

Editorial

The year 2008 marks the third centennial of the passing away of Guru Gobind Singh (Guru 1675-1708), the tenth and last personal Guru, whose hand has indelibly shaped the destiny of the Sikhs. The Khalsa Panth, their self-designation, the code of belief and practice (*rahit*) they aspire to follow, the four most sacred places (Patna, Anandpur, Damdama, and Nanderh) they make pilgrimage to, the system of dual authority of the Guru Granth and the Guru Panth they cherish, and the vision of Sikh sovereignty (*raj karega Khalsa*) they sing about in their daily prayers, emerged during the period of Guru Gobind Singh's leadership.

While the global Sikh community's commemoration of the tercentennial of Guru Gobind Singh's remained focused on the elevation day (*Gurgaddi Divas*) of the Guru Granth, we at the *Journal of Punjab Studies* decided to dedicate a special issue to his life and times and update scholarly understanding of his position and role in Sikh history. The seven contributors to this volume belong to the disciplines of history, literature, and religion, and they range from senior figures in the field to the fresh voice of a doctoral candidate. They are associated with academic institutions in the Punjab, Britain, and the United States. Here is homage to an illustrious figure in Sikh history from those who come from three disciplines, three generations, and three continents.

The issue of the Journal is divided into three sections. The opening set includes essays dealing with the life and legacy of Guru Gobind Singh. It begins with J.S. Grewal's interpretation of the Guru's life and mission in the light of the latest research in the field. The second essay by Indu Banga, a scholar of medieval Punjab, postulates a close connection between the ideology, and achievements of the Khalsa Panth in the century following the Guru's death. In the third essay, Reeta Grewal, an expert on urban history, surveys the story of Anandpur, Guru Gobind Singh's town, over the course of the past three centuries.

The second section comprises five essays containing translations of seven compositions of Guru Gobind Singh's period. In the opening essay, Ami P. Shah offers her translations of the *Jap* ("Meditation"), *Savaiyye*, ("Panegyrics"), and *Benati Chaupai* ("Supplication in *chaupai* meter"), all of which are part of the Sikh liturgy. The second essay presents John Stratton Hawley's translation of the *Shabad Hazare*, ("Hymns Multifaceted"), the only composition of Guru Gobind Singh that is set to *rags* (music) in the mode of the Guru Granth. The third essay contains Christopher Shackle's translation of Guru Gobind Singh's *Zafarnama* ("Letter of Victory") claiming the failure of the Mughal emperor to administer justice to his subjects.

In the next essay, Ami P. Shah introduces the *Ugradanti* ("The Fierce Toothed [Goddess]"), a composition that both the Nihangs and the

Namdharis, two small groups within the Sikh community that differ from each other in fundamental ways, recite in their daily prayers. The composition appears in the early manuscripts of the *Dasam Granth* as well as in the late eighteenth-century anthologies of daily Sikh prayers (*gutkas*). The poet dreams about the rise of the third community (*tisar panth*/the Sikhs) and its wresting of political control from Hindus and Muslims in the subcontinent.

In the last essay in this section, John Stratton Hawley and myself introduce the translation of the *Parchi Mirabai Ki*, ("Introduction to Mirabai"), which appears in the *Pothi Prem Ambodh: Parchia Prem Bhagata Kia* ("Book of Ocean of Love: Introductions to the Saints of Love") composed in 1693. The Sikhs enjoy the distinction of being the first community to commit to writing a composition of Mirabai, a Vaishnava saint from Rajasthan, in 1604 in Amritsar. The Sikh court at Anandpur in the 1690s seems to have provided the setting in which the first narrative about her life was created and recited.

The last section presents information pertaining to the source materials related to the period of Guru Gobind Singh. In the first essay, I present a detailed survey of the material and literary sources on the life and times of Guru Gobind Singh. I am particularly gratified to be able to introduce two copper plates and two *hukumname* ("letters of command"). In addition, I present contemporary evidence that indicates the need for revising our dating of key events and literary sources of the period. The closing essay of the volume includes the facsimiles of the compositions whose translations appear in Section II of this volume. The facsimiles of the five compositions that are part of Sikh devotional practices come from the *Anandpur Birh*, the earliest manuscript of the writings of this period (1690s), the *Ugradanti* is taken from the *Patna Birh* (1698), and the *Parchi Mirabai Ki* comes from a neatly calligraphed manuscript of 1787.

This collection of essays presents a new understanding of the life of Guru Gobind Singh, a detailed discussion of his legacy, and fresh and accurate translations of core compositions from his period. In addition, we are pleased to present the first ever translation of the *Parchi Mirabai Ki* to our readers. All the translations that appear in this volume take full cognizance of the texts available in the early manuscripts, and this aspect adds to their value as the critical renderings of these important compositions. The concluding chapters look ahead to more scholars joining the field and contributing to this growing body of work!

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