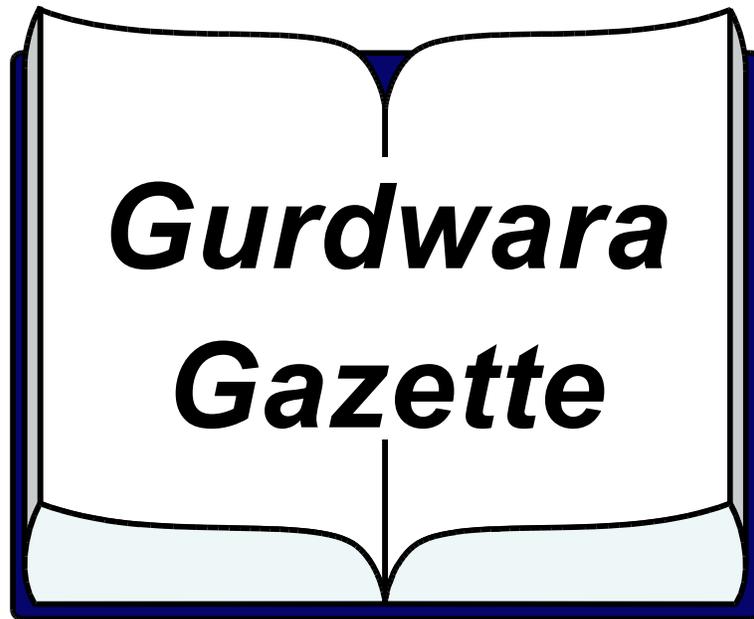


English Section



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DAYS COMMEMORATING HISTORICAL EVENTS
(16th January to 15th February)

16 January	Sri Guru Har Rai Sahib was born at Kiratpur Sahib. (16-1-1630)
17 January	The Govt. accepted Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee as the new name of Central Management Board. (17.1.1927)
18 January	Sher Singh (younger son of Maharaja Ranjit Singh) declared as Maharaja. (18.1.1841)
19 January	The Keys Agitation won by the Sikhs. The Government handed over the keys to Sikhs. (19.1.1922)
22 January	Delhi court awarded death sentence to Bhai Satwant Singh, Bhai Kehar Singh and Balbir Singh (In Indira Gandhi murder case). (22.1.1986)
24 January	129 members of SGPC and over one lac Sikhs took a vow before Akal Takht Sahib to sacrifice their lives for Punjabi Suba. (24.1.1960)
25 January	Sikh Jatha reached Tarn Taran Sahib. The hired men of Mahant attacked the Sikhs. Several Sikh including Bhai Hazara Singh and Bhai Hukam Singh seriously wounded. (25.1.1921)
26 January	Baba Deep Singh Shaheed born in Pahuwind (Amritsar). (26-1-1682)
30 January	Martyrdom of Bhai Haqiqat Rai. (30.1.1742)
31 January	Ban on the Sikh sword withdrawn. A notification declared that Kirpan was not a weapon. (31.1.1936)
4 February	Bhai Hukam Singh of Wajau Kot (Gurdaspur) who had been injured on January 25, 1921 at Tarn Taran, died. (04.02.1921)
10 February	Anglo-Sikh battle at Sabhraon. The Sikhs lost the battle due to treason of Lal Sinh, Teja Sinh and Gulab Sinh Dogra. Martyrdom of Sardar Sham Singh Attariwala. (10.2.1846)
15 February	Akali Dal swept the SGPC elections. (15.2.1939)



In continuation with the last edition:

Asht Ratnas- Eight Eminent Sikhs

-S. Surjit Singh 'Gandhi'

We are taking pleasure while publishing these contents from the book '*History of the Sikh Gurus*' by S. Surjit Singh Gandhi former Head of Sikh History Research Board (SGPC).

The great sage passed away in the winter of the year 1631 A.D. at the age of 125 years in village Ramdaspur about twenty seven miles from Amritsar. Guru Hargobind Sahib who had come to Ramdaspur a few days earlier was deeply moved at the death. Tears rolled down the cheeks of the Guru ji as the flames went up.

Bhai Mardana ji

Bhai Mardana ji was the closest associate and the dearest disciple of Guru Nanak Sahib. According to Bhai Manohar Dass Meharban, Bhai Mardana ji had been the companion of Guru Nanak Sahib since childhood. Both Bhai Mardana ji and Guru Nanak Sahib were born at Talwandi Rai Bhoi ki, Bhai Mardana ji in 1459 and Guru Nanak Sahib in 1469. Bhai Mardana ji's original name was Dana. 'Mardana' was the title conferred on him by Guru Nanak Sahib. The names of Dana's revered father and mother were Bhai Badrev and Lakho. According to Bhai Kahan Singh, Bhai Mardana ji breathed his last in 1534 at Kurum and Guru Nanak Dev ji himself performed the last rites. But this date does not stand the test of historical scrutiny. Guru Nanak Dev ji could not be at Kurum in 1534. Even if Bhai Mardana ji had himself gone to Kurum and expired there, how could, then, Guru Nanak Dev ji be there at his funeral. In fact he died at Kartarpur Sahib and was cremated on the banks of the Ravi in Guru Nanak Dev ji's presence. Bhai Mardana ji had two sons, Shahzada and Raizada and a daughter.

Bhai Mardana ji's father was the family bard of Mehta Kalu ji. Bhai Bardev and Bhai Mardana ji called every morning at the houses of local residents and obtained alms generally in kind in the form of flour or some eatables. Both would sing to the accompaniment of music or rebec and receiving charity would move next door.

Guru Nanak Sahib as a child listened to their sweet music and felt elated. According to Pro. Satbir Singh,¹ "Guru Nanak Sahib and Bhai Mardana ji first came into contact in A.D. 1480. All this happened at Talwandi while, once lying under a tree the sound of someone's playing on the rebec passed his (Guru Sahib's) ears. He arose, approached the man playing on the rebec and asked his name. He answered, 'Sir, Mirassi (bard) people call me by the name Dana'. Hearing this, Baba appreciated his fine playing on the rebec and his excellent understanding of Ragas. Baba suggested, in case he accompanied him and sang 'Ragas' along with Shabad, he would get the better of both the worlds. To this Dana replied, 'we hardly make our both ends meet, by singing Ragas before the rich. In case we follow you, our families would perish for want of food and being starved, we shall miss our prayer (Namaz) even, and thus, we shall stand condemned in both the worlds. How do you plan to liberate me?" Then Guru Nanak Sahib said, 'O Dana; You are ignorant. God protects and feeds us all. Namaz (prayer) and Roza (fast) are benediction bestowed by God. God's abode is the heart of the Saints. At the final judgement, none shall come to the rescue." Guru Nanak Sahib further emphasized, "Dana, in case you now turn to be 'Mardana' (brave) and sing Raga along with the word of God (Shabad) you will gain in both the worlds." Dana now turned to Mardana set out with Guru Nanak Sahib to enlighten the people living in this world. Bhai Mardana ji played on rebec and Guru Nanak Sahib sang Shabads. Quite often Bhai Mardana ji also sang the divine words along with Guru Sahib. Thus the Kirtan came into existence. Kirtan is the divine words (Shabads) sung in accompaniment of the music. Bhai Mardana ji once asked, 'Baba, is this the word of God that we sing in Kirtan? To this Guru ji replied, 'Kirtan is the word that Guru utters. Contemplation of the word leads to salvation.'

In course of time, Guru Nanak Sahib left Talwandi and went to Sultanpur Lodhi where he was employed in the service of Daulat Khan Lodhi, the Governor of Jalandhar Doab. Guru Nank Sahib after some time, sent for him from Talwandi. He came in response to Guru Nanak Sahib's call and began to reside at Sultanpur Lodhi with Guru Sahib.

It became usual with both of them to sing songs in praise of God in a public place. Their melodious voices and soft strains on rebec touched the hearts of listeners and transported them into a state of bliss. This drama was daily enacted in the streets of Sultanpur Lodhi for seven long years.

After the divine experience at Sultanpur Lodhi, the Guru became a missionary and he decided to awaken the people to the reality by undertaking long and arduous journeys in all directions. To begin with, he proceeded to the eastern part of the country. Thence-from he visited places in the south. After this he went to Ceylon.

All the time, during this travels, Bhai Mardana ji was with Guru Nanak Sahib. He suffered the hardships of journey and pangs of separation from his family and kith and kin but he remained unflinching in his faith in Guru Sahib.

Janam Sakhis are replete with anecdotes portraying wit and wisdom of Bhai Mardana ji. Barring a few questions which are either concocted or connected purposely with the fair name of Bhai Mardana ji in order to ridicule him possibly to emphasise that the Guru had the unique power of transforming brass into gold, all other questions touch the deepest chords of human heart as also the root problems of the worldly persons which hamper them from taking cudgels to better their own lot and of the people at large. Hunger, thirst, family comfort, poverty, insecurity were some of the things which often tormented Bhai Mardana ji as much as every human being but the beauty of Bhai Mardana ji was that he did not allow himself to be given to them and with sustained efforts reached the stage of identification between himself and the Guru. Visualising the approaching end of Bhai Mardana ji, Guru Nanak Sahib once asked, "Consequent upon your wishes, your body after death, may be let into water like Brahmins or it may be cremated like Khatris or it may be thrown to winds like one of Parsee or it may be buried like that of a Muslim." Bhai Mardana ji answered, "Well, Baba, you still think of the body. By the grace of your teachings, I have entirely forgotten about it. Now I regard my soul as the sole guardian of my body". Again Guru Nanak Sahib exclaimed, "Shall I make you famous by construction a suitable tomb and render thee, famous in the world?" Bhai Mardana ji replied, "When my soul has been separated from its bodily tomb, why shut it up in the stone tomb?" Baba stepped in forward, embraced Mardana ji and declared, "Mardana, you have realised the infinite." At the close of the first itinerary, Bhai Mardana ji reached Talwandi. His wife and children tried to retain him, but he did not agree. Now he was awakened, he again accompanied Guru Nanak Sahib in his journey into the west Asian countries.

At the harbour of Surat, Guru Nanak Sahib and Bhai Mardana ji sailed in the boat for Saudi Arabia. Having visited Mecca and Madina they reached Baghdad, the capital of the caliph of Islam. As usual, they stayed outside the town near

graveyard. Guru Nanak Sahib's visit to Baghdad is recorded in the Vars of Bhai Gurdas who writes:-

Baba gaya Baghdad nun bahar jai kiya asthana

Ik Baba akal rup duja rababi Mardana.

(Baba went to Baghdad and put up outside.

The immortal Baba was accompanied by the rebec-player Mardana.)

On the roadside, Guru Nanak Sahib began to sing hymns in praise of God and Bhai Mardana ji played a symphonic strain on his musical instrument. Although the people could not understand the language of they hymns, yet the melodious voice with which the hymns were being sung, produced a soothing effect on their minds. As a result, the local pir was converted to Guru Nanak Sahib's views and became his disciple.

Guru Nanak Sahib settled at Kartarpur sahib, Bhai Mardana ji also came to this place. Bhai Mardana ji was a master-rebec player. He improved the old form of instument by fixing to strings to a hollow gourd so as to produce deep and melodious strain.

He composed verses also, three of which are included in the Adi Granth in Bihagre ki Var. In the first Slok Bhai Mardana ji compares human personality of those living in the dark age to the vessel used for the extraction of wine. Lust is the wine that human heart continues to consume. Human wrath makes the cup of temptations, fill it and vanity feeds it. By partaking this wine in the company of unsanctified beings, human heart is degrading itself continously.

In the second Slok, Bhai Mardana ji regards it a further plunge into evils for those who partake of this fictious wine.

In the third Slok, suggesting a way out from these evils, Bhai Mardana ji thinks "man can find an escape from the evils provided his body (vessel) partakes the wine of Nectar-a winde that inspires the urge for inner realisation and immortality from a cup of devotion in the company of honest and chaste persons."

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1. Taken from the article 'Guru Nanak's life long companion- Rababi Mardana by Satbir Singh

Conti....

Sikh Reference Library, Sachkhand Sri Harimander Sahib: A Treasure House of Sikh Scholarship

*-S. Bagicha Singh**

The Sikh Reference Library, Sachkhand Sri Harimander Sahib has its genesis to February 1945 owing to the efforts of 'Sikh History Society'. However, it was established formally in 1946 vide resolution of the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee (S.G.P.C.), Amritsar. The Sikh scholars from different parts of the world have visited this library for research purposes. Library has a rich collection of 23291 books, 956 general manuscripts, 487 manuscripts of Sri Guru Granth Sahib Ji and 65 manuscripts of Sri Dasam Granth, which also includes manuscripts of Sri Guru Granth Sahib Ji (Sunehri Bir) written in ink made from a mixture of gold and pearls. The library has also preserved back files of national, regional and local newspapers in English, Punjabi, Hindi and Urdu dating back to as old as 1927 despite having suffered from the destruction of 1984 during Operation Blue star, Sikh Reference Library is the treasure house of Sikh scholarship.

Keywords: Sikh Reference Library, Sikh Literature, Sikh Scholarship, Amritsar, Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee.

Introduction: Libraries have a long history in India. During ancient and medieval periods, libraries were attached to the places of worship. The purpose of these libraries was to support the propagation of the respective religions through the medium of books, manuscripts and other reading material. The people visiting the places of worship were expected to use these libraries. The Sikh Reference Library, Amritsar situated in Mahakavi Bhai Santokh Singh Hall located in south side of the Golden Temple Complex was also established to serve the similar purpose and to serve as knowledge house for Sikh scholars. The Sikh scholars from different parts of the world have visited this library for research and reference purposes.

A brief history of Sri Amritsar: Sri Amritsar is a multicultural city located at Indo-Pak border. It accommodates population of more than one million people. Sri Amritsar is one of the major Sikh pilgrimage cities of Punjab. The holy city was founded by Sri Guru Ram Das Sahib (the fourth Guru of Sikhs) in 1574, under the instructions from his predecessor, Sri Guru Amar Das Sahib. In 1574, when Sri

**Library Incharge, Sikh Reference Library, Sri Harimander Sahib, Amritsar.*

Guru Ram Das Sahib moved to this place, it was known as Guru-Da-Chakk. After this it was named as Chakk Ram Das. In 1577, Sri Guru Ram Das Sahib started digging of the Amritsar Sarovar, which became ready during 1581. The Sarovar was renovated by Sri Guru Arjun Sahib in 1586. Since then this city is known as Amritsar, after the name of the Sarovar. The foundation of the Sri Darbar Sahib had been laid by Sain Mian Mir, a Muslim saint. The construction work of Sri Darbar Sahib was completed by 1601. The first volume of Sri Guru Granth Sahib was prepared in this city and was installed at Sri Darbar Sahib on August 16, 1604. Sri Akal Takht Sahib (the Throne of the Almighty) was also revealed at this place by Sri Guru Hargobind Sahib in 1609. Two flags representing temporal and spiritual authority have been set up in front of Akal Takht Sahib.

Sikh Reference Library: Historical Account: The Sikh Reference Library, Amritsar came into existence in 1946, vide Resolution No. 822 dated 27.04 1946 of the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee. However, the genesis to the origin of Sikh Reference Library are traced back to 1929, when the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee constituted Sikh History Research Board. The 'Sikh Historical Society' (SHC) was established in 1930 at Lahore under the leadership of Bawa Budh Singh. But it did not succeed to fulfill the requirements of a Research Library. On February 10, 1945 a meeting of the Sikh scholars and historians was held at Khalsa College, Amritsar, under the Presidentship of Princess Bamba (daughter of Late Maharaja Duleep Singh). In this meeting, foundation of the Sikh History Society, Amritsar was announced. Meanwhile, the Sikh organizations realized the need for Sikh Reference Library. Working in this direction, the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee in its meeting held on March 10, 1945, held under the Presidentship of Jathedar Mohan Singh passed a resolution to a full-fledged Reference Library to promote research in Sikh history. Consequently, the Sikh Reference Library came into existence on February 9, 1947.

Collection of the library: Initially, the library faced many hurdles in collection development as it could not collect the required material due to its limited resources because the library was working independently and without any financial assistance from any institution. However, with its becoming of an official organ of the S.G.P.C. during February 1947, the entire responsibility of maintaining the library was undertaken by the S.G.P.C. To accommodate the collection of library and establish services and facilities of library, a spacious hall in the Guru Ram Das Sarai was reserved, and the library started functioning from this place. During later fifties, the library was shifted to the present place, i.e., Mahakavi Bhai Santokh Singh Hall. Primary sources related to Sikh Gurus, the Khalsa, Hukamnamas, Pattaas, Sanads,

old paintings, rare books and journals were kept in the library for the consultation of scholars working on Sikh religion, history, philosophy and culture. According to a historical document published by the Sikh History Society in 1950, there were 2335 manuscripts and books in Punjabi, ten in Assamese and two in Sindhi. There was one book in French also. Later on, about 400 books in English and one in French were added to the library-stock. According to Sada Hatth-Likhat Panjabi Sahit (1968) by Shamsher Singh Ashok amongst other meaningful reading material, there were 383 manuscripts dealing with 980 different subjects. As per the statement of former incharge of Sikh History Research Board, Devinder Singh Duggal, there were 2500 manuscripts of the holy Guru Granth Sahib including the one Bhai Hardas Wali Bir containing a page bearing handwritten Mool Mantra by Shri Guru Tegh Bahadur Ji and so many other illustrated Birs, and Janam Sakhis, etc. Other documents included Kavender Prakash by Nihal Singh, Ajit Sagar by Surjan Das Ajaat, Bhagat Sudhasar by Bhai Bidhi Chand, Bhagat Premakar by Kavi Jassa Singh, Bansavalinama by Kesar Singh Chhiber, Parchi MahaSundarSalhiar, Guru Nanak Chandruddya and many other invaluable Granths by Udasis, Nirmalas, Meharbani and Niranjani sects, which are not available at any other library. The latest figure of the library-stock, according to Devinder Singh Duggal, had touched 20,000 mark before the destruction of the library in the operation Bluestar in June 1984.

Library is enriched with 105 manuscripts of Sri Guru Granth Sahib ji, 52 manuscripts of Sri Dasam Granth and 715 general manuscripts received from Gurdwara Bauli Sahib, Sri Goindwal Sahib from 2009 to till date. This collection contains 410 years old manuscript of Sri Guru Granth Sahib ji written in 1704 at the time of the tenth Guru of Sikhs Sri Guru Gobind Singh ji. The library also has a 'Sunehri Bir'. Around 5000 books received from Sri Guru Ram Das Library in 2009 are also a part of collection of Sikh reference Library. The collection also contain a book "Sketch Of the Sikhs" written by Lieutenant-Colonel Malcolm, published in 1812AD. Nearly 482 books were donated to library by Prof. Prakash Singh, divinity Prof. at Khalsa College Amritsar. In addition 3500 books were donated to library by Prof. Surjit Singh, Prof. tabla vadak at Shaheed Sikh Missionary College, Amritsar.

At present library collection comprises of 23291 books, 487 manuscripts of Sri Guru Granth Sahib ji, 65 manuscripts of Sri Dasam Granth and 956 general manuscripts. The rich collection of manuscripts of Sri Guru Granth Sahib also includes manuscripts written in ink made from a mixture of gold and pearls. The library has also preserved back files of national, regional and local newspapers in English, Punjabi, Hindi and Urdu dating back to as old as 1927. In addition, a few

journals, magazines in English and Punjabi are also being subscribed. Annual Budget of the library is Rs. 33,00,000/-, which is sufficient for the purchase of new books, journals and other electronic machinery for the preservation and conservation of documents of the library.

Library Management: The library is being controlled and managed by a Board consisting of five to seven members constituted by the S.G.P.C. eminent educationists, historians and scholars. The eminent personalities including Dr. Ganda Singh, Shamsher Singh Ashok, S.S. Amol have served as members and incharge of the Board and Devinder Singh Duggal, Devinder Singh Vidyarathi, Surjit Singh Gandhi and Dr. Harjinder Singh Dilgir have served as incharge of the Board. The Board serves as the Library Committee of the Sikh Reference Library and Secretary of the Board conducts the proceedings of its various meetings held three to four times in a year. At present the name of board member of Sikh Reference Library, Sikh history Research Board- 1. Jathedar Avtar Singh ji Chairman (President SGPC) 2. Dr. Kirpal Singh 3. Dr. Dalbir Singh Dhillon 4. Dr. Gurbachan Singh Nayyar 5. Dr. Prithipal Singh Kapoor 6. Dr. Madanjit Kaur. Presently S. Diljit Singh Bedi is working as Additional Secretary in Sikh ref. Library (SHRB). Library staff comprises of 6 people including one professional Librarian assisted one of them is serving as Assistant Librarian and 2 Computer Operator handle the Digital Library assisted by two non-professional staff members and another is serving as Sewadar (Library Attendant). The library follows a partially open access system. The reference and general books related to religion, history, philosophy, music and culture have been shelved on the book-stacks which have open access to the readers. However, the manuscripts (Handwritten copies of Guru Granth Sahib and other religion books) are under lock and key. The library is being visited by 10 to 15 readers everyday for research requirements. The Library follows 19th edition of Dewey Decimal Classification (DDC) system for organizing books on shelves. It follows Anglo-American Cataloguing Rules-II (AACR-II) for cataloguing purpose.

Automation and Digitization of Library: The Library is in the process of automation of its operations and digitization of its information resources. About 618 general manuscripts, 290 manuscripts of Sri Guru Granth Sahib ji, 51 manuscripts of Sri Dasam Granth Sahib, 247 photo album related with Jaito da morcha, Nankana sahib da morcha, Dharam yudh morcha, Punjabi subha morcha, shatabdi, nagar kirtan, gurmat chetna march and more than 1750 rare books have been digitized for preservation and future utilization. For the purpose of digitization and preservation, library has installed a server, 5 computers with the Internet connectivity, 1 Digital Camera, 1 A3 Scanner, and 3 portable hard drives. The work of complete digitization

and preservation of document collection of Sikh Reference Library is likely to be accomplished in near future.

Space problem and Optimization channels: The library is facing space problem to accommodate its growing collection. However, a few Optimization channels have been installed to provide some relief in this regard.

Fumigation Chamber: Fumigation Chamber is also available in Sikh reference library for the treatment of manuscripts, books, news papers and other reading materials. There are several chemical which are volatile i.e. they evaporate, if left open, either room temperature or with slight rise in the same. As the vapors of same such volatile chemical are poisonous to the insects, fungi, termite etc. The process of using such chemical for protection of Library material is called fumigation.

Use of Library: Anyone who wants to consult library for study and research purposes can visit and use its' information resources and services. The use of library is allowed free of any charge and being a reference library, its collection is for consultation inside library premises only. The users are not allowed to borrow any book even for a night. Library remains open from 9.30 A.M. to 4.30 P.M. on all days except Sundays and other holidays as notified by the S.G.P.C.

Library Services:

1. Photo copy service : a user can photostate 15 to 20 pages of any document (without manuscript), free of cost from the library
2. Internet service
3. Reference service
4. Any person or Institution can fumigate the manuscripts and rare documents with the permission of Secretary, Sikh History Research Board (SGPC).

Loss incurred during 1984: This library suffered a huge loss during Operation Blue Star in June 1984, the attack on the Golden Temple by the Indian Army. 12613 books, general manuscripts and 512 manuscripts of Sri Guru Granth Sahib ji were taken by Indian army during operation blue star It was a huge loss to the library. It is estimated that books and furniture worth Rs. 22,62,000/- were destroyed . This is apart from the price of handwritten Holy Scriptures of Sri Guru Granth Sahib ji, which is invaluable. The library was partially damaged and most of the reading material was carried away later by the Army in gunny bags and steel trunks, to a safer place. However, the same have not been returned to the S.G.P.C. only 75 books were returned by the CBI to the SGPC, who claimed it a number of times from the Government of India. Since 1988, the SGPC has written to the Central Government asking for the return of the material taken by the CBI but has received minor office files only. Mr. Ranjit Singh Nanda, former Inspector of Punjab Police,

who remained on deputation with the CBI for a couple of years, has confirmed the claims of SGPC, that the material is lying with the CBI. On May 23, 2000 George Fernandes wrote to the SGPC Secretary, Gurbachan Singh Bachan, and acknowledged that the Indian Army had taken the books and other documents from the Sikh Reference Library and handed them over to the CBI. He asked to refer the matter to the Ministry of Personnel, Public Grievances and Pensions, whose jurisdiction the CBI falls under. On March 25, 2003, A. P. J. Abdul Kalam made assurances that the books, documents, and manuscripts would be returned, however he took no further action. In April 26, 2004, the Punjab and Haryana High Court ordered the Central Government, Government of Punjab, and the CBI to return the "valuables, books, scriptures, paintings, etc, that were seized from the Golden Temple during "Operation Bluestar" in 1984". In February and May 2009, A. K. Antony, defense minister of India, spoke in parliament that the Indian Army no longer had any material taken from the library. Various members of parliament and the SGPC criticized him for "misleading parliament".

The response of Government reveals that this great loss can never be recovered in full.

Future Plans:

1. Establishment of Sri Guru Granth Sahib Bhavan (Manuscripts Section)
2. On line catalogue
3. New building for library

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SIKHS OF SHIVNAGAR, VAISHALI (BIHAR)

*-S. Jagmohan Singh Gill**

Shivnagar in Vaishali district is about 52 kilometers from one of our most important shrines, Patna Sahib. From Patna Sahib, after crossing the Mahatma Gandhi Setu on the river Ganga, we entered Hajipur. We moved towards Lalganj which was one of the important international river ports on the river Gandak in the yester years. It was well connected to Nepal, Dacca and Calcutta ports. It had connection farther to Rangoon, Europe and other parts of the world for overseas trade.

About 4-5 kilometers ahead there is this green village in serene atmosphere, named Shivnagar. It is under Madhopur Ram Post Office in the Vaishali Police Station area of the same district, with headquarters at Hajipur. When we pulled into this non-descript village in Mattaya Gram Panchayat near Vaishali, we had strange feeling. It is having thirty- five to forty houses populated by over three hundred people of the Sikh brotherhood. These Sikhs are seen in turbans of blue, green, red, orange and other colours and sporting the essential five K's for the Sikhs. They were seen doing various types of agricultural activities in their fields. They are renowned farmers who command wide respect and are the source of inspiration for the locals due to their dedication to farming.

The importance of Shivnagar came to my knowledge during my interaction with some sewadars in Patna Sahib and some other Gurdwaras in the towns of eastern India like Durgapur, Asansol, Burnpur etc. Here I started to collect oral accounts from a selected number of the community members as they undertook a journey down the collective memory lane. These memories aim at establishing continuity between the past and the present and make people turn towards the future with confidence.

They say that they belonged to the Kurmi class, who are mainly agriculturists. As per their version, their ancestors had come from the Sind, bordering Gujarat, for trading purposes. Two brothers named S.Sukha Singh and S.Mohar Singh settled here in the second half of the 18th century. Sukha Singh was childless and the present day Sikhs are said to be descendents of Mohar Singh. Their rough genealogy tables show that their settlement runs for nine to ten generations. It is possible that S. Mohar Singh or his descendants married into the Kurmi caste. According to them, they came from a village known as Imritpur, situated 2-3 kilometers away from the

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river Gandak. There was even old correspondence with Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (S.G.P.C.), Amritsar with some serial number of '960' even about 40 years ago. We enjoyed the walk from Gurdwara Sahib to various houses of the Sikh brotherhood surrounding it. Needless to say, the discovery of this old Sikh Settlement made us happy.

A note on Sukha Singh-

Sukha Singh, according to the people I talked to, was Mahant of Patna Sahib in that period. Even Giani Fauja Singh's article printed in "Gurmat Parkash" gives some information about Sukha Singh's connection with Muzaffarpur but does not mention the name of Shivrinar village. If this is true it is possible that this Sukha Singh was great Giani Sukha Singh, eminent Sikh scholar who wrote the biological chronology of Sri Guru Gobind Singh, named Gurubilas Patshahi Daswin. As per Bhai Kahan Singh Nabha, Sukha Singh was a Granthi at Patna Sahib who incorporated his 'Sukhmana Chhakey' etc in Dasam Granth and brought out its new copy, known as 'Khas Bir' (special manuscript) which is also known as "Sarabloh". According to Pandit Tara Singh, "Sarabloh" is the work by Bhai Sukha Singh who was a Granthi at Patna Sahib. He had admitted that he got this Granth, a work of Guru Gobind Singh, from an ascetic of the Udasi sect in the jungles of Jagannath (the exact location is unclear, but may be the area surrounding Puri). It may have been written in Samvat 1776 (1719 AD) but Guru Ji passed away in Samvat 1765 (1708 AD). As per the Encyclopedia of Sikh Religion and Culture, published by Patiala University, there is reference of Sukha Singh as person. He was a Granthi of Patna Sahib Gurdwara who made a new version of Dasam Granth called Navi Bir. It is not regarded as an authentic version of Dasam Granth though.

By going through the reference provided by S. Harbans Singh (editor of the Encyclopedia of Sikhism, volume-2) Sukha Singh of Patna Sahib and of Keshgarh Sahib seems to be identical person. In a brief account the Encyclopedia says that "Sukha Singh poeticized Guru Gobind Singh's life in Guru Bilas Daswin. The poet, a convert to Sikhism from the barber caste, was born at Anandpur in 1768 AD and completed the work in 1797 AD when he was barely twenty-nine. The poetry is more in Braj language than Punjabi, but the script used is Gurmukhi". Bhai Sukha Singh is said to have that dream while at Patna Sahib where he used to deliver sermons to Sikh congregations at Takht Sri Harimandir Sahib. He soon left Patna Sahib to Anandpur Sahib where he stayed until his death in 1838 AD and completed the Gurubilas. Sukha Singh's Gurubilas combines a rare insight into the prevailing political conditions and the moral issues involved in the resistance Guru Gobind Singh had launched. Elaborate detail marks the description of the Baisakhi day of

1699 when Guru Gobind Singh introduced 'Khande Di Pahul' and the pledges of Khalsa fraternity to the last day of Guru at Nanded.

Early history of Vaishali and Lalganj -

Vaishali was a well-known city of the prehistoric and historic times. It is now in ruins. This place is well known as it received the impact of two major and early religions of the world, namely Jainism and Buddhism. Koluva in Vaishali is where the Lord Buddha is said to have preached his last sermon. To commemorate this event, Emperor Ashoka erected one of his famous lion pillars here in the third century BC. A hundred years after the Buddha's death, Vaishali hosted the second great Buddhist council. Two Stupas were erected to commemorate it. Jainism too has its origin in Vaishali. In 527 BC, Lord Mahavira was born on the outskirts of the city and lived in Vaishali till he was twentytwo. Vaishali remains a pilgrimage centre for both the Buddhists and the Jains. So it is called Janmabhoomi (birth place) of Lord Mahavira and Karmabhoomi (field of work) of Lord Buddha. These are of great interest to the international community. Vaishali was the capital city of Lichchhavi, considered one of the first examples of a republic, in the Vajjian confederacy (Vrijji) Mahajanapada, around the 6th century BC. All around this area, within a short drive, there is plenty of historic sites to see.

Lalganj is situated on the left bank of the river Gandak. In Buddhist Pali literature it has been identified as Singiya (in Pali, Simhika) river port. It is well connected with land and waterways. European traders grasped the commercial potential of the region. Job Charnok, founder of Calcutta, was instrumental in opening indigo factory at Singia, near Lalganj. It served as the main transit town on the way to Nepal. It was an important centre of trade and manufacturing during the 18th century. Textile, saltpetre, silk, sugar, indigo, metallic goods, agricultural tools, swords, shields, as well as boat making, and oil processing were the main products and trades of this area. This importance was due to their location as well as its connectivity with river Ganga. The Ganga remained the route of trade and traffic and all the above mentioned commodities moved on it until the coming of railways in the mid of nineteenth century. But in today's world Lalganj is lagging behind other towns due to various reasons. The decline of inland water trade, change in the mode of production (agriculture and manufacturing), decline in public investment are the main reasons. Its loss of hinterland and growth of nearby towns of Patna Sahib, Hajipur and Muzaffarpur and some historical reasons like the shift in the centre of power, natural calamities like earthquake and flood are also responsible for its going into relative oblivion.

According to some old sources of Sikh history, Guru Nanak Sahib visited the

then bustling town of Hajipur in Vaishali district by crossing the river Ganga from the Patna Sahib side. It was a burgeoning trading centre, famous for pottery, cotton goods and saltpeter. At that time Patna Sahib was a ghost town, replete with the ruins of old Pataliputra. Hajipur was an important town of Tirhut district. Here the Gandak, coming from Nepal, merges with the Ganga. Patna Sahib regained its importance from the time of Emperor Sher Shah Suri and then Akbar's reign of our country. During the period of the tour by Sri Guru Tegh Bahadur ji, Patna Sahib shone in glory like Pataliputra, and thus became one of the prominent cities of India. From the Sikh perspective Shivnagar is one of the nearest Sikh habitats to one of the most important Takhts and Shrines of Patna Sahib (only about 52 kilometers). The Gurdwara Sahib of Shivnagar is also seen by locals an important place. Once there was a proposal by local Member of Parliament to include it into the famous Buddhist and Jain pilgrimage circuit. All communities live here in a deep bonding of brotherhood, demonstrating perfect example of interfaith harmony.

Their origin and relationship with local Bihari Brotherhood

The exact time and occasion of the coming of the Sikhs to this village from some other places is still not clear. As discussed earlier it goes back to Bhai Sukha Singh. Their way of life is totally in conformity with the Bihari style. They speak a local dialect known as 'Vajjika', a mixture of the Maithili and the Bhojpuri dialects. This name is derived from the renowned Vajjian Republic of Vaishali of earlier days. Besides, they speak fluent Hindi and understand Punjabi well. Many of them recite Sikh scriptures of Gurbani clearly in Gurmukhi. They are anthropologically closer to the Kurmis, who are generally small agriculturalists, mainly growing vegetables like Punjab's Saini, Kamboj or Arain castes. They are steeped in Kurmi culture in their rituals and way of life. Their marriages are held within this community. When a daughter of the Kurmi community gets married to a Sikh boy, she becomes a Sikh. Similarly when the daughter of a Sikh gets married to a Kurmi boy she becomes a Hindu. These trends of marriages are in vogue for many generations. There is much similarity between these Sikhs and the Kurmis. My prolonged personal observation of the Bihari communities, specially the people belonging to the Kurmi caste, revealed to me is that they are gentle and sober in behaviour and very obedient to their masters. The chief minister of Bihar, Shri Nitish Kumar also belongs to Kurmi roots. Most of the local festivals like Gurburabs, Holi, Diwali etc are celebrated with pomp and grandeur jointly. During the time of Gurburab people of other local communities throng the local Gurdwara Sahib of Shivnagar to participate in the religious activities of the Sikhs. The concept of "langar" has become a very good medium to propagate teachings of equality in Sikhism. They don't have, in general,

any matrimonial links with Punjab, but they always look up to Punjab as their base. The reason is that the most important shrines, Sachkhand Sri Harmandir Sahib and Sri Akal Takht Sahib are situated in Amritsar. They are always eager to obey the directives of our main centre just like the Sikhs, living in any part of the world. They have a thirst to know Gurbani, Gurmat and Gurmukhi so that they understand the teachings of their living Guru Granth Sahib Ji. The Sikhs here are very active, both socially and politically. It may be that the local Sikhs had received a deep impact of the Guru's teaching. By becoming part of the broader Sikh family they not only moved upwards the social hierarchy but also had earned dignity and respect. They lived their life according to Sikh teachings and maintained Khalsa identity. They also maintain customs of their local origin. The black days of 1984 also could not disturb the fabric of peace and harmony of these areas. There was no fear psychosis and Sikhs here felt completely safe. They don't have any type of enmity with the neighbourhood. Some Sikhs stay in nearby Nagwa village of Belsar block. Their origin is of the same type as in Shivnagar. Their ethnicity has its own character. They are usually moulded and developed by their upbringing and environment. The Pugree is marked as a symbol of trust amongst the locals.

Establishment of Gurdwara Sahib-

In the past, Lalganj port's importance attracted traders from different parts of the country, particularly the Northwest region, which essentially means Punjab. From Lalganj these Punjabi traders dispersed to various directions farther afield for trading purposes. In Lalganj there is a very old Udassi Dera known as Guru Nanak Math, at Ripura. These Udassi Deras were used as halts or 'Sarais' for the traders to stay temporarily before moving farther. There was a very old hand-written Bir of Guru Granth Sahib in Dera of Ripura, Lalganj. On the banks any important river these Deras and their remnants are still visible. They brought clothes, blankets, shawls and other materials from Punjab and sold here. These traders were known as 'Baisakh ke Kaari' or 'karari' i.e. collected their dues from locals in month of Baisakh as per commitment. The Sikh traders came twice in a year, once before the winters to sell blankets, shawls, woolen garments, cloth sheets and other cotton products on credit. Again they used to come in the month of Baisakh (April-May) after the harvesting season to collect the money for the items sold. From outward appearance they were misunderstood as Mughal traders, as they used to come more or less from the same region and wore Kabuli dress. I heard this story from many old people including non Sikhs of Bihar. This was a case of mistaken identity. These Sikh traders used to get astonished when they would see Sikh brethren in such remote areas ploughing the fields and involved in agricultural work. With the encouragement and some

donations from the Sikh traders along with the efforts of local Sikhs, a Gurdwara Sahib with kutcha structure was established around 1870 AD or may be a bit earlier. After few decades 3 cottahs of land was donated to Gurdwara Sahib by S. Gursahay Singh. A small pucca Gurdwara Sahib was constructed around 1920 AD by local Sikhs with the assistance of a Sikh trader named S. Sardar Singh of Baaghi Chowk, twenty-five kilometers east of Shivanagar on Mahua Road. During the devastating earthquake in 1934 some parts of the Gurdwara Sahib's structure were damaged. This earthquake even damaged parts of the Takht Sri Harimandir ji Patna Sahib. In 1960 AD Sant Kartar Singh of Sultanpur Lodhi provided his assistance to construct a Gurdwara Sahib with larger carpet area on the grounds where the old Gurdwara Sahib stood. He visited this place after knowing of its plight from the sewadars of Patna Sahib who belonged originally to Shivanagar. Sant Kartar Singh got a lot of Kaar Sewa done at Takht Sri Harimandir Sahib at Patna. He also mobilised the Kaar Sewa at Gurdwara Hatt Sahib, Sultanpur, Kapurthala. He was very well known to families living in the surroundings of Patna Sahib Area. The upper part of the present Gurdwara Sahib was rebuilt by local Sikhs, with the help from Baba Harbans Singh. Daily Nitnem and Paath are done in this Gurdwara Sahib. The duty of Granthi is performed by a retired Government official, Sardar Ramji Singh. The chanting of Gurbani in sweet melody can be heard daily in the morning and the evening and makes one feel as if one was in a village of Punjab. Celebrations of Gurburabs are planned several weeks in advance.

Early to Present Status of these Sikhs-

Sikhs here were mainly engaged in agricultural activities like their fellow Kurmi brothers. It is said that they settled under the zamindari of Rai Ram Chandra Prasad. One important thing heard from them was that about 200 years ago much land of this area was fallow due to the presence of a kind of chemical substance visible as white powder on the topmost layer of the soil. This was known as 'Khaari' locally. This material was extracted from the surface of the soil, processed and supplied to merchants in places like Dacca and Kolkata. It was to be used for leather processing and other purposes. The ancestors of the local Sikhs also might have been involved in this trade. One community known as "Nunia", who, in some places, were the landless community of the Kurmi caste were generally involved in this extraction. Many local people earned a good amount of money by getting involved in the trade of 'Khaari' as is known from some old stories of some rich families of this area. This led me to have a detailed study of the importance of 'Khaari'.

'Khaari' - Khaari is also known as Sora in Hindi. It is known as saltpetre in English. In Punjabi it is known as 'Kalar'. The major areas of saltpetre production

were Saran (Chapra), Champaran and Tirhut and included many present districts including Vaishali which lie to the north of the Ganga. The production of Saltpetre depended on the labour of so-called low castes such as the Nunias and the Bildars (landless earth workers such as diggers or dyke makers). Scraping off of saltpetre from farms and fields was done after the monsoon and the boiling and refining of the substance was carried out in the drier months. Saltpetre is generally seen in the winter on the upper surface of soil due to the effect of humidity. This part of Bihar falls in the humid zone, combining intense seasonal humidity with equally powerful seasonal aridity. Saltpetre of Bihar of very high quality and was in great demand throughout the world and had the potential to meet the global demand. It was exported to different markets in Asia and Europe. It is the main ingredient for the production of gunpowder used in firearms like guns, cannons etc. The search for saltpetre was one of the main reasons for the Europeans coming to India. Mostly Indian and some foreign traders were involved in this trade and earned huge profits. This was traded under the patronage of Delhi's Mughal Sultanate and regional Nawabs and Rajas.

Occupation:

Previously the main mode of transport from the village to Patna Sahib was navigation. First they used to go in bullock carts to Lalganj. Also they would go in boats along the river Gandak and then to the Ganga from Lalganj port. Some seniors of Sikh community say that in the 19th century or the early 20th century the economic condition of local Sikhs was very marginal. But they had gained much respect in the local community. Initially they traded in a variety of clothes brought from Rangoon, Dacca and Calcutta. Those clothes were sold to the upper strata of the society. Britishers, especially women folks (memsahibs) also used to buy from them. They were allowed into the houses of the British people. They used to travel extensively to different areas like Bhagalpur, Jamalpur and to many other places to sell their goods. Some of the Sikhs were accountants working under rich landlords. S. Ramji Singh's grandfather, S. Heera Singh and others like S. Hari Singh pursued these professions. Thus they accumulated wealth and started purchasing agricultural land which is still held by their successors. At present, they own more than 200 acres of land as a community. The plots lie at a stretch for two kilometres. They would ride horses. Being agriculturists, they might have been bracketed with the Kurmis, yet were held in high esteem among the local upper classes. While invited by these so called upper-caste people in any social gathering like marriages and 'shradhs' these Sikhs were treated specially and food for them was arranged in separate rooms. From these common traits of business and other features we may assume that to some extent that they might have maintained link with Punjab. They might be Khatri,

Aroras, or some other castes of Punjab and adopted Sikhism. Even around 1890 AD, more than ten Sikh families lived in this area. This shows their old bonding with this region.

Opium was also produced in large quantities earlier. Now the soil has become very fertile. Many varieties of farm products including paddy, wheat, maize, lentils etc. and fruits like banana, laloni (kharbooja) are produced in large scale. But many Sikhs have gone out of the village in search of other jobs. They have joined government services, banks, private firms and even work as Granthis, Sevadars and Langris of many Gurdwaras of Eastern India. Some important people of this community include Sports Doctor, Dr. Jaspal Singh of BCCI, now with the Assam cricket Team and Dr. Pritpal Singh, son of S. Udai Pratap Singh, who is a doctor in Ram Manohar Lohia hospital, Delhi. Many youths are doing jobs as engineers and in other professions. The Sikh community is tightly knit and they support one another, both in good and bad times. Marriages, births, birthdays, success in school examinations or career etc are celebrated in the Gurdwara Sahib and attended by everyone. Illness and deaths brings the community closer and everyone contributes to their capacity to help the affected family. The Sikhs are cremated at Basanta Ghat on the river Gandak at Lalganj. The Sikhs living outside their village of Shivnagar never forget their 'matribhoomi 'or motherland. They are strongly tied with their rural roots. They frequently visit the village to enjoy its pure and clean environment. But they are not untouched by a variety of basic problems like any other local village. They face the problems of roads, electricity, education and other amenities. Yet they are never perturbed. They are well aware of the importance of education, which has uplifted their society. They send their children to Lalganj, Patna Sahib, other parts of Bihar and other states for better education so that they may compete with the best in this world.

Conclusion-

My description about the Sikhs of Shivnagar may be is somewhat brief. But the main points to be noted are: they are a resilient group of people. They may be a tiny fraction of the population, but their contribution is immense. Their desire to preserve their identity is laudable. It was a memorable time that I had spent there with them. They have some resentment against the wider Sikh diaspora from a feeling of neglect. I listened to their problems and discussed the way ahead. I committed to hold Gurmat camp to be organized by Sikh Mission Kolkata (Poorvi Bharat) under Dharam Parchar Committee S.G.P.C. Sri Amritsar Sahib very soon. These camps are necessary to bridge the linguistic and cultural divide of the Sikhs of Punjab and the rest. This was my humble mission of connecting the dots to create

a full picture. It is long term job needing sustained and focused effort, which we have begun. The purpose of my visit was to give emphasis on these things and communicate their details to the Sikhs across the globe for further coordination with the entire brotherhood.

After a brief stay at Shivnagar and as the sun began to dip, we started driving for Patna Sahib. I was already feeling to miss these beloved brothers very much. I realized I had been attracted to this unusually beautiful place of idyllic environs and brotherly residents. The warmth with which S. Amarjit Singh (President of Gurdwara Committee), S. Ramji Singh, S. Bhajan Singh, S. Bhagat Singh, S. Rattan Singh, S. Raman Singh, S. Tara Singh, S. Taran Singh, S. Mehar Singh, S. Ishwar Singh and many others welcomed us was heartening and I shall always cherish the memory. And so the charm of Shivnagar lives on.

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Appeal

The devotees are requested to bring the 'PAVAN BIRS' of Sri Guru Granth Sahib (Old ones for SANSKAR) to Sri Guru Granth Sahib Bhawan, Gurdwara Ramsar Sahib complex near Gurdwara Shaheed Ganj Baba Deep Singh Ji 'Shaheed' Sri Amritsar Sahib only instead of Sri Akal Takhat Sahib. This has been decided to facilitate the 'SANGAT' for the Holy Sri Guru Granth Sahib (Newly published) are available at the same venue.

-Guru Panth Da Das-

**Secretary,
Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee,
Sri Amritsar Sahib**



ਸ੍ਰੀ ਗੁਰੂ ਗੋਬਿੰਦ ਸਿੰਘ ਜੀ ਦੇ ਛੋਟੇ ਸਾਹਿਬਜ਼ਾਦੇ ਬਾਬਾ ਜ਼ੋਰਾਵਰ ਸਿੰਘ ਜੀ, ਬਾਬਾ ਫਤਹਿ ਸਿੰਘ ਜੀ ਤੇ
 ਮਾਤਾ ਗੁਜਰ ਕੌਰ ਜੀ ਦੇ ਸ਼ਹੀਦੀ ਦਿਹਾੜੇ ਮੌਕੇ ਗੁਰਦੁਆਰਾ ਸ੍ਰੀ ਫਤਹਿਗੜ੍ਹ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਤੋਂ ਸਜਾਏ ਗਏ ਨਗਰ ਕੀਰਤਨ ਦੀ
 ਗੁਰਦੁਆਰਾ ਸ੍ਰੀ ਜੋਤੀ ਸਰੂਪ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਵਿਖੇ ਸੰਪੂਰਨਤਾ ਸਮੇਂ ਗੁਰਮਤਿ ਸਮਾਗਮ ਵਿਚ ਸ਼ਾਮਲ ਸਿੰਘ ਸਾਹਿਬਾਨ,
 ਪ੍ਰਮੁੱਖ ਸ਼ਖਸੀਅਤਾਂ ਤੇ ਸੰਗਤਾਂ।

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ਗੁਰਦੁਆਰਾ ਸ੍ਰੀ ਦਰਬਾਰ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਸ੍ਰੀ ਮੁਕਤਸਰ ਸਾਹਿਬ

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