



THE SIKH MESSENGER

A QUARTERLY MAGAZINE OF THE
NETWORK OF SIKH ORGANISATIONS, U.K.



Inder Singh Chawla, Deputy Director Sikh Chaplaincy Service (top right) meeting with Sikhs local Prison Officials to extend Sikh Prison Chaplaincy to Scotland

In this Issue

• ***NSO Annual Report 2012 - 2013***

SPRING / SUMMER 2013 - £1.50

With Compliments

to

The Network of Sikh Organisations

from

Guru Nanak Trust

Jasvinder Singh Kohli

Tel: (Mob.) 07957 362 66 44

With Compliments

From Amar Subhag Kaur and
Sundeep Singh Maker
Maker Properties Ltd

The Lord first created Light :

*From the Lord's play all living creatures came,
And from the Divine light the whole creation sprang.*

Why then should we divide human creatures

Into the high and the low?

G G S p 1349

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Editor: Lord Indarjit Singh CBE, DL

Asst Editor Hardeep Singh

Circulation Manager Dr. Kanwaljit Kaur OBE

NSO Patrons:

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Local Representatives:

Leeds:

S. Sukhdev Singh, 20 Linton Close, Alwoodly, Leeds LS17 8QW

Leamington Spa:

S. Tarlochan Singh, 15 Regency House, Newbold Terrace,
Leamington Spa CV32 2HD

Tel: 01926 337774

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THE SIKH MESSENGER QUARTERLY

SPRING / SUMMER 2013

CONTENTS

Page

Editorial	5
A Message to Sikh Youth Navkiran-Kaur Khalra.....	6
Annual Report of Network of Sikh Organisations 2012-2013.....	7
Book Review Warrior Saints Hardeep Singh.....	24

EDITORIAL

BUILDING FROM THE TOP DOWN

Editor Indarjit Singh

Sikhs, have a history full of courage and a commitment to high ideals but today we are in danger of forgetting the lessons of the past in looking to the present and planning for the future. A common excuse for not doing anything is that we have no hierarchy of authority to guide us, and can do nothing without such guidance. There is often reference to a Sarbat Khalsa type organisation to which all Sikhs subscribe. We look nostalgically with rose tinted spectacles at the supposed golden age of the missal period as a time of unity and cooperation. The reality is quite different, the missal period of Sikh history was characterised by constantly feuding and fighting, with occasional truces and cooperation when under threat.

Our 10th Guru Guru Gobind Singh taught us to never bow to repressive authority and act independently, always following the guidance of the Guru Granth Sahib. We have forgotten the context of his guidance and extended it to constant suspicion and distrust of those who wish to lead us. We are all sardars or chiefs, unwilling to follow any religious authority however benign. Constant talk of creating a central Sikh Authority should be seen in this context. 'Central' Bodies dreamt up by ambitious individuals are egotistic as those involved assume that they are at the centre. They cannot succeed unless they are linked to a record of service and achievement. Nor should the absence of a religious authority be used as an excuse for not doing what the Gurus taught us to do, it simply holds us back while the world moves on to tackle new challenges. Nor is it necessary. Most other religions do not have bodies that speak for all. Ask the chief Rabbi all the Archbishop of Canterbury if all Jews and Anglicans listen to them. As Sikhs we already have a supreme religious authority: the guidance of the Guru Granth Sahib, ethical principles written by the Gurus themselves in the own lifetime; teachings designed to help us decide our actions and reactions to challenges before us.

Our recent past is littered with memories of failed organisations that claimed to speak for us all: the International Sikh Youth Federation, the Sikh Federation, the Board of British Sikhs, the Sikh Secretariat, the two British Sikh Consultative Forums and many others. Now we have the Sikh Council with its different religious factions with maryadas of their own. The reason why such organisations fail is that they are built from the top down on unstable foundations of chaudrama, or unmerited desire to leadership. Their contribution to Sikh society is little more than constant disruption. The way forward is to be a little less ambition and work to greater cooperation between gurdwaras and other Sikh organisations committed living by the teachings of the Guru Granth Sahib and the Sikh Rehat Maryada.

The Network of Sikh Organisations (NSO) is a loose affiliation of more than 150 affiliated gurdwaras and other Sikh organisation, **but importantly it does not claim to speak for all Sikhs**. We simply seek to serve the Sikh community and wider society in the way our Gurus taught. As our Annual Report shows, we focus on providing chaplaincy services to prisons, hospitals and the Armed Services. Our work with government departments includes working with the Department for Education (DfE) to provide guidance in the establishment of and inspection of Sikhs faith schools. We are also involved in the national and regional promotion of interfaith understanding and wider understanding of the Gurus' teachings through articles lectures in colleges in universities in the UK and abroad and in presentations in the media. There are also other Sikh groups that are quietly working in clear areas of expertise. Khalsa Aid is one such body dedicated to providing relief to disaster hit areas in different parts of the world. The Anglo Sikh Heritage Trail is another that works to remind us of our wonderful history and our strong links with the country in which we live. We should encourage and support the establishment of many more.

A MESSAGE TO SIKH YOUTH

Navkiran Kaur Khalra (daughter of martyred human rights activist S Jaswant Singh Khalra)

September 7, 2013 marked the 18th anniversary of disappearance of my father, S. Jaswant Singh Khalra. It was on this day that my father was illegally abducted from our home in Amritsar and was later murdered on the orders of State Government and KPS Gill. Jaswant Singh Khalra truly lived a life of the "lamp that challenged the darkness" of injustice, state oppression and impunity. Ever since his martyrdom, S. Khalra's work has motivated many to stand up against oppression and join the struggle for justice and freedom. During his visits to Canada, UK and Austria, he urged the community to follow the path of Gursikhi to honour the Khalsa spirit and ultimately become the defenders of Human Rights. He wanted all of us to continue the struggle to justice and end impunity by joining with like-minded people against oppressors and tyrant Governments worldwide.

For the past 18 years, the Khalra family and Khalra Mission Organization (KMO) have received tremendous moral support from the Sikh Sangat in Punjab and in the diaspora. It is encouraging seeing youth organizations like The Sikh Activist Network (SAN) who have continued to engage the next generation to agitate and educate fellow Canadians about our issues and recognizing our Shaheeds. However the story of thousands of innocent Sikh men and women who were murdered mercilessly still needs to be shared in the larger 'Lok Kachehri' (people's court). With Vaheguroo's bakhsish and support of the Sikh Sangat, we all remain committed to keep this movement alive.

It is important that we reflect upon how we should honour the legacy of Jaswant Singh Khalra! The people of Punjab and parents of thousands of victims of State Oppression had once asked Jaswant Singh Khalra about the fate of their beloved children. Their question still echoes and the future generations will soon ask us about the role we have played in this ongoing struggle for human rights.

Although S. Jaswant Singh Khalsa is not with us today, his legacy continues not just in Punjab, but in all corners of the world where people are standing firm to end oppression and tyranny. At the end, I would request everyone to keep the lamp of justice lit so the future generations can breathe justice and peace. "Mukti de parvaaneo Shamma jagdi rakheyo!" - True commitment to God in our journey through life requires us to keep the flame of justice burning.

THE SIKH MESSENGER

Welcomes articles / correspondence on
Sikhism, Sikh history & on current concerns

Contributions should be sent in Word Format.
(contributions from young Sikhs are particularly welcome)

NETWORK OF SIKH ORGANISATIONS

ANNUAL REPORT 2012-2013

SECTION 1

INTERFAITH ACTIVITIES

DIRECTOR NSO ADDRESSES INTERFAITH NETWORK UK (IFN) NATIONAL MEETING 2012 CELEBRATING ITS 25TH ANNIVERSARY

Lord Singh began by paying tribute to his co-founders Brian Pearce, the late Rabbi Hugo Gryn and late Bishop Jim Thompson and many others involved in this national initiative. The founding of IFN was a great step in Inter Faith relations in the UK and there had been many significant achievements. One such achievement was helping ensure a question about religion was incorporated into the 2001 Census. That took a lot of work but we did succeed.

IFN has helped faith communities come to the table to talk to central and local Government about religion and its benefits to society. He commented on how the IFN was helping bring religion back in from the cold to the benefit of wider society.

Lord Singh is a founder member of the Interfaith Network and was its first elected Co-Chair. Mohinder Singh Chana from Bradford currently serves as Vice Chair and member of the Strategic Review Sub Committee.

Faith Forum for London. Rosalind Miller represents the NSO on the Faiths Forum for London and is a prominent member of its Executive Committee.

OTHER INTERFAITH ACTIVITIES.

- May 2012 attended the Templeton Prize award to the Dalai Lama at St Paul's Cathedral
- May 2012 and attended the installation of the Rev David Ison as Dean of St Paul's
- June 2012 Lord Singh attended a service in Westminster Abbey and later joined in a discussion with the chief guest, His Holiness the Dalai Lama
- June 2012 Letter from retiring Archbishop of Canterbury thanking NSO for support in working for interfaith harmony
- June 2012 Lord Singh and other Parliamentarians joined members of the RE Council to form an All Party Parliamentary Group for Religious Education.
- June 2012 Attended a seminar at Lambeth Palace and contributed to debate hosted by Dr Rowan Williams Archbishop of Canterbury with keynote speaker Andrew Mitchell Secretary of State for International Development
- October 2012 joined in a celebration of the Muslim festival of Eid at the at Millbank house Westminster in London
- October 2012 Director was invited to join in the celebration of the Jewish festival of Sukkot at the home of the Vivienne Wineman, Chair of the Board of Deputies of British Jews. The festival commemorates 40 years of wandering in the desert. Joining in with the family, the Director NSO observed 'I was fascinated to learn that during Sukkot Jews are urged to forgo normal comforts and live in small booths or rough dwellings to remind them of the difficult and

demanding journey from Exodus to a better future. It helps us remember and appreciate everyday comforts, which we normally take for granted. As we all know, it's only when a dishwasher, washing machine or computer breaks down that we appreciate its true value. Sikh teachings remind us that life itself is a gift and we should use it to help those around us; the theme of this year's 'Year of Giving' celebrations. Festivals like Sukkot help us put life in true perspective'.

- October 2012 Lord Singh spoke at a round table meeting of the Commonwealth Society where he was the keynote speaker on the topic 'Queen and religion: defender of faiths
- February 2013 Lord Singh was invited to a national peace symposium of the Amadiyya Muslim Association UK. Chief guest was His Holiness Hadhrat Mirza spiritual leader of the worldwide Amadiyya Muslim community
- February 2013 attended a Foundations of Life conference at Westminster Abbey with guest of honour right honourable friend Frank Field MP for a discussion on social policy.
- March 2013 Attended Commonwealth Day Service at Westminster Abbey
- Attended the installation of right honourable Justin Welby as Archbishop of Canterbury at Canterbury

SECTION 2 **HUMAN RIGHTS**

Professor Cyril Karabus a South African National

Sikh concern for the human rights of all people were underlined in a letter written by the Director Lord Singh tabling a question to Her Majesty's Government, as to what representations they have made to the Government of Abu Dhabi about the conviction in absentia and subsequent arrest of Professor Cyril Karabus.

Retired 77-year-old paediatric oncologist Professor Cyril Karabus was detained by the United Arab Emirates' authorities on the 18th of August 2012, while in transit returning home through Dubai from his son's wedding in Canada. He had been tried and convicted in absentia on charges of manslaughter for the death of a three-year-old child with chronic leukaemia who was under his care at an Abu Dhabi hospital 12 years earlier. He had been given no chance to prove his innocence. NSO Human Rights lead activist Jesbir Kaur contacted the professor's family and international pressure led to him being freed.

Campaign to secure the release of Indian nationals from detention by the Pakistani Government.

It is not generally known that many Indian Nationals are languishing in Pakistani jails for alleged border offences or as prisoners in conflicts between the two countries. Some have been 'outsourced' to Muslim Middle East countries where they are difficult to trace. Jesbir Kaur has worked tirelessly to trace these missing persons and secure their release.

All Party Parliamentary Committee on Freedom of Religion and Belief.

Barroness Berridge Chair, Lord Singh Lord Alton, Baroness Cox Vice Chairs and others joined in the formation of this important APPG investigating abuses of freedom of religion and belief in different parts of the world. Evidence has been heard from members of most religious communities on their particular concerns. Jesbir Kaur from the NSO spoke movingly of the suffering of Sikhs in India in recent years. A Report is being compiled and it is expected that this will be debated in Parliament.

• Gender Equality. Baroness Cox initiated a debate in the House of Lords drawing attention to the abuse of women's rights in Sharia courts in the UK. She received strong support from Lord Singh, Lord Alton, Baroness Berridge and others.

Harassment of Sikhs at Polish Airports.

The NSO's Polish campaign began August 2010, following a terse plea from Mr. Puri. With the help of UK gurdwaras and other Sikh organisations, the NSO took advantage of a Prime Minister led Polish trade delegation to India to get the Indian government to criticise the Polish behaviour. The lobbying was effective. External affairs minister Preneet Kaur outraged by the behaviour of the Polish authorities towards her fellow Sikhs made her feelings known to the Polish Prime Minister in no uncertain terms, leading to the Polish authorities grudgingly halting their harassment of Sikhs.

December 2012 The Director NSO met the British High Commissioner's new consulate representative in Chandigarh. In a one to one meeting in the Lords the Director explained some of the difficulties faced by NRIs and relatives wishing to visit them in the UK.

December 10 2012 Attended Human Rights Day at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

December 2012 The Director attended the Foreign & Commonwealth Office Christmas reception The Director Lord Singh was made Vice Chair of the all Party Parliamentary on International Freedom of Religion and Belief.

Caste Discrimination

In a much appreciated speech in the House of Lords, Lord Singh, Director NSO explained Sikh opposition to the concept of caste. He said: My Lords, speaking from a Sikh perspective, I give my full support to this amendment. Guru Nanak, the founder of the Sikh religion taught 'ask not a person's caste but look to the inner light within'.

At a time when even the shadow of a lower caste was said to pollute the food of a higher caste, he instituted the system of langar where people of all religions and social backgrounds were, and are, welcomed to share a gurdwara meal. The historic Golden Temple in Amritsar, recently visited by the Prime Minister David Cameron, has as he will have noticed, a door at each of its four sides signifying a welcome to all people regardless of religion, or supposed social difference.

My Lords, while I have the greatest respect for a sister faith, I also believe Hinduism without the old-fashioned concept caste will be infinitely stronger. Similar negative cultural clutter exists in all our different faiths. Their removal would help us to work together for a fairer society, and it is in this spirit that I support this amendment. The amendment to outlaw caste discrimination was passed by a small majority and has been incorporated into UK law.

SECTION 3 **HEALTH AND DISABILITY**

Disability

• **June 2012 Director spoke at conference to address the needs of people with disabilities at the House of Commons**

Speaking at the Meeting organised by the Group 'Include Me Too' The Director gave a Sikh perspective on meeting the needs of people with disabilities. He reminded those present of the need to provide resources to meet of those with disabilities and other vulnerable and socially or physically disadvantaged people and their families not out what's left of the national cake, but as a first call on our resources including importantly, the giving of our own time.

Sikhism and Organ Donation

The Asian community lags far behind the white community in the donation of organs for transplant although the need for transplants among Asians is twice as great. The NSO compiled a brochure to encourage organ donation in the Sikh community. Key points mentioned in the brochure are given below:

Sikh teachings place great emphasis on the importance of giving and putting others before oneself: Guru Nanak reminded Sikhs:

"Where self exists, there is no God. Where God exists, there is no self", and, "The true servants of God are those who serve Him through helping others."

The Sikh Gurus devoted their lives for the benefit of humanity, sometimes giving their lives helping others.

Seva [selfless service] is at the core of being a Sikh. The Sikh religion teaches that life continues after death in the soul, and not the physical body. The last act of giving and helping others through organ donation is both consistent with and in the spirit of Sikh teachings."

SECTION 4 **PRISON CHAPLAINCY**

The Director SCS would like to place on record his appreciation of the invaluable and dedicated contribution made by the Sikh Regional Managers and their colleagues providing seva as Sikh Ministers covering all prisons in their respective areas viz.

Region 1- North West Hardev Singh Sohal;

Region 2-North East & Region 3-Yorkshire/Humberside Mohinder Singh Chana

Region 4 Wales – Paramjit Singh of Cardiff

Region 5 – West Midlands Ajmer Singh;

Region 6; - East Midlands Jaswant Singh Heera ;

Region 7 - East of England and Region 8-South Central

Kulwant Singh Selhi;

Region 9 – Gurdial Singh

Region 10- Greater London, Deputy Director Inder Singh Chawla;

Region 11 –Kent & Sussex Makhan Singh Roy

The SCS gratefully acknowledges the dedicated commitment and service of the above and all the chaplains working with them. Particular thanks are due to all the voluntary administrative and liaison work done by Deputy Director Inder Singh and to Gagandeep Singh, who in addition to his work as full-time chaplain, had given much of his own time in his role of Recruitment and Training Manager for the SCS. We also gratefully acknowledge the role of NSO gurdwara management committees in arranging meetings, providing hospitality and support for the pastoral role of the SCS.

Deputy Director Inder Singh Chawla, apart from his role as the Sikh Minister at HMP Brixton, Holloway Huntercombe, has been actively associated involved in assisting the Director in providing advice on role and duties of Sessional Sikh Ministers (Chaplains) and Sikh Regional Managers, concerning Prison Service Instructions, assisting in the work of the Training and

Recruitment Manager Gagandeep Singh and Sikh ministers in the celebrations of major Sikh festivals in all prison, organising and participating in Regional Meetings of the SCS and meetings at various prisons throughout the country on specific Sikh issues. He also provided invaluable advice and assistance to Gagandeep Singh the Recruitment and Training Manager in the organising of training events, and occasionally deputising for the Director at meetings of the Chaplaincy Council. The Director represents the Sikh Chaplaincy Service on the national Chaplaincy Council.

Training and Recruitment

Training and Recruitment Manager Gagandeep Singh organised a very successful, two days, residential, Prison Sikh Chaplains Training conference at the Prison Service College Newbold Revels. This was done in partnership with Prison Chaplaincy Headquarters. Thirty five Sikh Chaplains and Regional manager took part from England and Wales. Sikh Governor Harsimran Singh Sethi, also contributed as a Trainer. Training sessions and meetings were also held in Bristol, Cardiff and Wolverhampton.

Gagandeep has been really keen, to get Bilingual and IT literate Sikh Chaplains on board. Recently we have had some success in this. We are glad to announce that now we have many Sikh Chaplains, who can access to the Prison IT Network.

We are also delighted that we now we have three full time, employed and one part time contracted Sikh Chaplains. We are still pressing with Prison Service to cluster prisons together and create a full time post of Sikh Chaplain there. At the moment most Sikh Chaplains are paid on sessional basis. If anyone reading this report is interested to join Sikh Chaplaincy Service, please contact Gagandeep Singh on gagandeep.singh@hmps.gsi.gov.uk . The eligibility criterion is:

The person should preferably be Amritdhari Sikh. The Person should be able to read, recite and interpret Gurbani and have sound knowledge of Sikh history and principles. Knowledge of Sikh Rehat Maryada (The Sikh code of conduct approved by Akal Takhat Sahib) in also required.

He/she needs to have a good command on English and Punjabi. Basic IT skills are also needed.

The paid training is provided by the Prison Service.

Extension of Work of SCS to Scotland

During the year, Deputy Director Inder Singh Chawla also took the initiative to extend the work of the SCS to Scotland. A Meeting was held in Glasgow Singh Sabha to discuss details a draft Memorandum of Understanding. The meeting was attended by S. Surjit Singh, Chowdhary, Dr. Inderjit Singh, Dr. Multani and S. Mela Singh Benning, office bearers of the Gurughar Management Committee. A formal meeting to launch the extension of the work of the SCS to Scotland will be held in the autumn of 2013.

SCS Offers thanks and Good Wishes to Rev William Noblett on his Retirement as Chaplain General to HM Prisons

The SCS and Guru Singh Sabha Hounslow invited Chaplain General William Noblett and members of the Prison HQ Chaplaincy Team to show appreciation of the invaluable contribution that William had made in the formation of a Multi faith Chaplaincy. In making the presentation of a beautiful cut glass memento inscribed with appreciation of William's role, Lord Singh, Director SCS recalled:

'William, before your appointment as Chaplain General some 19 years ago, there was virtually no Sikh chaplaincy and I remember the difficulty I had in finding suitable people to visit Sikhs in prison in different parts of the country. Attending Headquarters meetings was also a thankless task. I and the Hindu and Muslim representatives were virtually ignored and placed at one end of the table while the business of the meeting was discussed at the other end between the various Christian denominations and the Jewish representative. Unfortunately, the then Chaplain General seemed distinctly uncomfortable in our presence.

All this changed immediately with William's appointment. At our first meeting he met me with a huge grin and a perfectly pronounced greeting of Sat Siri Akal, and he told me of his high regard for Sikhs, particularly their wonderful hospitality. And he was equally warm and welcoming to other faiths. Against a background of tight financial constraints and widespread ignorance of other faiths William, with the help of a few dedicated people like Michelle, set up a multi-faith chaplaincy for all prisons in England and Wales. At Headquarters he established the Chaplaincy Council

William, none of this would have been possible without your enlightened and inspired lead. Sikhs and the wider British community owe you a tremendous debt. Now you have decided to move on, the Sikh chaplaincy team, Guru Singh Sabha Hounslow and the wider British Sikh community wish you and your family all the very best in health and happiness for the future'.

SECTION 5 **CHAPLAINCY IN THE ARMED FORCES**

Vaisakhi Armed Services Conference 20- 4-12

Report by Mandeep Kaur, Sikh Chaplain to the British Armed Services.

The Annual Chardi Kala, Sikh Conference for Armed Forces took place on 17-19 May at Amport House, home of the Armed Forces Chaplaincy Centre, Andover. Sikhs from all three services congregated for spiritual guidance, lectures on history and current affairs within the military environment.

Mandeep Kaur opening the event explained: "We have named this event Chardi-Kala: in Panjabi this translates to 'in high spirits, regardless,' so no matter what happens in one's life, despite their emotional state Sikhs will always place their trust in God's hands. They accept the fate that has been bestowed upon them and they endeavour to carry on in high spirits."

The objective of the conference was to promote and foster spiritual and moral values from a faith perspective, contributing to professional, personal and spiritual development. This is also an opportunity to develop morale and build confidence for serving personnel. This event is

the rare opportunity where Sikhs from the Royal Navy, Army and Royal Air Force to pray, learn and eat together. Over 40 people attended and stayed together for 3 days. They along with their families come and stay together to develop their knowledge about their faith and network with others. It also serves as a platform for people to raise any work issues, which could be discussed in the group to find the solution.

Chief of Staff Land Forces (COS LF) Major General T R Urch CBE did the opening address and passed his gratitude to the Sikhs serving the nation.

Lord and Lady Singh were invited by Mandeep Kaur, Sikh Chaplain to the Armed Services to be guest speakers at the annual Sikh Chardi Kala Conference to speak on the theme of Vaisakhi. Director NSO Lord Singh is the Endorsing Authority for the Sikh Armed Services Chaplaincy.

Lord Singh began his Address by thanking Sikh Chaplain Mandeep Kaur for all her hard work in organising the conference and for her kind words about his Life Peerage. He reminded the audience of the stirring events of the first Vaisakhi in 1699 when Guru Gobind Singh tested Sikhs to see if they had the courage to stand up for the egalitarian teachings of Sikhism without the guidance of further living Gurus. He recalled how the Panj Piare showed their readiness to give their lives for these beliefs. It was on this day that the Guru gave us the 5Ks or symbols of a distinct Sikh identity.

He continued: 'Looking back on our glorious history is both inspiring and necessary; like doing paath it helps in recharging of our spiritual batteries. But recharging batteries is not enough if we don't use them. Our spiritual batteries should be used to drive us as individuals and a community to live the life our Gurus taught, not simply for ourselves as a closed community, but as one that can give guidance, meaning and direction to society in general. We are all ambassadors' for the Gurus' teachings and in this role we should use inspiration from a glorious past, like the moving story of Vaisakhi to guide us to the future. Vaisakhi is all about new beginnings. Khalsa ji let us resolve today not only to live our teachings, but also to carry them into a wider world clearly in need of their sane guidance.

Deputy Director NSO (Education), The Lady Singh OBE, Dr Kanwaljit Kaur spoke briefly about her role as an Ofsted School inspector and in promoting gave guidance and support to Sikh Schools. Her mention that there had been a number of successful bids for new Sikh Free Schools was greeted with typical Sikh enthusiasm by all with 'Bole-So-Nehaal' being responded to with a loud "Sat Sri Akaal The spiritual 'cry' at the end of the standing prayer called the Ardas is also used by Sikhs as a jubilation cry and was also used as a war cry when Sikhs went into battle.

Lord Indarjit Singh and Lady Kanwaljit Kaur joined the delegates for the B B Q, followed by a very vibrant, positive and well needed discussion. This was the opportunity for serving Sikhs to connect with the Sikh Community through Lord Singh. Both Lord and Lady Singh were very generous in contributing their time to answer all the questions and hear the raised concerns. Their involvement was hugely appreciated.

Attendance at Armed Forces Celebration of HM the Queens Golden Jubilee.

The Director attended a celebration of the Queens Golden Jubilee at Windsor Castle with impressive displays by army and navy personnel followed by a breath-taking display of aeronautics and formation flying.

SECTION 6 **EDUCATION**

Working with the Department for Education (DfE) and Ofsted

NSO Deputy Director Education Dr Kanwaljit Kaur OBE writes:

The NSO is recognised by the DfE as the Endorsing Authority for all Sikh schools and inspects these schools for the teaching of religious education under Section 48. The Deputy Director has been Her Majesty's Additional Inspector since the formation of Ofsted for state maintained and independent schools as well as Sikh schools.

Guidance and support

The number of Sikh schools has grown. Letters of strong support from the NSO helped in two new schools getting permission to open. Guru Nanak Free School is opening in September 2013 and another school is looking for suitable premises and will open soon.

Inspections

Guru Nanak Academy in Hayes was inspected in March 2013 and was judged as an 'Outstanding School', the highest grade for Ofsted. It was a real pleasure to see its outstanding caring ethos. Students' results in GCSE in Sikhism were 100% A*-C.

The Head, S Rajinder Singh Sandhu modestly refused to take credit for these results saying that the school's success was due to the way his staff focus on the teachings of the Guru Granth Sahib and the guidance contained in the Sikh Rehat Maryada. The Academy has also started teaching of RE for AS Level.

The Deputy Director Education is a member of the DfE Faith Group and ensures that the Sikh schools' requirements are met. The Director also attended a number of meetings with staff at the DfE to assist in the understanding of the key aspects of Sikh teachings.

The Director NSO attended the inaugural meeting of a new All Party Parliamentary Group on Religious Education.

Teaching of Sikhism in main stream schools

NSO is active in giving training in Sikhism in schools and colleges. The Director spoke at some schools on their Leavers' Days to an appreciative audience of children and teachers. Other members of the NSO have also kindly given up their time to visit schools to do assemblies on Sikhism and give training to teachers. The NSO is grateful for their contributions.

Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education (SACRE)

NSO is continuing to support SACREs to find Sikh members throughout the country. NSO representative on the RE Council. Kanvar Ranvir Singh adds:

'Since representing the NSO on the Religious Education Council I have learned a great deal about Religious Education in the country. The REC is the umbrella organisation for teacher organisations, advisors, faith groups and others interested in religious education. I quickly joined the sub-committee charged with overseeing a review of Religious Education parallel to the National Curriculum review and was able to emphasise the Spiritual, Moral, Social and

Cultural dimension. However, it seems that the final document may well remove the phrase 'Principal religions' which includes Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam and Judaism as well as Sikhism. Moreover, the proposed requirement or recommendation to teach only two non-Christian perspectives, one of which may be Humanist, would be detrimental to the understanding of different faiths. This will be resisted by the NSO.'

SECTION 7 **THE MEDIA**

JK Rowling on Sikh teachings

JK. Rowling's, new novel, *The Casual Vacancy*, features a Sikh family at the heart of its plot said that she has been deeply influenced by Sikhism because of its stress on gender equality. So, when she thought of introducing a "family of colour" in a predominantly white setting of her novel, "they had to be Sikhs." It was her way of paying tribute to Sikhism.

Speaking to the BBC as prior to the book, Ms Rowling said what attracted her to Sikhism was its "egalitarianism".

"It's an amazing religion. My interest was sparked years and years and years ago when I was still in my twenties – and a girl I worked with briefly came from a Sikh family. We only ever had one serious conversation on the subject but it has stuck with me. She told me about the fact that men and women were explicitly described as equal in the holy book and that women are not excluded from any part of religious rites or observances. I couldn't believe it," she said.

The Director referred to the words of the celebrated author of the Harry Potter series in a 'Thought for the Day' broadcast and also wrote to Ms Rowling thanking her for her kind words. In her response she requested literature on Sikhism, which was duly sent and also expressed a desire to visit a gurdwara in the near future.

Comment: It sometimes takes an outsider to remind us of the relevance of Gurus' teachings to life in the 21st century

Complaint to BBC over the use of the word Asian

The NSO complained to the BBC over the inappropriate use of the word Asian to attribute responsibility for criminal or questionable behaviour by members of the Muslim community. The concern was that this word unfairly also spread the blame for such behaviour onto wholly innocent members of the British Hindu and Sikh communities. The National Council of Hindu Temples and the Sikh Media Monitoring Group linked to the NSO also expressed their concern.

The first complaint was about an item on the morning of 19 April. The report was about the practice of cousin marriages in what the report described as the Asian community. The director NSO writing on 6 August 2012, commented I'm sure your reporter would have been aware, the practice is almost exclusively confined to members of the Muslim faith and the use of the word Asian in this context unfairly smears Sikhs and others.

The second complaint referred to the use of the word Asian to describe sex grooming gangs in the Bradford area who were in fact all Muslim. He added that the use of the word Asian in this way strengthens the belief of your more ignorant listener that we are all the same. It is this sort of ignorance that led to the killing of 6 Sikhs at a place of worship in Wisconsin.

Response of the BBC

The response of the BBC was to say that the complaint was not upheld. They then went on to contradict themselves saying that the complaint raised important issues, which would be taken on board by the editorial team.

Comment: Following the complaint, the NSO have noted that the BBC have stopped their use of the use of the word Asian in a camouflaging way of avoiding offending the Muslim community. The Director NSO adds that most Muslims are decent law abiding citizens, but they and the rest of society must recognise and address disproportionate bad behaviour.

Complaint to BBC Asian Network

In March 2012 the NSO complained about a broadcast on BBC Asian Network. A text message from a listener was read out complaining about the “incredibly offensive” way the presenters had suggested that Sikhism was “made up from other religions i.e Islam and Hinduism”. The DJ, known simply as Nihal on air, replied: “I’m sorry with all due respect, it is, absolutely it is.” He added: “It came around in the 15th and 16th Centuries in India, how could it not be influenced? He went on: “A Muslim laid the stone to the holiest places, with all due respect I know more about your religion than you do.” [the reality is that Guru Nanak asked a Muslim saint to lay the foundation stone simply as a gesture of respect for other religions in the same way as the 5th Guru Guru Arjan, placed doors at the four sides of the the Golden Temple to emphasise a welcome to all people from any spiritual or geographic direction.]

The NSO’s first complaint on the matter was not upheld, so it was escalated in April 2013. Following the second complaint, the channel’s head of news, Kevin Silverton, wrote to the Network admitting that the discussion had been “less than satisfactory”.

“The Nihal phone-in deals with difficult subjects on a daily basis and very occasionally we don’t get the tone exactly right.

“In this case at the end of an hour of challenging debate, the presenter was unusually forthright about a point of view that some listeners have contacted us about concerning the influence other religions had on Sikhism ... We’ve stressed to him and the team the importance to retain an impartial tone on these kind of matters and to back up assertions with solid research where at all possible (considering the live and unpredictable nature of such a show).

“We will monitor both these points closely.”

The complaint and subsequent response from Kevin Silverton were reported in the Daily Telegraph.

BBC Trust Consultation on Religious broadcasting

In January 2013, Press Secretary Hardeep Singh attended a consultation meeting held by the BBC Trust. The meeting was specific to religious/faith based broadcasting.

The Director attends regular meetings of the BBC Trust on Religious Broadcasting.

NSO Press Releases 2012

•5th of April 2012

Lord Howell of Guildford responds to concerns raised by Lord Singh of Wimbledon: Balwant Singh Rajoana's case discussed in Parliament

Lord Howell expresses concern about the Indian death penalty in response to Lord Singh's tabled question.

•31st of May 2012

Lord Singh of Wimbledon highlights British Sikh contribution to the United Kingdom

Lord Singh mentions British Sikh achievements, highlighting individuals from Sport and Industry in a debate in the Lords.

•14th of August 2012

Sikhs close to European wide screening without the need for removing turbans

Positive developments in screening at airports further to correspondence with the Department of Transport and Earl Atlee.

•20th of August 2012

SEARCHING OF TURBANS

Following consultation with the Transport Minister, Earl Atlee, Lord Singh produced a 'Suggested letter to be carried by Sikh Travellers'. The letter detailed in an NSO Press Release, explained the religious significance of the Sikh turban and the importance of treating it with due sensitivity.

•28th of Oct 2012

Lord's Private Member's Bill to ensure Sharia and other religious courts and tribunals comply with Equality Legislation: Lord Singh gives a Sikh perspective. The debate focused in on religious courts in particular sharia courts in Britain, which often give an unfair disadvantage to women.

•25th of November 2012

Lord's Singh introduced and led a well-received debate on the Role of Religion in Society emphasizing the importance of religion and family values.

[Prior to the debate, Baroness Flather had indicated that as an atheist, she would criticize the role of religion. When it came to her turn to speak, she threw aside her notes and said: 'Lord Singh is very lucky; he belongs to the best religion to meet the complex challenges of today'. In her response at the conclusion of the debate, the Minister, Baroness Warsi, paid tribute to the national and international work being done by Lord Singh to promote harmony and understanding between different faiths.]

•22nd of December 2012

Lord Singh of Wimbledon touches on Christian, Sikh and Muslim teachings in Lord's Israeli Arab debate. The Debate was introduced by the Lord Bishop of Exeter.

•30th of March 2013

Lord Singh of Wimbledon expresses his concerns about Western arms fueling the Syrian crisis.

Lord Singh letter to the Times was published 'western arms fuel Syrian misery', this followed publication of another letter the previous month on 'The use of drones and the integrity of sovereign nations' by the USA

Thought for the Day Broadcasts

The Director continued broadcasting on the popular BBC's 'Thought for the Day' slot on BBC Radio 4 throughout the year. Additionally special broadcasts were made on the occasions of Vaisakhi and Guru Nanak's birthday.

November 2012 Director gave a Sikh perspective on a BBC broadcast on the 70th anniversary of the Beveridge Report which laid the foundation of the modern Health Service.

SECTION 8

SIKH FUNCTIONS

• May 2012. The Director NSO was chief guest at the Annual Celebration of Maharaja Jassa Singh Ramgarhia Day in Leicester

He thanked the Managing Committee for inviting him and their congratulations on him being awarded a peerage and expressed the hope that other Sikhs would soon be representing the community in Parliament. The story of S Jassa Singh's stirring achievements provided inspiration for all Sikhs today. He expressed some concern that Sikhs today were becoming too inward looking concerned with protecting their rights in a hostile world. The reality was that the teachings of our Gurus had much to offer today's world and true respect would follow naturally from us looking outwardly in working with other communities to promote a wider understanding of Sikh teachings on respect for other religions, human rights, personal responsibility and our Gurus' emphasis on the importance of working for a fairer society for all

• The Director was invited Attended as guest speaker at World Punjabi Organisation Dinner to honour Preneet Kaur, Indian government minister for external affairs. He expressed his and the Sikh community's appreciation of all the work she was doing in her role and for her positive stance over the harassment of a Sikh scientist by Polish Border Guards at Warsaw airport.

• Attended as Chief guest at the official opening of the new Baba Deep Singh gurdwara in Birmingham

• Grooming of Children and Teenagers. Seminar arranged by Hounslow Guru Singh Sabha and the local Police: Speaking at a seminar, the Director emphasised the importance of the family in preventing vulnerable children going astray .He said: 'It's in the family that children learn about the teachings of religion on responsible living and how to get on with others. The family is an ideal training ground for outside relationships and interaction with the wider world. If husband and wife can learn to work together despite occasional irritations and put up with the challenging behaviour of children; if children can learn to put up with the unreasonable behaviour of siblings and the infuriating and sometimes embarrassing behaviour of parents, they are fully equipped to seek genuine relationships with others and take on the challenges of wider society'. He warned that if children did not find this love and security in the home, they would become more vulnerable to seeking false and often dangerous relationships with others.

• Director NSO invited to speak as Chief Guest at the Vaisakhi Opening of Baba Deep Singh Gurdwara Birmingham Lord Singh recounted the story of Vaisakhi and continued: 'Looking back on our glorious history is both inspiring and necessary; it helps in recharging of our spiritual batteries. But recharging batteries is not enough if we don't use them. Our spiritual batteries should be used to drive us as individuals and a community to live the life our Gurus taught, not simply for ourselves as a closed community, but as one that can give guidance, meaning and direction to the rest of society'.

• Director NSO invited as Chief Guest at the AGM of the UK Sikh Doctors and Dentists Association on the importance of Organ Donation. In his Address he said that as a member of the BMA Medical Ethics Committee for a number of years he found that the non-judgemental was invaluable in making ethical decisions. He was encouraged

to learn that the Sikh Doctors and Dentists Association were embracing the need to increase organ donation in our community which like other Asian communities receives more organs than it donates. He added that there were cultural inhibitions which get confused with religion. But there is absolutely nothing in the Sikh religion against organ removal and donation-particularly against donation after death. Our Gurus gave even their lives to help others.

• April 2012 Talk to Lions Club Ealing Vaisakhi

The Director NSO in his Address said that in the story of Vaisakhi, we are reminded that we have an exceptionally inspiring and glorious history wrapped in courage and adherence to high ideals, He urged that Sikhs use this inspiration to give a lead to wider society in addressing social problems and working for a fairer and more peaceful society.

• May 2012 Lions Club Fairlop

Speaking as Chief Guest, Lord Singh, Director NSO said Sikh teachings remind us of the many opportunities we all have to make a difference to society and he complimented the Lions Club on their impressive voluntary work in setting up and providing financial support for eye camps, funding cancer research and the routine testing for diabetes in developing parts of the world.

SECTION 9 **LAW**

The Defamation Act

This was passed in June 2013, with the four-year libel reform campaign bringing together hundreds of individuals' and community organisations. The campaign was spearheaded by a coalition of organisations, English Pen, Sense About Science and Index on Censorship. This was the most significant reform of the law since 1843.

The NSO's Press Secretary, Hardeep Singh was one of the leading campaigners joining the efforts of the Libel Reform Campaign, alongside other libel defendants in high profile cases, like Simon Singh and Dr. Peter Wilmshurst. His case became a cause celebre, was mentioned in Parliament on a number of occasions and made the national news, including the Telegraph, Times, Guardian, Independent and Radio 4's Law in Action.

Hardeep had been sued for libel between 2007-2011 by a 'holy man' in India called His Holiness Sant Baba Jeet Singh Maharaj, leader of a group called the 'Nirmal Sikh Faith'. He had written an article for the now defunct Sikh Times newspaper expressing concerns about the baba, distortion of Sikh teachings and a dispute concerning ownership of three gurdwaras, in Bradford, Birmingham and High Wycombe. The Sikh Times buckled under the threat and apologised leaving Hardeep to fight the case alone.

He successfully defended the case in 2011, the Director of the Network, Lord Singh was expert witness for the defence.

Lord Singh and Hardeep Singh met with Simon Singh and the Libel Reform Campaign in the run up to the Defamation Act. Lord Singh subsequently raised concerns about the abuse of libel law during a number of committee stage debates in the House of Lords.

In May 2013, Hardeep spoke about the campaign and his case, alongside other speakers at the Libel Reform Celebration. They included Simon Singh, Dave Gorman, Professor Brian Cox and Dara O Briain, Rob Ffello MP, Dr. Peter Wilmshurst and others.

On the passing of the Defamation Act Hardeep told English Pen:

“The Libel Reform Campaign has made history by challenging the status quo. It has been a pleasure to be part of the lobby for change and celebrate this monumental success. Taking on a wealthy foreigner in the libel courts and facing ruin is an emotional roller coaster ride, the community of libertarians who stood by me acted like a soothing balm through the tumult of four years in the courts. I consider them all friends for life. I’d like to extend my congratulations to Index on Censorship, Sense About Science and English Pen, as well as all of those who supported me throughout my journey taking on ‘His Holiness’. The Defamation Act will only make it fairer for others who want to speak out on matters of public interest and hold those in power accountable. This is a milestone which will be remembered by future generations to come.”

Comment: The NSO is committed to challenging those who distort Sikh teachings and try and censor free debate on matters of public interest.

SECTION 10 **PARLIAMENTARY ACTIVITIES**

• April 2012 Director NSO tabled a written question asking HM Government whether they intend to discuss with the government of India their commitment to human rights following the sentence of capital punishment in the case of Balwant Singh Rajoana. In his reply, the minister, Rt Hon Lord Howell of Guildford said we are deeply concerned by reports that India intends to execute Mr Balwant Singh. We are following developments closely.

• May 2012 Director spoke on a debate initiated by the Chief Rabbi, Lord Sacks noting the contribution of faith communities in Britain to the enrichment of life in the country.

• 2912 Director wrote to Transport Minister Earl Attlee about the need for sensitivity and respect for the Sikh turban in airport security searches.

• October 2012 Director spoke in support of a private member’s bill to curb the use of Sharia Courts in the UK

• October 2012 Lord Singh intervened in oral questions on Education to urge that Religion be included as part of the new EBacc Syllabus.

• November 2012

Lord Singh led a debate in the Lords on the Role of Religion in the life of the UK. He was enthusiastically supported by members from all sides of the House by the Chief Rabbi Lord Sacks and Lord Janner from the Jewish community, the Bishop of Bath and Wells, Lord Popat speaking for Hindus, Lord Billimoria for the Zoroastrians, Lord Griffiths, Baroness Berridge and Lord Curry Christian, and several Muslim speakers. In her response Baroness Warsi Secretary of State at the Department of Communities thanked Lord Singh for initiating this well informed and interesting debate. She also paid tribute to Lord Singh for all he was doing in his invaluable support of national and international interfaith work.

• December 2012 Lord Singh spoke on the impressive contribution of Asians from Uganda to British life.

• December 2012 In a debate over concerns over the less than equitable treatment of some Israeli Arab Nationals, Lord Singh questioned the viability of a two state solution to the Arab Israeli conflict and urged that serious consideration be given to the creation of a single state where both Palastinians and Jews enjoyed equality of opportunity and religious freedom.

• January 2013 Lord Singh spoke on the Defamation Bill urging greater protection for those expressing concerns about the activities of wealthy cults from abroad.

June 9th 2013

Lord Singh, Director of the Network of Sikh Organisations, supports amendment opposing Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Bill

In a speech earlier this week, Lord Singh of Wimbledon the Director of the Network of Sikh Organisations (NSO) spoke powerfully in a debate in support of a proposed amendment to the Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Bill tabled by Lord Dear.

June 29th 2013

In two separate debates recently, Lord Singh of Wimbledon the Director of the Network of Sikh Organisations (NSO) gives a Sikh view, during the Committee stage of the Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Bill.

23rd of May 2013 Murder of a Soldier in Woolwich

Following the brutal murder of Drummer Rigby a British soldier executed on the streets of London and heightened community concerns, Lord Singh of Wimbledon, The Director of The Network of Sikh Organisations (NSO) said:

“All members of the Sikh community condemn this cruel outrage and we extend our heartfelt sympathies to the grieving family and their friends.” He added

“I am sure that all Sikhs will appreciate a prompt call made to me by Baroness Warsi, government Minister for faith and Communities expressing concern that, as after 9/11, Sikhs and Sikh places of worship may again be the focus of mistaken identity reprisal attacks. I warmly thanked the Minister for her concern and agreed to alert members of our community to be vigilant.”

19th of May 2013

Early signs of success in campaign against use of the word ‘Asian’ to describe those convicted of sexual grooming

Following on from a series of high profile convictions of predominantly Pakistani men in places like Rochdale, reports including those published by the BBC chose to describe those convicted of sexual grooming as ‘Asian.’ This caused significant disquiet amongst many British Sikhs and Hindus. In 2012 the Network of Sikh Organisations (NSO) led a campaign challenging the vague description, galvanizing support from both the Hindu Forum and Hindu Council of Britain.

23rd of April 2013

Lord Singh of Wimbledon highlights Guru Nanak’s condemnation of the caste system: Lords vote in favour of outlawing caste discrimination.

The House of Lords voted in favour of an amendment to the Equality Bill, which outlawed caste discrimination in Britain. Lord Singh of Wimbledon the Director of contributed to the

debate, challenging previously uninformed views about Sikhism's position on caste discrimination.

12th of April 2013 Deliberate distortion of the Gurus teachings

The NSO expressed concerns about the views of those in the Sikh community opposing the anti-caste legislation.

11th of April 2012

NSO supports BBC Religion & Ethics with forthcoming documentary 'The Story of the Turban.' Following lobbying the BBC for more documentaries on Sikhism, the NSO was delighted at the success of the lobbying.

Book Review

Warrior Saints: Four Centuries of Sikh Military History Volume 1

The first edition of *Warrior Saints: Three Centuries of the Sikh Military Tradition*, published in 1999 was a monumental success. It was launched after a related exhibition, *The Art of the Sikh Kingdoms* shown in the Victoria and Albert (V&A) Museum, in London. Like other British Sikhs, it was the first time I'd been able to fathom, through the power of image, eyewitness accounts and photography the magnificent military heritage of my forefathers. Let me be clear *Warrior Saints* was unprecedented: it brought childhood stories of Sikh chivalry narrated by my late grandparents to life. Regrettably I gave my copy away and was unable to procure another version until now. Nearly fourteen years on, the newly revised edition published by Kashi House (based over two volumes), is redolent with the 'warrior ethos' of the first, but brimming with lots of new revelations and this edition offers ninety illustrations. Reading this volume makes the reader contemplate some important questions. What was it that gave Sikhs a stoical constitution to fight tyranny against the odds? How is the transformation of Sikhism into the 'sword arm' of India relevant in the context of modernity?

This book takes you on a journey beginning with the origins of Sikhism from Guru Nanak to Gobind Singh, to the cosmopolitan empire of the sagacious one-eyed Maharaja Ranjit Singh, through to the treacherous Anglo-Sikh wars, leading to the eventual annexation of the Punjab. The first thing to point out cannot be discovered in the book. Many of the researchers, enthusiasts and writers at Kashi House who have worked tirelessly on this volume, have sacrificed their professional careers in doing so. In previous incarnations, some have worked for big auditors whilst others have served Parliamentarians. I find this instantly humbling, giving the work an entirely new perspective. The geeks amongst us will have immediately picked up on the fact that the latest offering has been retitled, providing readers with another century of history – also Sikh Military 'Tradition' has been changed to Sikh Military 'History.'

This is down to the fact that the earlier Gurus have now been covered in much more detail, highlighting for example Guru Nanak's stand against Islamism and skillfully weaving this narrative into the subsequent militarisation of the fledgling community by later Gurus. One of the most startling images, which for me is both equally inspirational and macabre is titled: 'Indomitable Khalsa: Sikhs Clash With The Mughal Army.' Here we see soldiers of Guru Gobind Singh removing wounded decapitated heads in the frenzy of battle, as a last act of defiance against the unrelenting enemy. The image epitomises the unflinching self-belief in

standing up for righteousness and of course represents the ultimate sacrifice, martyrdom. The portrayal here of resolute opposition to tyranny will no doubt resonate amongst many, Sikhs and non-Sikhs alike.

There's a wonderful account of Baghel Singh's unopposed march to Delhi in 1783, gaining a settlement with the Mughal emperor Shah Alam II. Here we learn of how the emperor's wives (begams) intrigued with Sikh women, arrange an introduction. According to accounts, the countenance of some Sikh women was not dissimilar to the Nihangs (coming from the Persian word crocodile) or warriors. The authors tell us 'Their appearance and masculine demeanor left the begams astounded.' For me, this is the first revelation, when the authors talk of Warrior Saints they are not just referring to men. Adopting hawkish habits under persecution was ubiquitous amongst the sexes, women often being the backbone of the Khalsa or brotherhood of the pure.

What I really enjoyed was the detailed historical accounts that illuminate otherwise obscure facets of history. For example Ranjit Singh's passage from boy to ruler was far from straightforward. He survived an assassination attempt at his father's funeral, thanks to the intervention of an influential descendant of Guru Nanak, Sahib Singh Bedi. Through the eyewitness accounts of Fakir Aziz-ud-din, Ranjit Singh's foreign minister, we learn of the lack of reverence Phula Singh, the mighty Akali (timeless) warrior, had for the Maharaja, when he shouts from his balcony 'O you one-eyed man, who gave you that buffalo to ride on?' making reference to the Maharaja's elephant passage under his balcony. Only to hear the humble retort 'your honor it's a gift from you.' What's fascinating is the way in which these legendary personalities are brought to life. You get a palpable sense of the pugnacious demeanor of Phula Singh, whilst getting a feel for the politically astute nature of Ranjit Singh, who needed the unruly Akali-Nihangs as elite troops for the Empire's most dangerous military expeditions. Phula Singh's heroic death in the face of insurmountable odds is also dramatically captured in verse.

Something else that stood out was a magnificent painting of the renowned General Hari Singh 'Nalwa' on an elephant with his army in the Punjab Hills. We learn about how he first meets Ranjit Singh, the reason he was given the epithet 'Nalwa' and how he spent years subduing the intractable Pashtuns, whilst tackling the jihadist Sayyid Ahmed Shah. The authors inform of us of how Hari Singh remarkably fought a tiger bare handed. Needless to say, it's hard for many of us to imagine a man wrestling a tiger, overpowering the big cat, then killing it. The closest I can get to this is in the movie *Gladiator* – but even Russell Crowe manages to avoid such a mauling encounter within the walls of the Coliseum. Remarkably, we also learn of European soldiers, some mercenaries, who took employment in Ranjit Singh's army. Images of Alexander Haughton Campbell Gardner the Scottish-American 'Akali' in Sikh regalia stand out, but other notable historical characters include General Jean Francois Allard (a former soldier in Napoleon's army) and the Italian Jean Baptiste Ventura. You get a feel of the cosmopolitan nature of the Sikh empire, as well as its equal opportunities employment policy.

As with all Empires, the emergence and rise are inevitably followed by decay, decline and eventual downfall. The authors detail the strategic importance of Ranjit's Empire, a convenient buffer between British and Afghan interests, and the eventual betrayal from within, at critical moments during the Anglo-Sikh wars. What was poignant was the correspondence between Lord Hardinge (the Governor of India) and the response from the British Prime Minister Sir Robert Peel. The British had come close to defeat during the battle of Ferozeshah.

On a recent interview on BBC Asian Network, one of the authors Parmjit Singh, describes Warrior Saints as an “epic story” and “far grittier” than the original. He summarised with the headline “Victorians subvert the world’s youngest religion.” Indeed, the book delves into British exploits in the Indian subcontinent, in the spirit of such books as Soldier Sahibs written by Indian born historian Charles Allen. For me, it embodies much more. This work not only champions Sikh history, it also adeptly avoids getting drawn into any messy political controversies. For example at no point are there parallels drawn between the historic battles against Islamic totalitarianism or jihadists, to the clash of civilisations we now see made reference to in the modern world. Nor do we see a bemoaning reflection of how the British usurped the Sikh Kingdoms through guile and treachery amongst Sikh ranks. Warrior Saints is quintessentially a wonderful preservation of a rich heritage and celebration of a proud military tradition, spanning four centuries. We learn how ordinary people achieved extraordinary things and how some within a persecuted nation, subjugated by foreign invaders, meteorically emerged from saddle to sovereignty.

Hardeep Singh is a freelance journalist and broadcaster and the Press Secretary for the Network of Sikh Organisations.

Reflections From Gurubani

*That man who in the midst of grief is free from grieving,
And free from fear, and free from the snare of delight,
Nor is covetous of gold that he knows to be dust,
Who is neither a backbiter nor a flatterer,
Nor has greed in his heart, nor vanity, nor any worldly attachment,
Who remains at his centre unmoved by good and ill fortune,
Who is indifferent to the world's praise and blame
And discards every wishful fantasy
Accepting his lot in a disinterested fashion,
Not worked upon by lust or by wrath,
In such a man God dwelleth.*

*The man on whom the Grace of the Guru alights
Understands the way of conduct:
His soul, O Nanak, is mingled with the Lord
As water mingles with water!*

Guru Granth Sahib page 633

NISHAAN

ILLUSTRATED JOURNAL OF THE SIKHS

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Contact :

S. Pushpinder Singh

THE NISHAAN

D-43, Sujan Singh Park

New Delhi 110003 India

Tel: (91-11) 4617234 Fax: 4628615

E-mail: nishaan@lycos.com

website: www.nishaan.com

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THE EURO SUISSE FOUNDATION

10 / F ,Onfem Tower, 29 Wyndham Street,
Central Hong Kong

Fax: + 852 2850 8952

Email: tesf-hk@eurosuisse.com