to mean that these three religious groups are part of the Hindu community."

It is submitted that a more convenient and concise mode to say the same thing for all four religions was to add the other three religions along with Hinduism in clause (2)(b), as the Venkatchaliah Commission has recommended later. Moreover, Prof. Shah had suggested in the CA to extend the provision to Buddhists, Jains, and Christians in the same manner. Thus insertion of Explanation II and then the inclusion of the Sikh religion in that is totally unwarranted and motivated. □

To be continued....

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2. S. Ujjal Singh while speaking on Objective Resolution, Constituent Assembly Debates (CAD), December 14, 1946.
3. The Sub-Committee consisted of Messers JB Kriplani, BR Ambedkar, MR Masani, KT Shah, KM Munshi, Maulana AK Azad, S. Harnam Singh, AK Ayyer, J Daultram and Rajkumari Amrit Kaur (a Christian).
4. Constituent Assembly Debates dated May 1, 1947.
5. Ibid., Nov. 21, 1949.
- 6A. Mr. Hukam Singh said, "Let it not be misunderstood that Sikh community has agreed to this Constitution. I wish to record an emphatic protest here. My community cannot subscribe its assent to this historic document."
- 6B. S. Bhopinder Singh Mann said, "The Sikhs cannot give unstinted support or full approval to this Constitution." This dissent became meaningless as third Akali representative and the other three Sikh members voted in its favour and Shiromani Akali Dal contested the ensuing election under the Constitution.
7. Editor of the Indian Law Review and some members of the Calcutta Bar suggested this, S.C. Kashyap, Framing of India's Constitution, 2nd ed.. 266.
8. CAD dated Dec.6, 1948.
9. Ibid.
10. KM Munshi, a Gujarati, great admirer of Gandhi and Patel, supporter of Akhand Hindustan Movement, wanted to compel Muslims by force to give up demand for Pakistan, strong opponent of inclusion of 'propagation' and conversion of religion in Article 25, got renovation of Somnath Temple on India Government's expense just after independence, became Governor of U P 1952-57, renounced Congress Party and started the Akhand Hindustan Movement, one of the founders of right-wing Swatantra Party and also of Vishva Hindu Parishad.
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Punjab Floods 2025 – A Nightmare Natural or a Manmade?

BHUPINDER SINGH*

Abstract:

In the month of August 2025, we had an unprecedented rainfall in Punjab, and the result of the heavy downpour was severe flooding. The Punjab government had declared all the 23 districts as flood affected. In this paper I have tried to examine the causes of these floods – if it was a natural phenomenon or human-caused? It may sound unbelievable that we the humans are contributing to it.

We have erected dams but are doing poor management of those with late, and large releases without warning the residents in affected areas. One gauge of our contribution is the timing and the amounts of water released from the dams plus the sludge and silting behind those. In addition, the other contributors as embankments called dussibandhs, plus illegal floodplain encroachments have also been explored. Besides exploration of causes, the mitigation methods have also been discussed.

Overview

The Punjab government has already declared all 23 districts of the state as flood-hit, as heavy rainfall and swollen rivers continued to wreak havoc, leaving 30 people dead so far, and affecting more than 3.5 lakh residents. The severity of floods can be gauged from the fact that no district have escaped the wrath of floods. The officials estimate that over 2,000 villages across Punjab have been hit by this year's floods, the situation in the state's border districts is worse. Of about 1,000 acres of the Sutlej riverbed area in village Kaluwala, Ferozepur District approximately 150 acres remain visible; the rest has been swallowed up as the river shifted its course. This tiny village which is surrounded by river Sutlej on three sides has international border fencing on the fourth side making it completely sandwiched. The plight of the people, animals,

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movable, and immovable properties, standing crops has been heart wrenching. The affected population had tragic memories of 1988 floods revived.

What is so strange is that Punjab has been one of earliest and had the best water management systems in place since 1693, when during the reign of Emperor Shah Jahan first canal was built. Next, during Maharja Ranjit Singh's reign further improvements were made to the canal systems. Then during the British Raj, an extensive network of canals were built from 1855 -1940. Finally, after the independence in 1947 and division of Punjab between India and Pakistan, a new wave water management projects were initiated on both sides of the new international borders. This extensive irrigation canal system which transformed the territory into the grain basket of the country lays in ruin today. With digital phones, the images and text exchanges news travels faster than the media making more people aware of the grim situation. Approximately 3.75 lakh acres of crop was damaged. Flood timing was especially harsh because transplanted paddies were maturing and when fields stay submerged for days resulted crops lodge or collapsed.

How Floods Unfolded

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

Dam Name	Water Discharged (Cu/secs)
Bhakra	95,000
Pong	74,000
Ranjit Sagar	600,000

The Ranjit Sagar Dam on the Ravi river had reached close to its maximum capacity of 527 meters by the end of August. On August 26-27, over 600,000 cu/secs of water was released from the dam. This massive inflow reached the Madhopur barrage, where old infrastructure and lack of maintenance worsened the situation as the floodgates there collapsed the result of which submerged the villages of Gurdaspur, Pathankot and Amritsar districts. Also, the Heavy rainfall caused surge in

river flow at Harike Headworks. As of September 03, the inflow touched 346,000 cu/secs prompting full gate opening.

The Ghaggar River, a rainfed system originating in the Shivalik foothills, is highly prone to flashflood, with a past history of breaches. Local tributaries and seasonal choes or streams (such as the Sirhind Choe in Ropar and Ludhiana, and the various basins in Doaba) also swelled beyond safe limits during the late August rainfall, inundating adjoining lowlands.

The Dhussi bandh was originally laid down in the 1950s on every perennial and even seasonal river of Punjab to protect the countryside areas close to the rivers. The objective of the Dhussi bandh on the Beas was to protect the downstream areas from the river's unpredictable course. But, while the bandh protected several villages outside, around 30 villages inside the bandh, of which 16 fall on an island-type area and the remaining, along with the river inside the Dhussi bandh in Sultanpur Lodhi tehsil, remained exposed to backflow and inundation. Overall, it was a devastating picture for the whole state.

Causes

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

- Interaction between climate stressors—such as glacial melt, erratic monsoon rainfall, and large scale deforestation.
- Unprecedented and concentrated monsoon rains this year 2025.
- Ill-timed release of excess water from the reservoirs without sufficient warnings to the population, only intensified the flood's impact, trauma and damage. In addition the trust of people was taken away from the government.
- Poor management or lack of management and poor maintenance of facilities.
- Severe silting or rather No silting in the water management facilities coupled with urbanization and encroachment by builders in flood zones without any concern for environmental impact studies or approvals.

Mitigation

Mitigation from the ravages of floods will be very costly, time consuming and painful. Yet not doing it is not an option. It is not merely a problem of rehabilitation of the

flood victims and their livelihood, but it means saving the nation's granary. Again, there will be recommendations from the expert's committees and commissions. Knowing from the history of how far they get implemented, it will be an open question. But some common suggestions are as under:

1. Better Warning Systems - There should be a better warning system so that the population can be warned of an impending disaster. During this year's flooding, the common complaint was that we were not given adequate warning. Just by better managing the warning system the impact of floods can be lessened. Complaints could be heard that; "They (officials) came and informed us just half an hour before the water came and devasted us. Tell me, how can a man save himself and his family in half an hour?"
2. Desilting of Reservoirs - While Punjab was battling one of its worst floods in decades, it came to light that the holding capacity of the Bhakra Dam, the second tallest in the world built upstream on the Sutlej, has been reduced by about 19 per cent in live storage since its inception in 1963. The primary reason, officials say, is that the dam's reservoir has never been desilted all these years. It shows a glaring lack of upkeep of the facilities. The modern dams are designed with features incorporated in design to enable periodical desilting. But no silting for its entire lifespan is a sad commentary on the state of affairs. The revelation came amid criticism of the Bhakra Beas Management Board (BBMB) for "failing to hold back water" in the Bhakra and Pong dams when heavy rain wreaked havoc across Punjab recently. If this is state of India's largest and prestigious project, nothing much is left to be said of other projects. So, when the gates are opened to release water we can either expect blockages or sand sludge being discharged, which will only worsen the situation.
3. Incorporate Desilting features in existing dams - Desilting affected dams will reduce the likelihood of aquatic weeds and algal blooms, increase storage volume and prolong the life of the dam structure. So, it is imperative that such features be incorporated into the existing dam facilities. Dredging, pneumatic desilting, and sediment flushing are some of the commonly employed methods for desilting. But considering that large scale deforestation is taking place in the mountains from where the rivers originate results in increased silting. On top of it not having desilting features is an invitation to disaster, when there are number of scientific desilting machines and methods available in this modern era.

4. Human encroachment on the dry river land – The Dhussi Bundh is a classic example of human encroachments on the river land. During the flooding, the gauge at Dharmkot, meant to measure up to 4.63 lakh cu/secs, became inaccessible days after August 26, as Ravi crossed more than double its capacity. Officials said this unprecedented pressure overwhelmed embankments. Such encroachments also obstruct the natural flow of water, raising its level further and causing it to spill over into villages and towns along the riverbanks, resulting in higher damage. The fate of houses, animals, farmland and properties were like sitting ducks to be swept away.
5. Embankment failures - In 2023, around 100 breaches were reported across different rivers in Punjab. While 50 breaches were reported in Ghaggar river, the remaining were in Satluj, Beas, Ravi and their tributaries. In 2025, Ravi river unleashed its worst fury in Punjab, causing 42 of the 45 breaches reported in the state's Dhussi bundhs (embankments), the highest ever in the river's recorded history. When the embankments fail the repercussions on flood's fury translates into an unbearable tragedy. Obviously, there should be a reassessment, reevaluation of these bundh's strength against the higher flow rates being encountered now and it is going to get worse as time passes.
6. Unplanned Development along with lack of environmental impact studies - When project approvals and its sanctioning can be achieved through greasing of palms, the projects will get nod not on the basis of merit, but based on connections, money laundering and exchanges to get the permits and relationships. Environmental concerns get thrown out of window to select the prime view location for the projects based on aesthetic appeal and photogenic background of hills or rivers. According to a report released on February 20, 2023, by the Cross Dependency Initiative, Punjab is among the top 50 regions in the world where climate change is expected to cause the maximum damage to human-made infrastructure. Keeping such international reports in mind, both state and central governments should weigh the developmental projects for sanctioning. This will not mitigate the damage already done but it can prevent the added impact of new projects. Simultaneously, the review of existing development projects need to be made to access their environmental impact. Some fancy projects already built with much political fanfare may provide a better ecological benefit if they are scrapped and returned back to nature.



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Punjab's River Water Crisis: A Long Tale of Grave Injustices

SANTOKH SINGH BAINS*

Abstract:

Out of India's 28 states and 8 union territories, Punjab is the only one which has been repeatedly compelled (illegally and immorally) to part with huge volumes of its river waters - and that also for free - to satisfy Rajasthan, Haryana, Delhi and Chandigarh. While it is crystal clear that the Central government has always been adopting step-motherly attitude towards Punjab (particularly in the context of Punjab's river waters), the state's political leaders have also frequently failed to safeguard Punjab's interests.

Now, a high-power delegation led by Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Singh Mann should meet Prime Minister Narendra Modi. All relevant facts and figures regarding grave injustices done to Punjab relating to its river waters should be properly explained to him. Also, Narendra Modi should be reminded of the statement made by him during his election rallies in Punjab in November 2016 and January 2017; he had then clearly stated that Punjab ki dharti (land of Punjab) should get the advantage of additional river waters. Regarding the Indus Waters Treaty, the Prime Minister had mentioned that the waters from the Indus, Sutlej, Beas, and Ravi rivers, over which India had a right under the Treaty, was flowing into Pakistan without being fully utilised in India. He had promised to stop this 'wasted' water from going to Pakistan, and instead divert it for the farmers of Punjab and Jammu & Kashmir.

India suspended the Indus Waters Treaty after the horrifying terror attack in Pahalgam on 22 April 2025. In this connection, Home Minister Amit Shah announced that, after suspension of the Treaty, the river water earlier flowing to Pakistan, would now be diverted through new canal systems primarily to Rajasthan. In fact he should have assured Punjab that the newly available river

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water would now be diverted primarily for Punjab because this state has immensely suffered in the past and is now urgently in need of huge volumes of river waters.

Hopefully Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Home Minister Amit Shah will now come forward to Punjab's aid by agreeing to divert the newly available river waters to Punjab. Also, Punjab's river waters presently flowing to Rajasthan, Haryana, Delhi and Chandigarh should be substantially reduced, and the concerned states and union territories should be forced to pay Punjab for using its river waters in the past, present, and future.

If, unfortunately, Punjab fails to get justice from the Centre this time also, then the Punjab government should avail the services of India's top lawyers to finally get justice through the country's Supreme Court.

Punjab's river water crisis started appearing just two years after the country's independence, when, in 1949, the Punjab government sent a proposal to the Central government to build the Harike Headworks. The Central government's bad intentions became clear when it put the condition that this proposal would be implemented only if the Punjab government agreed that from these headworks, 18,500 cusecs of water would also be given to Rajasthan. Call it the Punjab government's carelessness, weakness, or helplessness, the Punjab government approved this fully unjustified proposal of the Centre. Under these adverse conditions. The Harike Headworks were built and completed in 1952.

The surprising fact is that Rajasthan, for which this water arrangement was made, had never before asked or demanded water from Punjab's rivers from the Central government. Actually, Rajasthan knew that, being a non-riparian state, it had no right whatsoever over the waters of Punjab's rivers. It also knew that if it demanded water from Punjab in this situation, it would have to pay for it, just like Bikaner used to pay for Punjab's river water through the Gang canal, which it could not afford. They also knew that Jaisalmer's area was much higher than Harike Headworks, and lifting water from a low area to a high ground is a very difficult task.

Due to its own incompetence, Punjab did not assert its claim over all of its rivers' water. Hence, the World Bank team was told that up to 15.85 million Acre Feet (MAF) of additional water from the Sutlej, Beas, and Ravi rivers could also be used. The Centre then conspired to allot 8.00 MAF water to Rajasthan. At that time, Punjab should have

properly planned for the future of its agriculture. Accordingly, it should have demanded 15.85 MAF of additional water instead of only 7.25 MAF. It was really an egregious blunder by the government of Punjab. Also, the Union government went out of its way to help Rajasthan. While unduly favouring Rajasthan, it did not care at all about some sandy and dry areas of Punjab, which were urgently in need of river waters. If the Centre were really impartial, it could have reviewed the scheme and made it somewhat more favourable for the Punjab.

Anyway, from Harike Headworks to Jaisalmer in Rajasthan, a 1680-kilometer-long and about one-acre-wide canal, one of the world's longest and widest canals, known as the Indira Gandhi Canal, started being built in 1956 entirely with central government funds. It was completed in 1965. From 1965 till now, a huge share of Punjab's river water has been taken away to Rajasthan through this canal. Moreover, the canal's 167-kilometer length within Punjab ruined 9,000 acres of the state's fertile land, and the effects of waterlogging spread far and wide. Almost all canals flow from high to low ground, but this is probably one of the very few canals throughout the world that flows from a low area to a high ground. It may be mentioned here that Jaisalmer of Rajasthan is about 100 feet higher than Punjab's Harike Headworks. To get water to this high area, powerful motors were installed at two places to lift water to a height of 60 feet each at both places.

Before building the Indira Gandhi Canal, the Indian government had taken advice from the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation regarding this canal. After four years of deep study, in 1954, the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation advised the Centre not to build this canal to irrigate the sands of Rajasthan's desert. The American Bureau had further stated that with this water, it would be better to irrigate the areas near Punjab's rivers. But the Centre ignored this sane advice and decided to go ahead with constructing the canal. Punjab lost its land and water, and that too for a non-riparian state (Rajasthan). It is crystal clear that, according to the world's water-sharing principles, Rajasthan had no right or claim over Punjab's rivers. Surprisingly, the Union government ensured that Rajasthan would get all this water and that too without paying for it. It may be mentioned here that, before India's independence, the Bikaner State (part of modern Rajasthan) used to pay 'seigniorage charge' (royalty) to the Punjab government for using water from Punjab's Sutlej river. Bikaner used to receive Punjab's river water through the old Gang canal.

According to some rough calculations, if the price of water given by Punjab to Rajasthan is calculated, it would be about 11.75 lakh crore rupees (this estimate is

based on the 2008 C.W.P.C. report and it was prepared in 2018). Now, in 2025, this amount would have naturally increased very significantly. With such a whopping amount, the entire debt of Punjab and also of its farmers could have been paid off, and even then, several lakh crores of rupees would have been left unutilized, with which poverty and unemployment could be fully eradicated in Punjab. If the Central government wanted, instead of making Punjab barren, it could have given water to Rajasthan from the Narmada or Sardar Sarovar Dam in Gujarat, but neither the Centre nor the Gujarat Government was prepared for it.

It would not be out of place to mention here that the Indus Waters Treaty, which was signed in 1960 between India and Pakistan, was very badly negotiated by India. While Pakistan was unduly favoured, India, particularly the Indian Punjab part, suffered immensely from implementing the one-sided treaty. Once, when Nehru was asked about it, he had coolly said that he believed that India would have very cordial relations with Pakistan because of the treaty, which duly favoured Pakistan. We all know that Nehru was repeatedly proved wrong by Pakistan.

Now, let's turn to Haryana. After coming into existence in 1966, Haryana rightly believed that the political leaders of Punjab were very incompetent and simple-minded. If Punjab could give its river waters to Rajasthan for free without any proper reason, then why can't it similarly serve Haryana also? Hence, Haryana claimed a right over Punjab's rivers, stating that before the reorganization, it was a part of Punjab; so now it should get a share of the water from Punjab's three rivers according to its area.

During the use of the Reorganization Act of 1966, the Centre also added three clauses (78, 79, 80) that should not actually apply to inter-state rivers. Under these clauses, it was arranged that the leaders of Punjab and Haryana would sit together with the advice of the Central government and resolve the water issue within two years; otherwise, the right to resolve the issue would go to the Centre. As was rightly anticipated, no agreement could be reached between Haryana and Punjab, and, therefore, the Centre stepped in. In 1976, taking advantage of the Emergency in the country, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi forced her decision on Punjab, allotting 3.5 MAF more water to Haryana from Punjab's Ravi and Beas rivers. Haryana, striking while the iron was hot, said that to get this 3.5 MAF water into Haryana, a new canal should be built because the existing canal did not have enough capacity to carry this additional water. This planned canal came to be known as the Sutlej-Yamuna Link (SYL) Canal.

Ideally, as soon as Haryana became a separate state, all the small and big canals carrying water from Punjab's rivers to Haryana should have been immediately

stopped, or Haryana should have been made to pay for the water. But Punjab's political leaders did nothing like this. Haryana, despite being a non-riparian state, kept on getting Punjab's river water for free. As regards the SYL Canal project, under the stewardship of Chief Minister Parkash Singh Badal, the parcels of land (which had earlier been acquired for the SYL Canal project) were returned to the original farmers and their descendants free of cost. Consequently, many farmers physically reclaimed and levelled their lands for cultivation. The Supreme Court later held that the Punjab legislature could not unilaterally terminate water-sharing agreements or override court orders.

Unfortunately, the rules relating to the distribution of river waters between various states of India are applied differently in case of different provinces. In 1953, during the reorganization of Madras (Chennai) state, Andhra Pradesh was separated from it. Before the birth of the new state, three rivers—Godavari, Krishna, and Kaveri—were flowing in Madras state. After the division, Andhra Pradesh got the Godavari and Krishna rivers. Hence, Madras state became a non-riparian state without these two rivers. In spite of repeated requests by the Madras state, Andhra Pradesh refused to give any water from these two rivers. In fact, the water flowing in the Godavari and Krishna rivers is even more than four times that of Punjab's rivers (Godavari = 100 MAF, Krishna = 60 MAF, Sutlej+Beas+Ravi = 34.3 MAF). After the division of Madras state, Andhra Pradesh never claimed any right over the Kaveri river because it became a non-riparian state for that river. There are scores of such examples in India as well as in other countries where, after division, non-riparian states, regions, or countries did not get water from other rivers belonging to other states or regions. Servai's Constitutional Law of India was already available on this subject, which is universally accepted. Unfortunately, however, exceptions have always been made in the case of Punjab, thus depriving this state of its own precious river waters.

After 1966, Haryana became Punjab's neighbourly state. At that time, Punjab should have asked for water from Haryana's Yamuna River (just as Haryana had demanded water from Punjab's rivers). But Punjab's incompetent, selfish leaders never forcibly laid their claim to this issue. Now, Punjab gets only 8.00 MAF from its own rivers. At the same time, Haryana is taking about 7.00 MAF from Punjab's rivers, 5.60 MAF from the Yamuna, and 1.10 MAF from the Ghaggar. In total, compared to Punjab's 8.00 MAF only, Haryana is using 14.50 MAF.

Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi and Shiromani Akali Dal President Sant Harchand Singh Longowal signed an agreement on 24 July 1985, known as the Rajiv-Longowal Accord. Out of its 11 clauses, clauses 9.1, 9.2, and 9.3 pertain to the distribution of

Punjab's river waters. This accord clearly shows that Longowal miserably failed to safeguard Punjab's interests (particularly the ones relating to the distribution of Punjab's river waters).

All of the agreements made so far regarding Punjab's river waters—whether the 1955 decision, or those of 1966, 1976, 1981, 1985, or 2002—are actually unconstitutional and illegal. All of Punjab's rivers flow through Punjab's land, and according to Article 246 of the Indian Constitution, only the Punjab Legislative Assembly has the authority to make any decision regarding them. Yet, all these agreements have been made under Articles 245 and 262, which are applicable only in case of inter-state river disputes.

What is the meaning of the Rajiv-Longowal Accord? Rajiv Gandhi had no connection to the Punjab Legislative Assembly, nor did Harchand Singh Longowal. Rajiv Gandhi was the country's Prime Minister, and Harchand Singh Longowal was the president of a regional political party and an ordinary citizen. According to Article 246 of the Constitution, neither the Prime Minister nor the Akali Dal president has any authority to make decisions regarding Punjab's river waters without the Punjab Assembly's approval.

On 5 November 1985, Punjab's Chief Minister Surjit Singh Barnala rejected Darbara Singh's 1981 agreement in the Punjab Assembly, but did not say anything about rejecting the Rajiv-Longowal Accord of 24 July 1985, even though both agreements were illegal and unconstitutional.

The fact is that, from 1950 to 2025, the Akali, Congress, Akali/BJP, and AAP governments in Punjab, for their own narrow political interests, have repeatedly sacrificed Punjab's vital interests and deceived its own simple people. For their vested interests, Punjab's most political leaders sacrificed the real interests of Punjab (particularly the ones relating to Punjab's river waters), for their own political gains.

Between 1960 and 1970, several important events occurred, such as the inauguration of the Bhakra Nangal Dam in 1963, the opening of the Indira Gandhi Canal for Rajasthan in 1965, the loss of Haryana during Punjab's reorganization in 1966, the transfer of some hilly areas of Punjab to Himachal Pradesh, and the first Green Revolution in 1965-66. All these events gave a new direction to Punjab's economy, society, and its future.

The Bhakra Nangal Dam, for which Punjab had been waiting for more than five decades, was handed over to Himachal Pradesh during Punjab's reorganization in

1966, and its control was given to the Bhakra-Beas Management Board, leaving the helpless Punjab government to watch silently. Extremely huge volumes of water from Punjab's rivers were handed over to Rajasthan, Delhi, Haryana, and Chandigarh for free, and the Green Revolution was imposed on Punjab.

As is well known, water is of paramount significance for agriculture. Out of the surplus from the Ravi and Beas rivers, Punjab was left with only enough water to irrigate about 25% of its land. It was crystal clear that if Punjab wanted to irrigate the remaining 75% of its land also, then it would have to rely on groundwater through tube wells. Thus began the era of tube wells in Punjab. The Green Revolution, water, and electricity became interconnected. The number of tube wells increased, and so did the need for electricity. For a while, the additional electricity from the Bhakra Dam and other sources met the need, but as the number of tube wells and the population grew, the electricity demand rose so much that power cuts became routine. It would not be wrong to say that today, just to irrigate 75% of the land with groundwater, more than 16 lakh tube wells are running in Punjab, requiring about 1,150 crore units of electricity each year, costing around 5,800 crore rupees. This much electricity is produced by four large power plants. Over the years, during the last 50 years or so, Punjab has consumed more than 2,32,000 crore rupees worth of electricity just for irrigation. Each tube well costs at least 3 lakh rupees to install, and over the last 40 to 50 years, due to falling groundwater levels, farmers have had to dig new bore wells 3 to 4 times, with each farmer spending about 12 lakh rupees. And for 16 lakh tube wells, the total cost comes to about 1.2 lakh crore rupees. In other words, Punjab and its farmers have spent about 3,52,000 crore rupees just to irrigate 75% of the state's irrigable land.

This does not include the costs of setting up and running power plants, salaries of employees, and the loss of valuable land submerged by these plants. All this expenditure could have been avoided if Punjab's river water had remained within Punjab. There would have been no need for so many tube wells or power plants. If, in recent times, Punjab's governments had been sincere about Punjab's rights, today, Punjab would not be struggling for water. Today, in Punjab, 9 to 10 government and private power plants burn about 4.38 million tons of coal each year, producing 1.46 million tons of hazardous radioactive uranium, which causes cancer and other diseases among Punjabis. Today, because of these power plants, Punjab's soil, water, and air are so polluted that out of 138 blocks, 110 have been declared dark zones. Now, Punjab is known as the cancer capital of India.

Punjab is importing coal from other states, and according to a NASA report, Punjab is heading towards becoming a desert in the future years to come. Today,

Punjab's government has been pleading with the Centre to waive off farmers' loans. We all know about the various suicides by Punjab's farmers from time to time.

In December 2019, Himachal Pradesh had signed an MOU to sell off its share of Yamuna water to Delhi for 21 crores rupees per annum. But Haryana opposed Himachal Pradesh's plan to sell its share of Yamuna water to Delhi, contending that its "canals did not have the capacity to carry extra water from Himachal Pradesh to Delhi." Thereafter, Himachal Pradesh also backed out of this agreement. It shows that some Indian states could wriggle out of their agreements subsequently due to political or other reasons. However, Punjab was never allowed to cancel its river water agreements with some states, even after realizing that the concerned agreements were against the interests of Punjab.

The Centre, as well as several states, undoubtedly wanted to harm Punjab, but Punjab's own political leaders did not even hold back either for the reasons best known to them. If our own leaders had not sacrificed Punjab's future for their personal interests, billions and trillions of rupees could have been saved and spent on Punjab's development. Even though it is already too late, but again, Punjab's political leadership should come forward to fight valiantly for justice and rights for the people of Punjab.

Before the 2016 assembly elections in Punjab, the Akali government had passed a resolution in the Assembly on 16 November 2016, stating that the Central government should be asked in writing to recover the price of water given to Rajasthan, Haryana, and Delhi. Who wrote this matter and what happened to it, no one knows. Such great resolutions are only passed when elections are very near, and everyone forgets about them after the elections are over. It is all just politics for votes, and nothing else.

Public Interest Litigation

In 2018, a Public Interest Litigation (PIL) was filed in the Punjab and Haryana High Court seeking compensation of 80,000 crores rupees to Punjab for supplying river water to Haryana and Rajasthan for free for more than 70 years. The PIL sought the setting up of an independent authority for calculating the costs for supplying Punjab's river water to Haryana, Chandigarh, Rajasthan, and Delhi. The PIL had been filed by 19 persons, including MP Dharamvir Gandhi and former High Court judge Justice Ajit Singh Bains. In their plea, the petitioners stated that Punjab's deficiency in water and even in the groundwater, stands depleted in at least 14 lakh tube well areas. The

petitioners sought the quashing of the 1995 Government of India's decision to allocate Punjab's river water to Rajasthan and other non-riparian states.

The Punjab government has supported the claim that an initial 1955 decision mentioned that the allocation of water cost would be taken up separately, but that never happened.

Narendra Modi, Amit Shah, and Bhagwant Singh Mann

At his election rallies in Punjab in November 2016 and January 2017, Prime Minister Narendra Modi had made the statement that Punjab ki dharti (land of Punjab) should get the advantage of additional river waters. He had mentioned that the water from the Indus, Sutlej, Beas, and Ravi rivers, over which India had a right under the Indus Waters Treaty, was flowing into Pakistan without being fully utilised in India. He had promised to stop this 'wasted' water from going to Pakistan, and instead divert it to the farmers of Punjab and Jammu & Kashmir.

In response to the horrifying terror attack in Pahalgam on 22 April 2025, where 26 innocent Indians were gunned down, India suspended the Indus Waters Treaty. Home Minister Amit Shah stated that after suspending the Treaty, the river water flowing to Pakistan would be diverted through new canal systems primarily to Rajasthan. (From the time of Nehru till now, India's successive Central governments have gone out of the way to provide excessive volumes of Punjab's river waters to Rajasthan while adopting a step-motherly attitude towards Punjab. While special efforts have been continuously made by the Centre to transform Rajasthan's desert areas into green lands, direct and indirect efforts have been regularly made to convert Punjab's green fields into desert or semi-desert areas. From Amit Shah's statement, it appears that after the suspension of the Indus Waters Treaty by India, some volumes of river waters can also be diverted to Haryana and Delhi. While Punjab deserves to be the main beneficiary because it has immensely suffered in the past. It appears that Punjab might get very little of the river water. Punjab Chief Minister should take up this matter forcefully with the Centre without any delay, but chances seems to be remote.

It is a matter of satisfaction that at the Punjab's special Vidhan Sabha session convened in May 2025, the opposition parties fully supported the Aam Aadmi Party's resolution to reject Haryana's demand for additional water via the contentious Sutlej-Yamuna Link (SYL) Canal. Punjab has repeatedly asserted that it has no spare river water to give to Haryana. At a meeting between the Chief Ministers of Punjab and Haryana held in October 2025, Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Singh Mann proposed

an alternative solution – utilising water from the Chenab river (a western river previously allocated to Pakistan) to address the water-sharing conflict between the two states while shelving the SYL Canal project altogether. He urged the Centre to divert the Chenab river's water to Indian dams like Ranjit Sagar, Pong, and Bhakra, emphasizing the need for new canals and infrastructure in Punjab. He suggested using water from the Chenab River, arguing that it could be shared with Haryana and other states, also, which would make the SYL Canal project unnecessary. It is an amazing proposal, and the Centre should pressure Haryana to accept it. Punjab should also put pressure on Haryana to share its Yamuna River water with Punjab.

Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Singh Mann should seek the unwavering support of the leaders of all political parties of Punjab for the permanent solution of Punjab's river water crisis. If water flowing to Haryana, Delhi, Chandigarh, and Rajasthan cannot be fully stopped, then their volumes should be significantly reduced. Also, Haryana, Delhi, Chandigarh, and Rajasthan should be compelled to pay Punjab for using its river waters (one cu/sec of water is worth more than one crore rupees), similar to how states are compensated for other natural resources like minerals.

A high-power delegation consisting of Chief Minister Mann, Punjab's other important political leaders, and the state's top concerned ministers and bureaucrats should meet Prime Minister Narendra Modi. All relevant facts and figures regarding grave injustices done to Punjab relating to its river waters should be properly explained to him. After the suspension of the Indus Waters Treaty by India, Punjab's river waters have almost stopped flowing into Pakistan. All such river waters will obviously be used by India now. As Punjab has suffered too much in the past, it should be ensured that Punjab is the major beneficiary now.

If, unfortunately, Punjab's high power delegation fails to get a suitable response from the Prime Minister, then the Punjab Government should avail the services of India's top lawyers to get justice from the country's Supreme Court.

Acknowledgment :

The scribe has liberally used facts and figures mentioned in several newspaper reports and articles, but he particularly wishes to express his gratefulness towards Dr. Malkiat Singh Saini (Former Dean, Academic Affairs, Punjabi University, Patiala) for using exhaustive information contained in his amazing article that was published some time back.



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Paradise Never Lost

SHAM GUPTA*

Was Song Celestial, but jargon
And I, by soul, a giaoour
Were all hymns but gorgon
Yet Axiom one will never sour!

When hopes crumble
and fears pile
And trampled is Eternal Flame.
When religion is at low ebb
His men are losing the life game.

The battling multitude
That ever stood by religion's fate
Yes, the sages shower blessings
To honour that message is great.

Years around four hundred past
Vanity villainy turned the mast
Not pure heart but "mosque" and "bell."
Measured truism, heaven, and hell

Then the Master Ninth came
A light house to the lost
From the clutches of that pirate sway
Helped the wrecked ship to the coast

'T' tuned the Te Deum
'E' expunged evil from earth
'G' granted the greatest goal
That honoured martyr's birth

He served mankind, preserved Faith
It is not an empty boast
Virtue was ever rescued
And blissful Paradise is never lost.

*E-mail: shamsgupta@yahoo.com

I am thankful to the Editor, The Sikh Review, Kolkata for selecting my article on Amritsar in December Edition. Worldwide every country is keen to engage tourists so that they can extend their stay to boost the economy. I have described the new Tourist attractions.

Tarlochan Singh, Ex-M.P

Former Chairman
National Commission Minorities

From: Tarlochan Singh <tarlochan@tarlochansingh.com>

To: HARKRISH SINGH <harkrishs33@gmail.com>

Harkrish Singh,

I appreciate your interest full of knowledge for Sikh History at this young age. I can see in you a rising Scholar on Sikhi.

May satguru Bless you.

Tarlochan Singh, Ex-M.P

Former Chairman
National Commission Minorities

Dr. Jogishwar Singh,

I have gone through your article in Sikh Review December Issue jointly written along with Dr. Gurnam Singh. This is like a proper thesis as an Academician. I wonder if the Sikh Youth will take benefit of your advice. You are always correct in finding the Sikh Leadership both in Punjab and Abroad badly failing in their duty. In this article you have made them synonymous with unbridled corruption. Both Moral and financial. So how will our youth will come up to follow the Guru's teaching under such circumstances. We boast of being first in the World to give equality to women and proper respect to schedule caste. You and I are fully aware of what is the current situation. Your call to Sikh Youth to have

courage is to be fully supported. Let Guru shower blessings on them who are our future hope.

Tarlochan Singh, Ex-M.P
Former Chairman
National Commission Minorities

To Tarlochan, Singh, & The Chief Editor

Sat Sri Akal Sir,

Thank you so much for your message. Sikhs like you are beacons of encouragement for people like me. While there is everything to despair about the leadership situation in Punjab, we have to keep the gift of Chahrdi Kala alive by continuing to believe in our youth. Only they can provide new leadership.

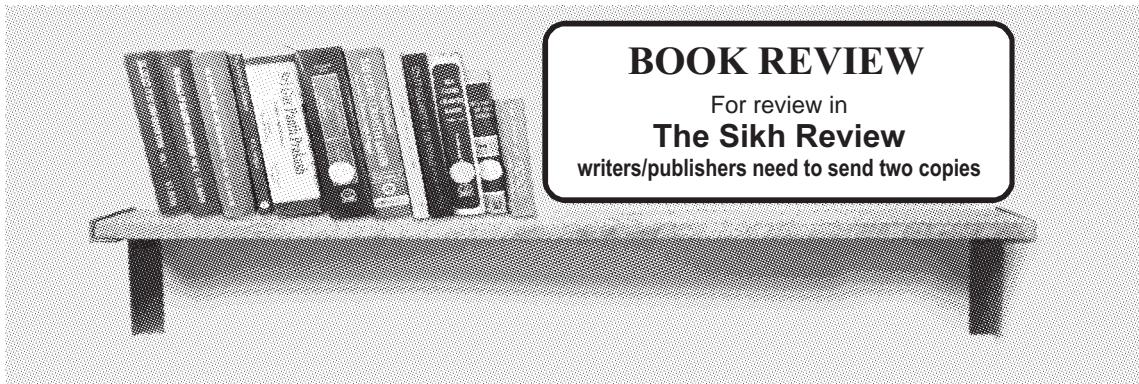
At my very small individual level, I interact with Sikh youth on every occasion that I get, encouraging them to go into media and finance. We need our youngsters in large numbers in both these fields on the lines of Jews. I am frequently asked for advice by many Sikhs and others through LinkedIn where they see my profile. I advise them to not fall prey to misguided ideas of a paradise in the West but to contribute to improving the situation in Punjab.

If all of us try to improve the situation at our individual level, collective improvement could gradually come.

Respectfully,
Jogishwar Singh

**FOR BASIC KNOWLEDGE,
BOLD COMMENT READ**

The Sikh Review



Book Title	: Guru Nanak & The Sikh Religion
Author	: Prof. Hardev Singh Virk, Professor of Eminence (Hon.), SGGS World University, Fatehgarh Sahib, Punjab, India
Publisher	: Atlantic Publishers & Distributors
Publication Year	: 2025
Pages	: 150;
Price	: Rs. 595, US\$10
ISBN	: 978-81-269-4186-5

A Review by Dr. Devinder Pal Singh*

In his book "Guru Nanak and the Sikh Religion," Prof. Hardev Singh Virk presents a compilation of 16 critical essays on Sikhism. The introduction sets the stage by explaining the genesis of these essays, which were initially intended as lectures for an online platform and later adapted for a wider audience. The author candidly shares his journey, from initially having no formal teaching experience in Sikhism to being selected by 'Academia.edu', an educational group, highlighting the personal challenge he undertook to prepare these materials. He also mentions the support he received from various Sikh scholars, underscoring the collaborative and scholarly context in which the work was produced. This introductory note frames the book not as a traditional historical text but as a collection of thoughtful reflections on the religion's core principles and contemporary issues.

*E-mail: c4usikhism@gmail.com

The Sikh Religion: Introduction and Overview (Chapter 1) offers a concise introduction to Sikhism, the world's fifth-largest organized religion. It traces the faith's origins to Guru Nanak in the 15th century, highlighting his foundational teachings and his extensive travels to spread a message of universal brotherhood. It also provides a historical overview of the ten Sikh Gurus, the institutionalization of the religion through concepts like dharamsal, langar, and manjis, and the compilation of the Guru Granth Sahib. The chapter emphasizes the distinct identity of Sikhism, rejecting the notion that it is a sect of Hinduism and clarifying the role of the Guru as a divine messenger rather than an incarnation of God.

Guru Nanak: The Founder of Sikh Religion (Chapter 2) delves into the life of Guru Nanak, presenting him not just as a religious leader but as a pioneer of social, political, and spiritual revolution in India. The chapter explores his early life, his spiritual awakening, and his travels (udasis). The author highlights how Guru Nanak challenged the social norms of his time, including the caste system and religious rituals, and established a new way of life at Kartarpur. The chapter emphasizes his role in creating a distinct faith with its own institutions and practices, which was continued by the nine succeeding Gurus.

Guru Nanak: A Pioneer of Social, Political & Spiritual Revolution in India (Chapter 3) explores Guru Nanak's revolutionary impact on Indian society. The author discusses how the Guru challenged the socio-political and spiritual stagnation of his time, advocating for equality, social justice, and a direct relationship with God. The essay examines his teachings on rejecting the caste system and the importance of a householder's life. The author highlights how Guru Nanak's mission was to reform society from the ground up, promoting a faith that was not just about personal salvation but about building a just and equitable community.

Concept of GOD, the Ultimate Reality, in Sikh Religion (Chapter 4) provides an in-depth analysis of the Sikh concept of God. The author explains Guru Nanak's unique contribution of defining God as both transcendental and immanent. The chapter examines the various aspects of God, emphasizing the concept of a "Personal God" as promoted in the Sri Guru Granth Sahib. The author clarifies that Sikhism is strictly monotheistic, believing in One God as the Ultimate Reality, and provides an explanation of the faith's core principles through the use of Gurbani quotes.

Approaches to the Exegesis of Sri Guru Granth Sahib (Chapter 5) focuses on the different ways the Sikh sacred scripture, the Sri Guru Granth Sahib, has been

interpreted. The author discusses various scholarly approaches to Sikh exegesis, citing the work of both Western scholars and Sikh scholars. The essay highlights the ongoing controversies surrounding the interpretation of Gurbani and the importance of a correct, logical, and scientific approach. The author references Macauliffe's interpretation as a model for understanding the Gurus' message in a way that respects the faith's moral and political merits.

In the chapter "Sikh View of Creator & Creation vis-à-vis Stephen Hawking's Ideas" (Chapter 6), the author draws a parallel between Sikh theology and modern scientific thought, explicitly referencing the ideas of Stephen Hawking, which are redundant in face of Guru Nanak's creation hypothesis. The essay examines the Sikh scripture's perspective on the Creator and creation, arguing for its compatibility with a scientific worldview. The author posits that the SGGS provides a framework for understanding the universe that can be logically and scientifically interpreted, thereby making the faith relevant in a modern scientific age.

Concept of Mind, Body, and Soul in the Sikh Scripture (SGGS) (Chapter 7) explores the interconnected concepts of mind, body, and soul as presented in the Sri Guru Granth Sahib. The author discusses how the soul, being a subtle essence of the five elements, is entangled in the body and must overcome its influence. The chapter delves into Gurbani's perspective on the human condition and how an individual can attain spiritual liberation while living a worldly life. The author quotes from the SGGS to provide a spiritual and logical understanding of these fundamental concepts.

Concept of Maya in Sri Guru Granth Sahib (Chapter 8) provides a critical analysis of the concept of Maya (worldly possessions and illusions) in Sikhism. The author defines Maya not as an illusion but as a "necessary evil" for leading a worldly life. The essay explores the dual nature of wealth, which is essential for a trouble-free life but can also be a source of anxiety and temptation. The author uses a Gurbani quote to illustrate the predicament of humans with both excess and lack of Maya, highlighting the need for balance and a liberated state of mind.

In the chapter "A Critique of 'Hope' and 'Desire' in the Sikh Religion" (Chapter 9), the author examines the concepts of hope and desire from a Sikh perspective, contrasting them with those found in other religious traditions. He introduces the Sikh concept of Chardi Kalaa, a state of eternal optimism and joy, and connects it to the idea of being content with God's will (bhana). The author shares a personal anecdote about how his faith in the SGGS helped him overcome adversity, illustrating how Sikh

teachings provide moral strength and a formula for alleviating worries through honest effort and meditation.

The essay "A Critical Evaluation of Waheguru Gurmantar in Sikh Religion" (Chapter 10) provides a critical examination of the term "Waheguru" as a form of address for God. The author presents the historical context of its use and offers his opinion that the term was originally used as a eulogy for Guru Ram Das, not as a reference to God. He provides evidence from the Sri Guru Granth Sahib to support this claim, highlighting how different contributors to the sacred text used various names to represent the divine. The essay prompts readers to think critically about the origins and usage of a term central to Sikh devotion.

The chapter "How and Why the Message of Guru Nanak got Distorted?" (Chapter 11) is a critical examination of the historical factors that led to the distortion of Guru Nanak's original message. The author discusses the influence of schismatic groups like the Minas and Dhirmalias, who wrote fake scriptures and opposed the mainstream Gurus. He also points to the failure of Sikh scholars and institutions to correctly interpret Gurbani, as well as the impact of the Brahmanical environment on the perception of Sikhism. The essay highlights the need for a "paradigm-shift" in Sikhi to counter these historical and ongoing issues.

In the chapter "Sikhi at the Cross-Roads: Do We Need a Paradigm Shift in Sikhi?" (Chapter 12), the author argues that Sikhism is at a critical juncture and requires a paradigm shift to remain relevant in the modern world. He laments that the Gurus' message has been misinterpreted due to various factors, including the influence of Brahmanical traditions. The author suggests a return to the core principles of Guru Nanak and a focus on critical, logical, and scientific interpretations of Gurbani. He proposes a new movement, similar to the Singh Sabha movement, to address the current challenges and bring a renaissance to the faith.

The essay "Why Sikhism Fails to Impact at Global Level? Some Random Thoughts" (Chapter 13) explores the reasons behind Sikhism's limited global impact, despite its universal message. The author contrasts the spread of Christianity and Islam, which benefited from missionary efforts and institutional support, with Sikhism's lack of a similar organizational structure. He suggests that Sikh institutions create well-versed preachers who can disseminate the message in foreign languages and make the Sikh scripture more widely accessible. He also advocates for making the faith more inclusive by engaging with groups like the Nanakpanthis.

Genesis of Hindu-Sikh Divide: A Critical Evaluation of the Divide (Chapter 14) critically examines the historical and political reasons for the divide between the Hindu and Sikh communities. The author uses historical evidence to analyze the roots of this divide, challenging the notion that Sikhism is a part of Hinduism. He references the authoritative statement from the Sri Guru Granth Sahib by Guru Arjun Dev, which clearly declares the independent position of Sikhism. This essay provides a thought-provoking perspective on a sensitive and complex topic within the Indian context.

In the chapter "Use of Scientific Analogies, Metaphors & Similes in Sri Guru Granth Sahib" (Chapter 15), the author explores the use of scientific analogies and metaphors by the Sikh Gurus in the Sri Guru Granth Sahib to explain complex spiritual concepts. He highlights how the Gurus used common, everyday examples from the flora and fauna of Punjab to make their message accessible to the ordinary person. The chapter demonstrates the compatibility of Sikh scripture with a scientific worldview, showing how a logical and scientific approach can be used to interpret Gurbani.

The last chapter, "My Sentimental Journey from Dera Baba Nanak to Kartarpur (Pakistan)" (Chapter 16), presents as a personal travelogue and serves as a poignant appendix to the collection. The author recounts his emotional journey to Kartarpur, the township established by Guru Nanak. He describes the hurdles he faced and the joy he experienced during his pilgrimage. This personal narrative not only provides a vivid picture of the Kartarpur Corridor but also serves to inspire other Sikhs to undertake this significant pilgrimage, thereby connecting them to the final resting place of the faith's founder.

The book aims to serve as a guide to Sikhism, introducing its history, belief system, and philosophy, with a primary emphasis on the teachings of Guru Nanak and the succeeding Gurus. It also highlights the three golden rules of Sikhism: "Kirat Karo, Vand Chhako and Naam Japo" (earn livelihood by honest means, share the fruits of your labour among the needy, and meditate on the name of God).

The author's writing style is a blend of academic discourse and personal reflection, making complex theological concepts accessible to a broad readership. He frequently references the Sri Guru Granth Sahib (SGGS) and quotes from Gurbani to support his arguments, providing an authentic and well-grounded perspective. The content is an "anthology of critical essays," as the title suggests. It doesn't shy away from addressing controversial topics and offering a critical evaluation of both historical events and current challenges facing the Sikh community. The context is modern, with

the author frequently connecting historical events and religious doctrines to contemporary scientific thought and global issues, such as the spread of religion. The book's strength lies in its attempt to bridge traditional Sikh theology with modern-day concerns, offering a fresh lens for understanding the faith.

Guru Nanak and the Sikh Religion is a highly relevant book for anyone interested in a deeper, more critical understanding of Sikhism, including practicing Sikhs, scholars, and those from other religious backgrounds. The author's blend of personal experience, historical analysis, and theological critique makes the content both engaging and thought-provoking.

The book is significant in the modern era because it directly addresses the challenges faced by the Sikh community today. By questioning "why" the universal message of Guru Nanak has not had a greater global impact and by urging a "paradigm shift" in how the faith is taught and practiced, the author provides a roadmap for the future. The emphasis on a scientific and logical interpretation of the Sikh scripture is particularly vital in a world increasingly guided by reason and technology. This book serves as a valuable resource for fostering a more inclusive, intellectually rigorous, and globally minded understanding of Sikhism. □

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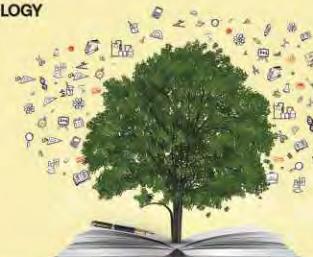
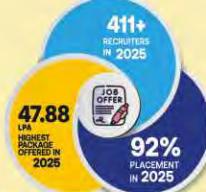


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