

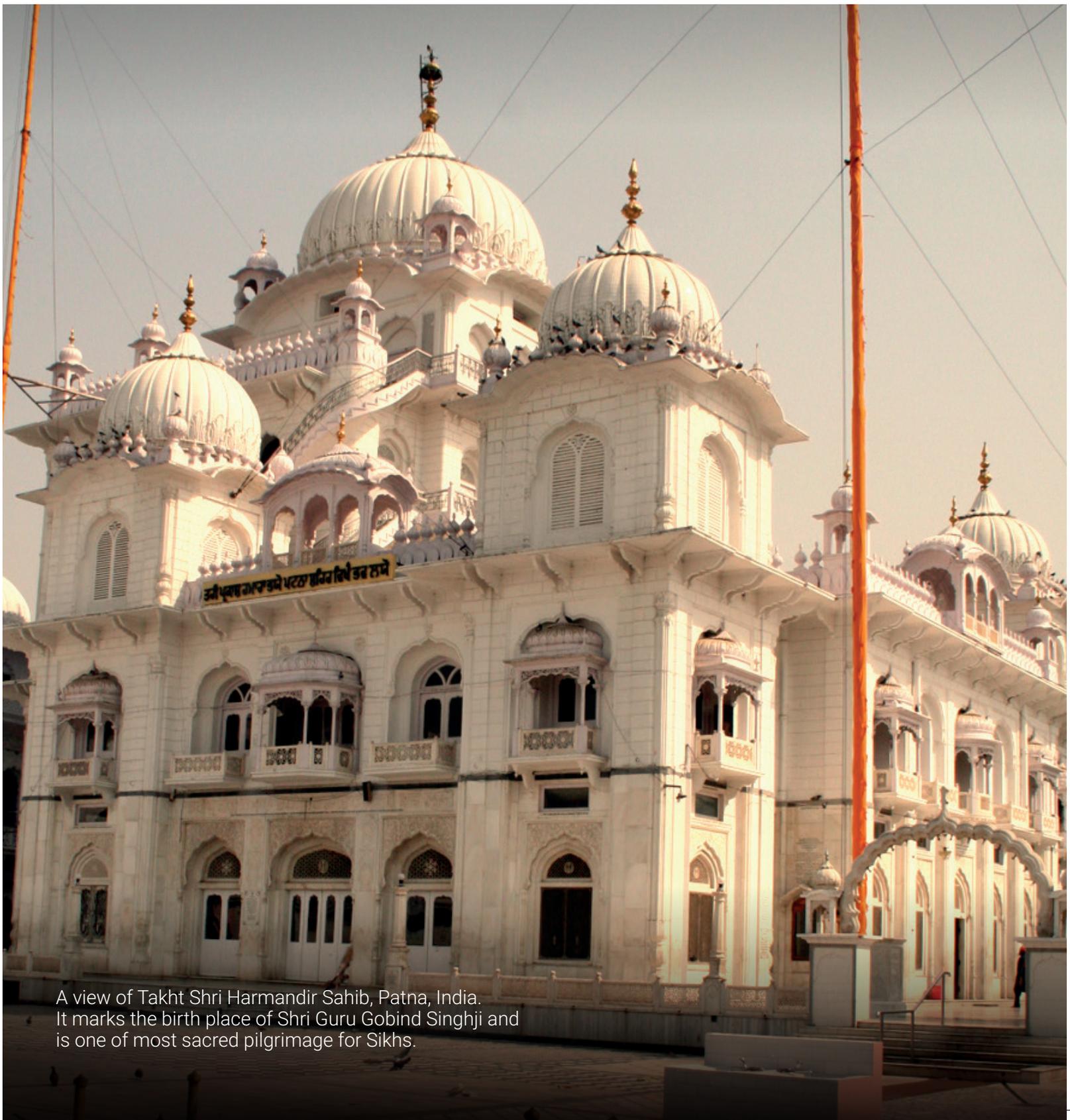


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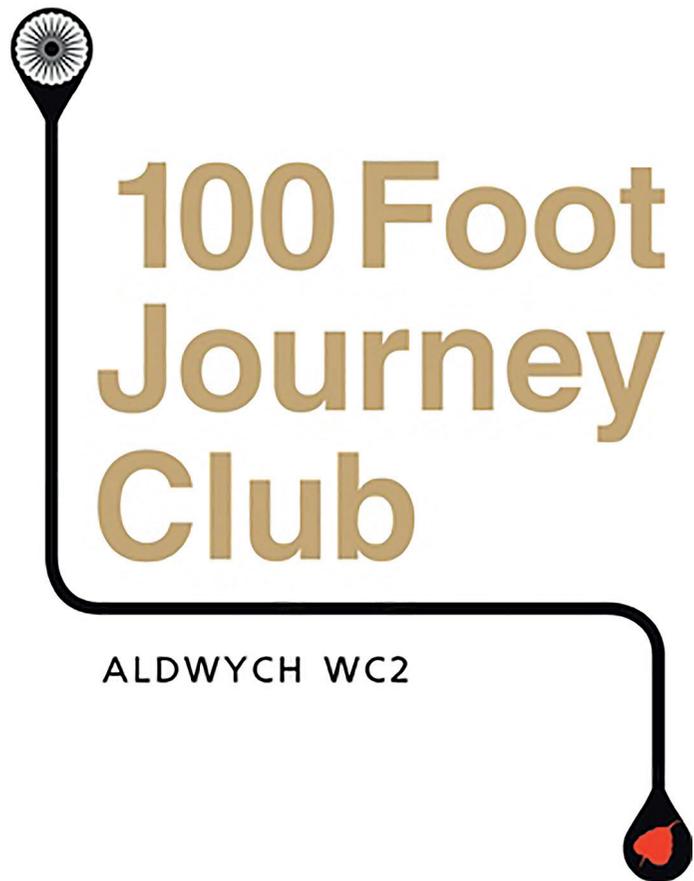


Shri Guru Gobind Singhji

CELEBRATIONS MARKING THE 350TH PRAKASH PARV OF THE GURU



A view of Takht Shri Harmandir Sahib, Patna, India. It marks the birth place of Shri Guru Gobind Singhji and is one of most sacred pilgrimage for Sikhs.



100 Foot Journey Club

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The '100 Foot Journey Club' is a collaborative initiative between LSE South Asia Centre and the High Commission of India in the UK. Established in 2016, it hosts events and other activities of mutual interest including lectures, panel discussions, and film screenings, underlining India's historic relationship with the United Kingdom. Events are held at LSE, India House or the Nehru Centre.



Introduction

Dr Mukulika Banerjee

Director, LSE South Asia Centre

2016–17 marked the 350th *Prakash Parv* (birth anniversary) of Shri Guru Gobind Singhji, the revered tenth Guru of the Sikhs and the compiler of the holy text, the *Shri Guru Granth Sahib*. The High Commission of India organised several events for and with the Sikh diaspora community across the United Kingdom to celebrate this anniversary.

We were therefore delighted to be invited to host an event to mark this important milestone in the history of the Sikh community under the auspices of the '100 Foot Journey Club'. The LSE South Asia Centre has organised several very successful events in collaboration with the High Commission of India, building on the Centre's commitment to work with governments to impact public consciousness through informed knowledge. All events of the Club focus on India, or on India in relation to the wider world – and there is a conscious attempt to curate interdisciplinary events focusing on issues of contemporary relevance and concern in India today.

A panel discussion entitled 'Shri Guru Gobind Singhji: Understanding the Sacred Word', hosted by the LSE South Asia Centre, was the grand finale of the series of celebratory events to mark the 350th birth anniversary of Shri Guru Gobind Singhji. The panel was specially curated to appeal to both academics and the wider public, and we were delighted that experts on the sacred text from different walks of life participated in the event, which was marked by animated debate and discussion on both the historicity as well as the continuing relevance of the teachings enshrined in the text. As the papers published here show, the centrality of Shri Guru Gobind Singhji, and his lasting legacy – the compilation of the sacred text for the Sikhs – remains the fulcrum of community formation even today.

We were privileged to hear four distinct perspectives on the text, its making, and the role and significance of Shri Guru Gobind Singhji at the panel discussion. Two academics – Professors James Hegarty (Cardiff University) and Pritam Singh (Oxford Brookes University), and two community leaders – M S Bedi (Chairman, P C Pirithi Bedi Foundation) and Prabhkirt Seyan discussed different aspects of the text at length. The presentations were introduced by His Excellency Mr Y K Sinha, Hon'ble High Commissioner of India to the United Kingdom, with a personal touch since Mr Sinha is himself from Bihar, and visited the Takht Shri Patna Sahibji – the birthplace of Shri Guru Gobind Singhji – in his childhood. We are delighted to be able to include his speech in this publication as well.

The texts of the lectures have been edited and approved by the speakers, and a complete audio recording of the event is available on the website of the LSE South Asia Centre.

I take this opportunity to thank the Ministry of Culture, Government of India for allocating special funds for the event, and the High Commission of India in London, especially Dr Aseem Vohra (Second Secretary, Public Diplomacy) for providing advice and support.



Inaugural Address

His Excellency Mr Y K Sinha

Hon'ble High Commissioner of India to the United Kingdom

The South Asia Centre at LSE organised a panel discussion on 'Shri Guru Gobind Singhji: Understanding the Sacred Word', and I was delighted to speak at the inauguration of the event, which was the last in a series of events organised directly, or in collaboration, with the High Commission of India in London to mark the 350th *Prakash Parv* of the great Guru, Shri Guru Gobind Singhji.

The last year has been truly momentous: we have joined with our friends in the Sikh community and several organisations, the Indian diaspora and other organisations to commemorate this very important event in the United Kingdom. In India, the event was commemorated in a big way last year on 5 January 2017 by the Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi at the Takht Shri Patna Sahibji. More than half a million people participated in the event; the Government of Bihar also organised an international seminar on Sikhism as a curtain raiser. Several other events have also been organised through the year to commemorate the Guru's birth anniversary; most importantly, the Hon'ble Chief Minister of Bihar Shri Nitish Kumar announced that the state government would create a circuit of places for everyone who was planning to come to Shri Harmandir Sahib in Amritsar, allowing them to travel to other pilgrimage sites in the region.

Personally, for me it has been quite a journey and I am happy that this is happening during my tenure here. I belong to Patna, it is my home town, and I used to visit the Takht Shri Patna Sahib Gurdwara many times as a child. We were very happy that Guru Gobind Singhji is someone we could claim as an eminent son of Patna, since he lived in Patna in his formative years. I am therefore especially happy that in 2017–18 the High Commission of India here in the United Kingdom has organised events not only in London but throughout the UK, and I would like to thank all our partners who have joined us to celebrate this event.

The Sikh community in the UK has been especially hospitable to me: I recall I was here only a month when I was invited by the oldest gurdwara not only in the UK but also in Europe, the Shepherd's Bush Gurdwara, on 5 January 2016. The next day we had celebrations in India House and a lot of our friends joined us. Last year, we had the first-ever Baisakhi celebrations in April, with the High Commission working with 13 gurdwaras in the region and other community organisations. It was a huge success, and attracted a large attendance. We have done a number of other events, which you will find listed at the end of this brochure.

We also organised a photo exhibition on the life and times of the great Guru with the Victoria & Albert Museum, which has toured different parts of the United Kingdom, and has been greatly appreciated not only by the Sikh diaspora but several other members of the public. We have also had sponsored plays staged in various places: I personally saw a play on the Great Guru's life in Birmingham a few months ago, and that play has travelled to many places, including to India.

As I hope is evident from all this, we have had a number of events to mark and to celebrate this event, and I think that that is very important because the United Kingdom has a large Sikh and Punjabi community; it is therefore only befitting that (outside India) the biggest the largest celebrations of the birth anniversary of Guru Gobind Singhji have been held in the UK, and especially in London. So we are happy, we are proud, and we would like to thank everyone who has made our events possible, and such a great success.

I think that in the life and the teachings of the great Guru, about whom you will hear expert views presented here, the one thing that always struck me was that he fought for justice, he fought against oppression and he fought for freedom. He sacrificed a lot, he lost his father through trickery – if I may put it like that – when the Emperor Aurangzeb put him to death. He lost his sons fighting the Mughals, and the 'Sikh' – the *Khalsa* Panth he established on Baisakhi Day in 1699 has played such an important role not only in the history of India but of the world. Because the Sikhs came from India and fought for India not just in the Anglo–Afghan wars or the Anglo-Sikh wars, or when Ahmad Shah Abdali came to India, but they fought right through till World War II. My father, who was in the army, had many great Sikh compatriots who fought in World War II and subsequent wars that India has been involved in since 1947. I think the *Khalsa* Panth stood for the unity, the integrity and the defence of India. And that is something that no community can boast of in terms of the number of people who have played this role in proportion to the population. I think no one in India can speak of such valour and such sacrifice through the ages, and I think the epitome of this ethic of sacrifice was the great Guru, Guru Gobind Singhji. He taught the Sikhs not just the *Khalsa* Panth but he taught them humility, he taught them compassion, he taught them sacrifice. He taught us virtues, he is one of those people who cannot be described in words. He was a warrior, he was a saint, he was a poet, he was a philosopher. And what is remarkable is that he never even called himself the son of God. He said the followers are the sons and daughters of God; he was just a servant or a slave of God. That showed his humility. What he imparted to the Sikh community in India, to the world, and to the larger Indian and global community is something priceless and is something worthy of commemoration in the 350th year of his birth anniversary.

I am so happy that the High Commission of India collaborated with the South Asia Centre under the auspices of the '100 Foot Journey Club', and was able to get together all of you to celebrate this wonderful anniversary through academic dialogue and discussion.

Shri Guru Gobind Singhji

James M. Hegarty

Professor of Sanskrit and Indian Religions, Cardiff University

Gobind Singhji, original name Gobind Rai (born AD 1666 in Patna, Bihar; died 7 October 1708 in Nanded, Maharashtra), was the 10th and last Guru of the Sikhs. He is best known for his creation of the Sikh *Khalsa* (the Pure), the community of fully initiated Sikhs who are ritually admitted to it at puberty.

Gobind Singhji was the son of the ninth Guru Tegh Bahadurji, who suffered martyrdom at the hands of the Mughal emperor Aurangzeb on 24 November 1675. He was competent in several languages including Persian, Arabic and Sanskrit, as well as his native Punjabi; he wrote poetry, was responsible for the further codification of Sikh law, and was the mastermind behind the *Dasam Granth* (lit. 'Tenth Volume'; also known as the 'Dasam Patishahji da Granth'), a separate religious text from the Sikh holy text *Shri Guru Granth Sahib*, and is a compilation of several texts attributed to the tenth Guru.

Gobind Singhji shared an enthusiasm for military life, which tied him closely to his grandfather Guru Hargobindji (AD 1595–1644), though Gobind Singhji combined this with a strong emphasis on cultural and intellectual activity. Giving the Sikhs a firm military basis was Gobind Singhji's greatest contribution to the Sikh community and tradition. He also created a body of martial poetry and music and

rationalised the structure of the Sikh Panth in other ways. With his initiatory order, the *Khalsa*, he breathed new life into a reformed Sikh army. He confronted the major opponents of the Sikhs — both the Mughals and the contending hill tribes. His troops were described as devoted and fully committed to Sikh ideals, willing to risk everything in the cause of Sikh religious and political freedom. He himself, however, paid a heavy price for this freedom. In two battles against the Mughals, both in AD 1704 (one in Anandpur, the other in Chamkaur), he lost all four of his sons; similar battles with Mughals over the years also claimed his wife, mother and father. He himself was killed by a Pashtun tribesman in a revenge killing in AD 1708.

Guru Gobind Singhji proclaimed that he was the last of the personal Sikh Gurus. Subsequent to his death, the Sikh Guru was to be their sacred text, the *Adi Granth*. Today, Guru Gobind Singhji stands in the minds of Sikhs as the ideal of personal honour, bravery and commitment.



Shri Guru Gobind Singhji: A Reflection and Tribute

James M. Hegarty

Professor of Sanskrit and Indian Religions, Cardiff University

Shri Guru Gobind Singhji deserves to be known by everyone. He is an example of extraordinary spiritual leadership, as well as courage in adversity. After Guru Nanakdevji, whose deep and profound insights into the nature of the divine and the place of humanity in the universe are known throughout the world, it is Shri Guru Gobind Singhji who contributed most to the nature and form of Sikhism. Like Guru Nanakdevji, he transcends the boundaries of his religion and offers insights and lessons that are universal in their value and appeal, some of which I will draw attention to today.

We know of Shri Guru Gobind Singhji's life from sources such as the *Vichitar Natak*, the *Gur Bilas* and the *Suraj Parkash*. These were not written for a modern audience; they share a commitment to truth that transcends the details of a life and attends instead to its *significance*; a significance that is then read into the details. I propose to adopt the same approach as they do, but my focus will be on the thought of Shri Guru Gobind Singhji, as it is reflected in the *Dasam Granth* and elsewhere, and its significance for humanity as a whole.

The Guru's thought is known to us from the compositions that he left to us, many of which are compiled in the *Dasam*

Granth. It is a fact that the Sikh Panth has always been a home for truly great poetry and Shri Guru Gobind Singhji was no exception in this regard. What is exceptional is the range of poetic forms and languages, of which he was a master. However, it is often hard to separate the voice of a great religious leader from that of his prominent followers and Shri Guru Gobind Singhji is no exception in this regard (notwithstanding the efforts of scholars both within and outside the Sikh community). However, poems such as the *Zafarnama*, which is a defiant message from him to the ruler of the day, the Mughal emperor Aurangzeb, seem so personal, so heartfelt, that it is impossible to not feel as if

Shri Guru Gobind Singhji is reaching out to you directly. For example, when he says:

“ *Pursuit of truth is worship.
It is an act of true piety.
To know the True God
Is life's highest priority.*

Zafarnama: 84; trans. Sarna: 85

He offers an expression of not just the need to know God, but how one might do this. The idea of the *pursuit of truth* as *piety* is a powerful one precisely because of its open and exploratory character. Shri Guru Gobind Singhji elegantly and forcefully captures something that is essential to Sikh tradition: the world cannot be taken at face value; one must understand the world and the human condition in order to transcend it. More than this, *truth as worship* means that you must *embody* this understanding (as is reflected in the familiar markers of *Khalsa* identity, for example). As Gandhiji, centuries later, said, 'We need not wait to see what others do.'

The process of exploration can be philosophical (it is worth noting that Shri Guru Gobind Singhji presided over the translation of the *Upanishads* and other great works of Sanskrit philosophy and theology), but it can also be highly practical and even *political*. That the Guru meant *both* the former and the latter is clear from the searing courage of another verse from the *Zafarnama*:

“ *O King of Kings! The Ornament
That the two worlds does adorn!
The kingdom of the earth is yours,
But not so the heavenly one.*

Zafarnama: 94; trans. Sarna: 95

Here, Shri Guru Gobind Singhji addresses the emperor of India himself in no uncertain terms. He dares nothing less than to call his moral character into question. He is not making a narrow point about religious allegiance here: Shri Guru Gobind Singhji is not asking Aurangzeb to become a *Sikh*. Rather, he is reminding the emperor of the urgent need to connect the heavenly and earthly realms; for the Guru, there is no place for *realpolitik*, there is no place beyond the gaze of God or morality, in which all things are permitted. There is only *truth as piety* and the rigours of such a life. These rigours include speaking truth to power when circumstances demand it. This is something no less important today than it was centuries ago. It requires an absolute commitment to morality *whatever the consequences*. The *Zafarnama* is, then, one of the great works of what we might call *the world literature of defiance*. It is also one of the great works advocating *spiritual and moral consistency*.

Of course, a commitment to 'what is right' can encompass a wide variety of moralities, not all of which are worthy of support. It is here that Shri Guru Gobind Singhji's absolute commitment to human equality is of critical importance. This commitment is forcefully and eloquently expressed in the *Akal Ustat*, the second *bani* of the *Dasam Granth*. He provides

one of the signal statements of human equality, for which the Sikh tradition is justly famous:

“ *He has neither mother nor father nor any
caste. He is not attached to anything, nor
is he limited to any colour. He permeates
in every human spirit. He is present in all
beings and places.*

Akal Ustat: 9; trans. McLeod: 56

The Guru goes further than the rejection of caste however. He sees God everywhere and in all religious activities:

“ *At times [...] you are present in the Hindu
reciting hymns from Gayatri, in the Muslim
quazi calling from the mosque. You are
in the ones who study Koka's work or the
Puranas, in the scholar studying tenets of
the Quran. You are in those who follow the
Vedas and in those who oppose them....*

Akal Ustat: 12; trans. McLeod: 57

Elsewhere in the *Dasam Granth* we find the words, 'all men have the same eyes, the same ears, the same body, the same build, a compound of earth, air, fire, and water.' (trans. McLeod: 57) It is hard to imagine a more inclusive vision than that presented by Shri Guru Gobind Singhji. This lesson fills with content the *Zafarnama*'s powerful expression of the need for moral consistency; *the pursuit of truth leads to the consciousness of the equality of all humanity before God*, which must then be embodied in thought and deeds. We know that this is precisely what Shri Guru Gobind Singhji personally achieved during his lifetime.

I think, in closing, that the global legacy of Shri Guru Gobind Singhji is best summarised in the words of the *Vichittar Natak*. In its sixth chapter, when the Guru's life is described, there is a wonderful sequence in which God orders him to take birth in the Kaliyug, the final age in the cycle of the universe. God concludes, after a rich description of His creation, that Shri Guru Gobind Singhji's chief goal must be to '*restrain the world from senseless acts.*'

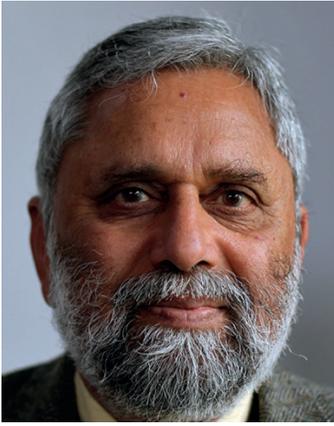
This sentiment, once again, refuses to separate religion from society and is, in today's world — replete as it is with senseless acts — just as important as it was at the time of its first expression. Shri Guru Gobind Singhji pushed his religion into a deep engagement with the world. The world is, in the final analysis, for him, when read sensitively, nothing less than an instruction manual for moral living. He invites us all to read with him and to embody what we learn.

I can think of no more powerful teaching.

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Shri Guru Granth Sahib: Understanding the Sacred Word

Pritam Singh

Professor of Economics
Oxford Brookes University

I must be very brief in sharing my thoughts on reading *Shri Guru Granth Sahib* due to the limitation of space. I will focus on just three points: first, on what *Shri Guru Granth Sahib* is as a holy scripture in the history of religious thought in the Indian subcontinent; second, the core of the message of the text; and third, the relation of Shri Guru Gobind Singh to *Shri Guru Granth Sahib*.

Guru Nanak Dev, the founder of the Sikh faith, was born in AD 1469. He was followed by nine gurus. *Shri Guru Granth Sahib* was compiled by the fifth guru, Guru Arjan Dev (AD 1563–1606), by including the writings of all the previous gurus and his own. The maximum number of hymns (2,218) are by Guru Arjan Dev, followed by 974 hymns by Guru Nanak.¹ When Guru Arjan Dev was compiling the Scripture, a word had gone around the vast Indian subcontinent that a major religious scripture was being compiled. Writings of many saints and spiritual leaders were presented and considered for inclusion in the *Granth*. Based on the spiritual and philosophical merits of the writings, Guru Arjan included the teachings of many Hindu *bhaktas* and Muslim Sufi saints in the *Granth*.

Shri Guru Granth Sahib is, as such, a repository of the highest level of spiritual wisdom and advanced social visions of the late 16th and early 17th century in India. The first copy of *Shri Guru Granth Sahib* (which was then known as *Adi Granth*) was installed under the personal supervision of Shri Guru Arjan Dev in Harmandir Sahib (Golden Temple, Amritsar) on 16 August 1604. The tenth guru Shri Guru Gobind Singh (AD 1666–1708) added 115 hymns by the ninth guru Shri Guru Tegh Bahadur (AD 1621–1675)² which probably includes one of his own.

The central message of the alternative world view of the Sikh gurus which resonates in the *bani* of the *bhaktas* and of the Sufi saints (whose poetry was included in *Shri Guru Granth Sahib*) is of egalitarianism. Guru Nanak attacked the two oppressive powers of the time with his message of egalitarianism: one was political power of the Mughal empire of Babur, and the other was the social power of the hierarchical Brahmanical order of the caste system (*varnashram*). Both these oppressive powers shared another socially inegalitarian order, that of patriarchy. In the alternative world view of *Shri Guru Granth Sahib*, all human beings are equal, without distinctions of caste or gender.

In attacking the politically oppressive power of the Mughals, Guru Nanak even castigates God when in Babarvani, Guru Nanak says '*eti maar pai kurlane, tain ki dard na aaya*' (p. 360); 'When the victims were crying with pain due to barbaric torture, did you not feel their pain?' In contrasting the egalitarian world view of *Shri Guru Granth Sahib* with the inegalitarian social order of Brahmanical *varnashram*, we find

a continuous and running theme in *Shri Guru Granth Sahib* about the critique of the caste system. One scholar considers *Shri Guru Granth Sahib* an emancipatory narrative beyond two hegemonies of the time – the Vedic and the Mughal.³

The core vision articulated in *Shri Guru Granth Sahib* that clashed with the Brahmanical social order was equality of all human beings. This equality has two dimensions: spiritual and social. *Shri Guru Granth Sahib* celebrates the spiritual equality of all human beings in the eyes of God. This vision is actualised as social equality through innovative social institutions like the *langar* (community kitchen where food is prepared collectively) and *pangat* (sitting beside one another without distinctions of high and low while partaking the collectively cooked food). Such initiatives were a severe blow to untouchability and the hierarchical caste system which were central to the theology and practice of the majority Hindu religion.

This concept of equality was literally carried into the architectural design of the place of worship (*gurdwara*) wherein *Shri Guru Granth Sahib* resides, and into the rules of access to these places of worship where all human beings had equal right of entry, worship and the opportunity to listen to the recitation of *Shri Guru Granth Sahib*.

This vision of equality is also captured through what I would like to characterise as the trilogy of the commonly accepted moral code enunciated in *Shri Guru Granth Sahib*: *Kirt Karni* (earning one's livelihood by labouring activity); *Wand ke Shakna* (sharing the fruits of one's labour with others); and *Naam Japna* (reciting God's name). *Kirt Karni* raises the moral and social status of those who do manual labour, and is a critique of those who earn their living by appropriating the fruits of labour of those who do the labour. This ethic was a clear attack on the caste system where those who performed manual labour were considered lowly while those performing priestly or intellectual duties were considered superior. *Wand ke Shakna* is a celebration of the ethics of sharing, and an endorsement of the morality of egalitarianism. *Naam Japna* has two connotations: one of spiritual equality, i.e., all being equal while reciting God's name; and two, *Naam Japna* is not an isolated meditative activity but one integrally related to the two other parts of the trilogy, i.e., *Kirt Karni* and *Wand ke Shakna*.



L-R: PANELISTS AT 'SHRI GURU GOBIND SINGHJI: UNDERSTANDING THE SACRED WORD', LSE, 22 MARCH 2018 MR PRABHKIRT SEYAN, PROFESSOR JAMES HEGARTY, PROFESSOR PRITAM SINGH & MR M P S BEDI.

This brings me to the moral universe of *Shri Guru Granth Sahib* against exploitation, which comes out most clearly in the *shabads* (the Word) on *maya*. There are two meanings of *maya* – one referring to illusion, and the other to money; and it is the context that makes clear what meaning is being referred to. Regarding *maya* as money or wealth, a very powerful *shabad* is '*papa bajh hove nahin muia saasth na jai*' (p. 417), 'Wealth cannot be accumulated without committing sins, and it does not go with you after your death'. In that sense, the moral universe of *Shri Guru Granth Sahib* is not compatible with money/wealth/capital/property accumulation which is an essential characteristic of all economic systems promoting inequality.

Employing the egalitarian and emancipatory narrative, *Shri Guru Granth Sahib* contains the sharpest attack on gender inequality in medieval India. Guru Nanak Dev taps the mass consciousness of the feudal era where the King is supposed to be the Supreme and then argues: '*so kyon manda aakhiye jit jammeh rajaan*' (p. 473), 'Why consider her the lowly, who has given birth to kings?' It is important to note here that Guru Nanak Dev does not view kings favourably but is merely raising a troubling question to those whose world view values the kings as worthy of respect.

On the ecological message of *Shri Guru Granth Sahib*, in the era of global climate change and the threat of global warming, I want to touch upon *Shri Guru Granth Sahib's* teachings on respect for nature, one that is in conformity with the message of egalitarianism. Here spirituality and social egalitarianism blend together in a marvellous manner; here, egalitarianism goes beyond human egalitarianism as *Shri Guru Granth Sahib's* vision encompasses all living beings – human and non-human, what modern ecologists call 'bio-egalitarianism'. To enmesh the human and the non-human into the web of inter-connected life, Guru Nanak Dev represents the elements of nature as human beings. e.g., air as teacher, water as father, and earth as mother.

Finally, I want to say a few words about the relation between Shri Guru Gobind Singh and the *Shri Guru Granth Sahib*.

Shri Guru Gobind Singh had composed his own *Granth* called the *Dasam Granth* about which there is an unresolved controversy of whether it consists entirely of the writings of the Guru, or if there have been deliberate interpolations in it.⁴ However this controversy is ever resolved if it is resolved at all, one thing is incontrovertible, namely, that Shri Guru Gobind Singh gave the status of Guru to *Shri Guru Granth Sahib*. In the final days of his life, when one of his close disciples Bhai Nand Lal asked Shri Guru Gobind Singh about who would follow him as the Guru after him, the Guru immediately responded that *Shri Guru Granth Sahib* would be the embodiment of all the gurus as it contains the essence of the gurus' teachings:⁵ Shri Guru Gobind Singh raised the *shabad* to the status of the Guru.

One of the most enduring and historic contributions of Shri Guru Gobind Singh in carrying further *Shri Guru Granth Sahib's* ideal of equality was the creation of the *Khalsa* (lit., the Pure, Unsullied).⁶ Any man or woman taking the baptismal ceremony to become *Khalsa* was required to abandon his/her old caste name. All baptised men were required to have 'Singh', and all baptised women 'Kaur' as their surnames. Retrospectively, we can only imagine the severe blow this would have dealt to the seemingly impregnable caste system.

Today, while we are remembering Shri Guru Gobind Singh and the teachings of *Shri Guru Granth Sahib* on which he conferred the status of embodiment of Gurus, if we can contribute to making the world around us equal and sustainable, with due humility we can make some claim to have followed the path shown by the great Guru and *Shri Guru Granth Sahib*.

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Shri Guru Gobind Singhji and the Sacred Word

Mohinder Pal Singh Bedi

Chairman, P C Pirithi Bedi Foundation

“ *Nasero Mansoor Guru Gobind Singh
Teg de Mansoor Guru Gobind Singh
Haq Haq Agah Guru Gobind Singh
Sahey Shahshah Guru Gobind Singh*

Poet Bhai Nand Lalji at Guru Gobind Singhji Darbar

Guru Gobind Singhji's Prakash Ustav has been celebrated across the world with great reverence

What are the special qualities and charismatic traits that Guruji had that touched the hearts of mankind all over the world? My essay here will seek to highlight some of these outstanding qualities which, in my humble opinion, are not easily achievable by every human being.

A revered *pir* of the time, Bhikhum Shah, saw Gobind Raiji when he was only just a child. Shahji foresaw that this child will be a great visionary one day, one who would treat both Hindus and Muslims alike. It is indeed a fact that Muslims – including Nabi Khan, Ghani Khan and Peer Budhu Shah – to name but a few, were Guruji's great admirers.

Shri Guru Gobind Singhji always stood for truth, justice and equality. He never believed in idol worship and had faith in the Oneness of God. As he says:

“ *Namaskar tisi ko hamari
Sekal praja jin aap savari*

And this is in line with what is said in the *Shri Guru Granth Sahib*:

“ *Avval Allah noor upaye
Kudrat ke sab bande
Ek noor te sab jag upjia
Kon bhaley ko mandey*

The establishment of the *Khalsa*, founded by Shri Guru Gobind Singhji in AD 1699, was a substantial step forward to bring the mission of Shri Guru Nanak Devji to a successful conclusion. The title *Khalsa* was formally adopted as a new community where prejudice and privilege had no place, where caste and class had no value, where equality and justice was the rule, and where service and sacrifice was the duty. As the Guru himself says: 'The *Khalsa* is my own form, I manifest myself through the *Khalsa*.'

He changed the psyche of the *Khalsa*, infusing it with the spirit of saint and warrior:

“ *Seva lakh se ek larao
Tebai Gobind Singh naam kahou*

No wonder then that even though only 40 *Khalsa* defended Chamkaur Sahib Garhi in AD 1704, when attacked by the Mughal army led by Wazir Khan, with more than one lakh soldiers on their side, the *Khalsa* was not defeated, a victory that is celebrated by the Guru in his *Zafarnama*. Again, in 1897, 21 *Khalsa* soldiers defended British Saragarhi Fort against 10,000 enemies and they all ultimately died defending this British position. On hearing of the bravery of the Sikh soldiers, all Members of the British Parliament stood up and applauded the heroism of the Sikh fighters. Queen Victoria honoured *Khalsa* soldiers with bravery awards.

In later times too, the West would always remain indebted for the sacrifices Sikh soldiers made in both the World Wars. And even though the Sikhs are a minority in modern India, they take a leading role in the Indian Army in serving on the frontline.

Despite his greatness and vision, Shri Guru Gobind Singhji forbade his followers from calling him Parmeshwar ('God'). He says:

“ *'Whoever says I'm the Lord, shall fall into
the pit of Hell. I am only the servant of
the Supreme.'*

To the *Khalsa*, he says:

“ *Inhi ki kirpa se sajey hum hain,
Nahi moso garib karor parey hain*

Shri Guru Gobind Singhji was also a great poet, as his praises to Shri Akalpurkh (God) through 'Jap Sahib' and 'Chopeyi Sahib' *bani* testifies. He was also a master in both Farsi and Sanskrit languages. His letter in Farsi to Emperor Aurangzeb, widely known as *Zafarnama* referred to above, is exemplary not just for its literary flair but also for being so outspoken against tyranny and injustice. He was also very good in martial arts, and in horse-riding skills, and as his several military victories demonstrate, he was a courageous warrior in the battlefield.

Nearing his death, Shri Guru Gobind Singhji informed his followers that there would be no further Sikh guru in human form again. The Guru's utterances, recorded in the *Adi Granth* would be the 'Granth Sahib' thereafter, and would act as guiding principles in the life of the community.

“ *Agya bhai akal ke
Tabey chaleo panth
Sab sikhan ko hukum hai
Guru maneo Granth*

When one goes to the Gurdwara, we all bow and kneel before the *Shri Guru Granth Sahib* as a mark of respect. The Guru's utterances are Dhur (Rabi) ki Bani:

“ *Dhur ki bani aye
Jis sagle chint mitaye*

Again,

“ *Bani Guru, Guru hai bani
Which bani amrit sarey*

It is indeed quite befitting to attribute the title of 'Sarbans Dani' to the one and only Shri Guru Gobind Singhji. He sacrificed his

father, mother and four children for the truth and for fundamental human rights. We do not find any such parallels in history.

In conclusion, I would like to share some personal thoughts with you. Throughout my life, I have been studying different faiths and philosophies. Having studied in depth the guiding principles of the *Shri Guru Granth Sahib*, I believe it is highly desirable that it should be understood by people everywhere. The virtues in Gurbani, if cultivated in our day-to-day life, will make us become better people. We will be more tolerant to other points of views and beliefs. Surely our world will be a better place for all to live in peace and harmony, loving each other as we all are children of one Almighty God.

Let us remind ourselves, 'Man is created by God, in His image.' But a lot of things that happen in our world today are not befitting to this image, and are degrading.

Let Gurbani's teaching that 'God is Truth, and Truth is God' be understood by the world in the right spirit. To quote this from the *Shri Guru Granth Sahib*:

“ Ad sach
Jogad sach
Habi sach
Nanak hosi bi sach



The Sacred Word according to Guru Gobind Singhji Prabhkirt Singh Seyan

When I was asked to speak about the Sacred Word, I checked the Oxbridge dictionaries, and there was in fact no entry for 'Sacred Word'; I had to check two words — 'sacred' and 'word' — separately.

Word, as we all know, is a unit of language, and its meaning is in fact quite straightforward. For 'sacred', however, a few points need to be noted. It is closely related to God, has some divinity, is sacrosanct, and very important. But as I say above, I could not see what actually is a 'Sacred Word'. So, I delved into it and Shri Guru Gobind Singhji, I think, offers a classic definition for it. The 'Sacred Word', we could say is *gurbani*, is *shabad*; it is something that, I believe, actually makes the Divinity within an individual come out. We are inherently created by God with Divinity within. It is like fire within wood, like butter in milk. Fire, to light, requires a source for ignition, a spark, and that is when the wood can start burning but nevertheless the fire is inherent within it. In much the same way, the human body has Divinity inherent within it. What it needs is a spark to trigger it, to proliferate and come out, and that spark is the Sacred Word, and I don't think it is something which is unique to Sikhi.¹

¹If you believe that the Sacred Word is what brings forth the Divinity within an individual and since Guru Gobind Singhji says '*manas ki jaat sabhai ekaie paihchanbo* (recognise all human race as one), then everyone is born with this Divinity within. Then what clouds it from us? The Sikh religion propagates Guru Nanak's philosophy, that our mind creates layers of barriers that actually separate us from the Divinity within. The Guru's *bani* and *shabad* is what awakens us, to reach deep within us. The classic expression of this, if you look for a single word, is *Waheguru*. That is the Sacred Word — *Eik Onkar*.

In terms of definition, how is it that the Sacred Word brings forth the seed of Divinity. This seed is already within us, just like any seed we plant in the ground. Nobody tells the seed 'you are going to grow up into a rose plant', nobody informs the seed or has to coach the seed to say that 'you are going to become a maple tree or an oak tree'. The seed is already planted with this information. You could, in scientific

vocabulary, say that this is the DNA, the genetic structure. The programme is already set within the seed. What the seed needs is something to spark it off: just as a plant's seed buried in the ground needs to be watered and nurtured to grow into the plant that eventually proliferates with the fruits of the labour, so it is with the individual in terms of practising the Sacred Word, the *shabad*, and trying to fall in tune with one's inner vibrations.

Eik Onkar is an extension, taking us beyond the ancient religions of India which, in a manner of speaking, focussed on the sound 'Om'. It is said that this is the sound of Creation, prevalent in the cosmos. But Guru Nanak Devji said, we are talking about the creator of that sound, and used the symbol *Eik Onkar* to define the Supreme Entity as the source of creation of the cosmos and everything within it. And the beauty of the Sikh religion is, that the Creator is imbued within the Creation, and is very much a part and parcel of the creation. The two forms of Akal Purak (Invincible Being) — the Nirgun (when He existed in a state of pure meditation, when there was no material existence), and the Sirgun (with all material attributes), what people call the 'Big Bang', that is the emission of the sound 'O' (followed by a long nasal drone), commonly referred to as 'Om', which is said to have created the whole of the cosmos. So, Guru Nanak is talking about 'Eik', the numerical symbol 'One', which is very difficult to dispute. If you write it in a language format you can dispute and deliberate about what it is or what it might be, but because it is put down as a figure, there is no dispute.

Mathematics is the purest of languages; you cannot misinterpret within mathematics (although I know that some mathematicians will tell you that $1+1=0$). In fact, philosophically, I can say that it is true when you talk about '*Jyoti jyot ral gai*' 'The ray of Light merges with the Supreme Beam of Light'; if you have one drop of water, you add it to

another, you do not end up with two, you still end up with one drop. They merge, and that is what the awakening of the spirit within us is like, when that inner soul, the Divine within us, is merged with the Supreme Soul that is the *jyoti jyot ral gai*.

I do not think there is any equivalent to the personality and achievements of Shri Guru Gobind Singhji in the whole world; other essays here discuss his life in greater detail, so I will refrain from repeating it. Yet, he had the humility to say that there are hundreds of thousands like him roaming the earth; it is only for the *Khalsa* that he is elevated to the state of the Guru. He himself is but a servant of God, come to play his role in the Divine play, the *Jagat Tamasha* (Global Drama). He is ordained with a specific mission to accomplish the upliftment of the downtrodden, the upliftment of dharma, and himself says that he will allow nothing to stand in the path of him protecting dharma and propagating it.

Dharma, I think, again is part of a set of cross-language misinterpretations, and is not really 'religion'. Dharma is righteousness, the right way of living human existence, and every religion has that message within it. The idea is to be spiritually true to yourself and actually practice the true message within the religion.

Guru Gobind Singhji himself dictated the whole of the *Shri Guru Granth Sahib* and endorsed it as being the Sacred Word. In other words, then, the explanation of terms like 'Waheguru' and 'Eik Onkar' are set within *Shri Guru Granth Sahib*. It is difficult for some people, depending on their state of spiritual elevation, to plug into that spark and begin to draw energy from it. The whole of the *Shri Guru Granth Sahib* is a key; if you look at it carefully, it is an explanation of what you need to do, how you need to connect to the divine Supreme Being, and that is the Revelation.

Those familiar with the work of Dr Masaru Emoto would know that words, effectively, have vibrations. Emoto conducted experiments where he attached some labels with 'positive' and 'negative' words, and observed their effects on water (published in his *Messages from Water* (1999)). When he froze the water crystals and studied them under the microscope, he found with positive words like love, gratitude, spiritual, etc., the water structure was very symmetric and beautiful to look at; with words that were negative, like hate, ugly and the like, the molecular structure of the water was completely destroyed. If we agree with Emoto's hypotheses, and we know that nearly 75 per cent of our body is fluid, one may conjecture that the words we speak, the thoughts we have, all affect our structure. This is what defines the Sacred Word; the vibrations it creates and the effect it has on our structure and our body's composition is what tunes us to the Divine within us.

If we apply Emoto's hypothesis to the Sacred Word of the Guru, a classic demonstration would be when the Guru created the *Khalsa* Panth reciting the *Panj Baniya* (the 5 prayers), the sacred words on this water, stirring it with the *Khanda* (double-edged dagger). One can perhaps see the vibrational effect of Gurbani in converting water into *amrit* (nectar).

All this brings us back to the *Mool Mantar* (the Prime Verse – a definition of the Supreme Soul), the sacred words that start the *Shri Guru Granth Sahib*:

“ *Eik onkar, Sat Naam, karta Purkh
Nirbhau, Nirvair, Akaal Murat, Ajuni
Sabhn Gur Parsad*

So *Nirbhau, Nirvair* (devoid of fear, devoid of enmity) – that is the state of the *Khalsa*, and Guru Gobind Singhji reminds us that he is only the instrument in the creation of the *Khalsa*. In *Vichittar Natak* (his biography) he tells us that he bowed down to the *Akaal Purkh* (Invincible Being) and said that this task can only be performed if *Akaal Purkh* assists in the task, otherwise Guru Gobind Singhji will not be capable of doing it. *Khalsa* is *Akaal Purkh ki Fauj* (the Knights of the Invincible Being), and created by the Divine Will of the *Akaal Purkh*. Guru Gobind Singhji used the Sacred Word, and showed us what the effect of that Sacred Word, the *Gurbani*, can have on us.

To conclude: 'Waheguru' is an inspiring term. 'Wahe' – Wow! (You know, to express the whole of creation is really a miracle!). So, Waheguru is Awesome Guru; and Guru, as you know, is a teacher, an enlightened person. 'Gu' is ignorance, and 'Ru' is spiritual enlightenment. So, Guru is one who dispels your ignorance and enlightens you.

The Sacred Word *Gurbani* gave Guru Gobind Singhji the spiritual power to create the *Khalsa*. He installed that power through the sacred *gurbani* into the *Khalsa*, and then he had the humility to bow in front of the *Khalsa* and ask to be infused with the same power so that he too may become like them (a *Khalsa*). But that tradition of *Apai Guru Apai Chela* (the Guru and the Disciple merged in one) was actually started by Guru Nanak Devji. The light (*jyot*), it is explained again and again, is the same spiritual light from Guru Nanak to the tenth Guru, which has now been assimilated into the *Guru Granth Sahib*, the Shabad Guru.

References

¹I use the word 'Sikhi' because I am of the belief that it is wrong to call it an -ism, as is done in Western languages; I prefer to use 'Sikhi' to refer to the religion of Sikhi and/or the path of practicing the Sikh religion.



MEMBERS OF AUDIENCE AT 'SHRI GURU GOBIND SINGHJI: UNDERSTANDING THE SACRED WORD', LSE, 22 MARCH 2018 INCLUDING THE MAYOR OF BRENT MR BHAGWANJI CHOCHAN & MRS CHOCHAN.

Events by the High Commission of India to commemorate the 350th *Prakash Parv* of Shri Guru Gobind Singhji 2017–18

The celebrations by the High Commission of India, London saw a series of firsts. The High Commissioner H.E. Mr Y K Sinha joined devotees for prayers at the historic Shepherds Bush Gurdwara Sahib, the oldest *gurdwara* in Europe. Events organised to mark this anniversary included the first-ever commemorative celebration with Sikh devotional music at India House, London; a specially curated photo-exhibition on Guru Gobind Singhji and Sikhism in association with Victoria and Albert Museum; and the first-ever Baisakhi celebrations on a grand scale on 29-30 April 2017, which was attended by around 20,000 people.

The High Commission of India, with financial support from the Ministry of Culture, Government of India, organised plays and Sikh devotional music recitals in several cities including London, Belfast, Cardiff, as well as in *gurdwaras* in Bedford, Bradford Southall, Leicester, Wolverhampton, Leeds, and Birmingham. As part of the celebrations, the High Commission drew attention to the contributions of Sikhs in the two World Wars, as part of the Labour Corps under the India Unremembered project.

From a long and busy calendar, key commemorative events included

- the Baisakhi celebrations on 29-30 April 2017 at Northolt, London. The event included 14 *gurdwaras* from all over London who pitched in with volunteers, and a rich array of food items for the *langar* (lit. 'public kitchen') for visitors. The event attracted 18,000–20,000 people. Cultural programmes included Punjabi spiritual music, Bhangra and Gidda performances, and performances by eminent artist like Jasbir Jassi, Channi Singh and Angrez Ali. In addition, the High Commission also organised Gatka, a Punjabi martial arts competition in which more than 120 experts participated.

- a seminar at the House of Commons in Westminster on 7 December 2017, in association with the Indo-British All-Party Parliamentary Group, titled 'Life and Teachings of Shri Guru Gobind Singhji'. Eminent Sikh leaders from across the country participated in the seminar along with UK Members of Parliament, Councillors and Members of Greater London Authority were present at the event, in addition to senior representatives from *gurdwaras* and Sikh community organisations.

To conclude the celebrations, the High Commission, in collaboration with the LSE South Asia Centre under their joint venture, the '100 Foot Journey Club', organised a panel discussion titled 'Shri Guru Gobind Singhji: Understanding the Sacred Word' on 22 March 2018. The opening remarks were presented by H.E. Mr Y K Sinha, and discussants included Professor James Hegarty, Mr Prabhkirt Singh Seyan, Professor Pritam Singh, and Mr M P S Bedi. The discussion was chaired by LSE South Asia Centre's Deputy Director Dr Nilanjan Sarkar, and attended by over a 100 guests. Podcasts of each of the speaker's address is available on the LSE South Asia Centre website: <http://www.lse.ac.uk/south-asia-centre/events/archive/shri-guru-gobind-singh-ji>

Select Photographs of Events

BELOW: THE HIGH COMMISSIONER H.E. MRY K SINHA JOINED DEVOTEES FOR PRAYERS AT THE HISTORIC SHEPHERDS BUSH GURDWARA SAHIB, 6 JANUARY 2017, LONDON.



BELOW: BHANGRA DANCERS AT THE BAISAKHI CELEBRATIONS ON 30 APRIL 2017, LONDON.



ABOVE: LAUNCH OF THE RESOURCE PACK ON 'INDIA UNREMEMBERED: CONTRIBUTION OF SIKHS IN INDIAN LABOUR CORPS, WORLD WAR I' AT INDIA HOUSE, 14 JUNE 2017, LONDON.

LEFT: PRACTITIONERS OF GATKA, A PUNJABI MARTIAL ARTS AT A COMPETITION PART OF THE BAISAKHI CELEBRATIONS ON 30 APRIL 2017, LONDON.

Select Photographs of Events

SPEAKERS AT THE SEMINAR AT THE HOUSE OF COMMONS, 7 DECEMBER 2017, LONDON.



HIGH COMMISSIONER H.E. MR Y K SINHA GIVING THE OPENING REMARKS AT 'SHRI GURU GOBIND SINGHJI: UNDERSTANDING THE SACRED WORD' ON 22 MARCH 2018, LONDON SCHOOL OF ECONOMICS, LONDON.



MEMBERS OF THE AUDIENCE AT 'SHRI GURU GOBIND SINGHJI: UNDERSTANDING THE SACRED WORD' ON 22 MARCH 2018, LONDON SCHOOL OF ECONOMICS, LONDON.

List of events organised by the High Commission of India on the 350th *Prakash Parv* of Shri Guru Gobind Singhji in the United Kingdom

6 January 2017

350th Prakash Utsav of Shri Guru Gobind Singhji

SHEPHERDS BUSH GURU DWARA SAHIB, LONDON

29-30 April 2017

Baisakhi celebrations

NORTHOLT LONDON

14 June 2017

Resource Launch

'India Unremembered: Contribution of Sikhs in Indian Labour Corps, World War I'

INDIA HOUSE, LONDON

24 June 2017

Play

'The Life and Teachings of the 10th Sikh Guru and the History of Punjab and Sikhism'

NEHRU CENTRE, LONDON,
GURU NANAK DARBAR GURDWARA, GRAVESEND

13 October 2017

Play

'The Life of Guru Gobind Singhji and his Teachings'

BIRMINGHAM

26 October 2017

Commemorative Photo Exhibition

'Guru Gobind Singhji and Sikhism'
with Victoria and Albert Museum

INDIA HOUSE, LONDON

18 November 2017

Music performance

Sikh devotional music by 'KauRas'

Gurbani recitals by children

Seminar on the life and teachings of the Revered Tenth Sikh Guru

BELFAST AND LONDONDERRY

7 December 2017

Seminar

'Life and Teachings of Shri Guru Gobind Singhji'
with Indo-British All-Party Parliamentary Group

HOUSE OF COMMONS, WESTMINSTER, LONDON

12 December 2017

Prize-giving ceremony

KHALSA PRIMARY SCHOOL, LONDON

6 January 2018

Devotional Sikh music and Gurbani session

GURU NANAK SIKH ACADEMY, HAYES

7 January 2018

Essay-writing and Painting competition

Devotional Music

Guru ka Langar with SEVA Trust, UK

BEDFORD

13 January 2018

Prakash Utsav

SIKH GURDWARA, PEARL STREET, CARDIFF

20 February 2018

Photo exhibition

WOLVERHAMPTON

25 February 2018

Play

'The Life and Teachings of Guru Gobind Singhji'

with Yorkshire Sikh Forum and local Sikh Gurdwaras

BRADFORD

22 March 2018

Panel Discussion – 100 Foot Journey Club

with LSE South Asia Centre

'Shri Guru Gobind Singhji: Understanding the Sacred Word'

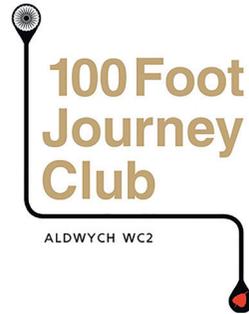
Opening Remarks: H.E. Mr Y K Sinha

Discussants: Professor James Hegarty, Mr Prabhkirt Singh Seyan, Pritam Singh, and M P S Bedi

Chair: Dr Nilanjan Sarkar (LSE)



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London, United Kingdom



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