

SIKH HERITAGE OF NEPAL



Gurdwara Guru Nanak Satsang, Kupondol, Kathmandu



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07

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FOREWORD

The 550th birth anniversary of Guru Nanak Dev Ji provides us a special reason to celebrate the Sikh Heritage of Nepal.

Guru Nanak Dev Ji travelled through Nepal as part of his Udasis. Nanak Math in the Balaju area of Kathmandu has a peepal tree under which he is said to have meditated. Archival records appear to show a large land grant from the King for this shrine, where a Mahant presides. The shrine is, however, largely unknown and celebrated author, Desmond Doig, called it the “forgotten shrine of the Sikhs”. Kathmandu also boasts a few more shrines linked to the Udasi tradition with several hand written copies of the Guru Granth Sahib.

Guru Nanak Dev Ji’s travels in Nepal are said to also cover western Nepal, the Terai, Janakpur, areas around the Kosi River and even Tengbuche Monastery in the Everest region. Dr. Dalvinder Singh Grewal has done pioneering work in this regard with famous mountaineer M.S. Kohli noting that Guru Nanak Dev Ji is revered in Tengbuche as Guru Rimpoche.

The Sikh connection with Nepal developed during the reign of Maharaja Ranjit Singh when the armies of the Sikh and Gorkha courts fought inconclusively in the Kangra region. The valor of the Gorkhas saw the Lahore Court start recruiting them and even today Nepalese serving in the Indian Army are colloquially referred to as ‘Lahures’.

Later, when Maharani Jind Kaur escaped from the British, she came to Nepal and lived here for several years. Accompanying her were Sikhs, many of who settled down in the area around Nepalgunj. Retaining their Sikh identity, including Gurdwaras in the villages of their concentration, they are a community largely forgotten in the annals of the Sikh Diaspora.

In modern times, Sikhs have played pioneering roles in Nepal, especially as transporters, engineers, doctors, police officers, teachers, educationists, pilots and even in fashion design. Some of their stories are documented in this publication.

In the 1970s and 1980s, the Sikh community in Nepal numbered more than a few thousand with a grand Gurudwara in Kuponhole (Kathmandu) along with smaller Gurdwaras in Birgunj, Nepalgunj, Krishnanagar and Butwal. It was also enriched by Nepalese like Sardar Gurbaksh Singh embracing Sikhism.

In 2004 Nepal became one of the few countries that issued legal tender with a Sikh connection. This was in the form of a commemorative coin on the occasion of the 400th anniversary of the birth of the Khalsa Panth. This year, on the occasion of the 550th birth anniversary of Guru Nanak Dev Ji, the Nepal Rastra Bank is issuing more legal tender with a Sikh connection - three commemorative coins, two in silver with denomination of Nepali Rupees 2,500 and 1,000 and a cupronickel coin with a face value of Nepali Rupees 100.

Serendipity has played its own role in the bringing out of this publication on Sikh Heritage of Nepal.

Sardar Surjit Singh Majithia, a Sikh, was the first Ambassador of India to Nepal and established the Embassy in 1947. His arrival and departure, by aero-plane, saw the first uses of Gauchar in Kathmandu as a landing strip. It is now Tribhuvan International Airport.

Today, seventy years later, I am the only other Sikh to have been appointed Ambassador of India to Nepal. And, in my time the number of Sikh officers even reached the auspicious number of five before Second Secretary Gurjeet Singh and First Secretary Ruby Jaspreet Sharma left on posting. Such number of Sikhs in the Embassy has not been seen before.

Gurjeet Singh and Major (Dr.) Rajvinder Singh were both involved in this project but my very special thanks go to First Secretary Prabhjeet Singh Gulati. He has been the driving force in making this publication possible by painstakingly covering the various places, helping develop the write-up and secure the various photographs. He has also been hugely instrumental in getting the Nepal Rastra Bank to issue special commemorative coins to celebrate the 550th birth anniversary of Guru Nanak Dev Ji.

And, then Achuyt Bhattari, who I knew in New York, returned to Nepal with an ambition to write on India-Nepal happenings. He teamed up with Prawash Gautam and these two young academicians did the research and wrote this publication. We remain grateful to them.

My special thanks go to Gavin Leicester for his creative work in designing this publication, Lt. Col. Uday V. Sagane for the front cover photo and to SAMA Printer Pvt. Ltd for its printing and publishing. I must also express my deep appreciation to photographers Madhup and Mukund plus members of the Sikh community in Kathmandu, in particular Sardar Pritam Singh and Sardar Ravinder Singh Sethi, who most generously shared their experiences and memorabilia.

My gratitude goes to the India-Nepal BP Koirala Foundation (BPKF) for sponsoring this publication and to the Ambassador of Nepal in New Delhi, HE Nilambar Acharya, who gave us the idea of working collaboratively on BPKF projects.

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Manjeev Singh Puri
Ambassador of India to Nepal
and Co-Chair of the
BP Koirala India-Nepal Foundation

September 2019

PROLOGUE

A lean yogi draped in orange cloth sitting in the pangat for Guru ka langar alongside Sikhs and individuals of different religions, ethnicities and financial backgrounds seems to embody one of the greatest ethos of Sikhism – that we are one humankind, irrespective of various categorization each human being is placed into. Be it the Golden Temple in Amritsar or Khalsa Darbar in Ontario or the Gurudwara Sahib in Johannesburg, Sikhs across the globe follow this tradition of langar, which serves as a reminder of the need to love, respect and empathize with all human beings.

Little is it known that in the heart of Kathmandu, in Gurdwara Guru Nanak Satsang in Kopundole or in Gurudwaras in Nepalgunj and Birgunj too, the tradition of langar continues, and through this, among others, the values of Sikhism.

Nepal's Sikh community is tiny, but the historical and cultural connections it forges reaches great depth – extending as far as the India's struggle against the British rule in the 19th century to the partition in 1947 and the modernization of Nepal after the 1950s.

Even before the Anglo-Nepal War, the army of Maharajah Ranjit Singh of the Sikh Empire, a greatest of the warriors, met with the Gorkhali troops of another great warrior Amar Singh Thapa.

The Maharaja's wife, Rani Jind Kaur took asylum in Kathmandu for 11 years and Nepal's Rana Prime Minister Jung Bahadur built her a palace and is said to have told her to feel at home in Kathmandu like it was her maiti. Almost 150 years have passed since Rani Jind Kaur left Nepal in 1861 to unite with her son in London, but her tremendous struggle to try and unite the Sikh and Gorkhali soldiers to fight the British is still evident in Nepal in the Sikh community, who are the descendants of the small troop of army and palace courtiers that accompanied Rani Jind Kaur to Nepal.

When India finally got independence in 1947, a small number of Sikhs caught in the bitter times of the partition migrated and also settled in Nepalgunj. After Nepal opened up to the outside world in 1951, it was the Sikhs who drove the first trucks to Nepal and played incomparable role in transporting logistics to Nepal's first highways, hydroelectricity projects and other development projects.

We try to trace this historical trail of Sikhism in Nepal and the contribution of this small community that has commanded trust for being honest, brave and hardworking.

Although an in-depth exploration of the history of Sikhism in Nepal and its Sikh community is not the intention or scope of this publication, we have tried to provide a broader outline of the historical course of events of the Sikh connect in Nepal, and the contributions of Nepal's Sikh community."

Prawash Gautam

Achyut Raj Bhattarai

Message

I am happy to know about the Photo Publication of Sikh Heritage of Nepal by BP Koirala India-Nepal Foundation, Kathmandu Secretariat on the 550th Birth Anniversary of Guru Nanak Dev. On the occasion, I would like to pay my homage to Guru Nanak Dev.

Sikh community in Nepal has contributed to the development of Nepal and in maintaining communal harmony. It has strengthened the cultural linkages between Nepal and India and has augmented the religious diversification of the country as well.

Bringing out a photo publication entitled "Sikh Heritage of Nepal" will be very helpful to providing opportunity to people to better know about the Sikh Heritage in Nepal and to bring the people of the two countries closer eventually fulfilling the objectives of the BP Koirala India-Nepal Foundation

On this occasion, I would like to extend my heartest congratulations and best wishes for peace and prosperity of all.

Nilamber Acharya
Ambassador of Nepal to India
and Co-Chair of the
BP Koirala India-Nepal Foundation



March 2017 : Ambassador Manjeev Singh Puri and Mrs. Namrita Puri at the presentation of his credentials to the Right Hon'ble President of Nepal, Mrs. Bidya Devi Bhandari.



▲ December 1947 : Surjit Singh Majithia, the first Ambassador of India to Nepal, at the presentation of credentials to King Tribhuvan at Gaddi Baithak in Humanan Dhoka Palace. ▼ at an official function in Singha Durbar.



Photo from : The Ranas of Nepal

The Maharaja of Patiala and other members of Royalty from India forming the Baarat for the wedding of Yuvraj Raghunath Singhji of Jaisalmer to Yuvarani Mukut Rajya Laxmi Rana, daughter of General Sharada Shumshere Rana and grand-daughter of Maharaja Mohun Shumshere Rana, Prime Minister of Nepal in April 1950 at Singha Durbar, Kathmandu. This was the last Rana wedding to be held at Singha Durbar.





PART I

SIKH HERITAGE OF NEPAL

GURU NANAK DEV JI'S VISIT TO NEPAL

Guru Nanak Math, Balaju



Compound of Guru Nanak Math, Balaju

Down the sharp, sloping bend in Shorhakhutte, the road swerves westwards towards Balaju. Just as the road touches the bridge over Bishnumati, a dusty, graveled path offshoots to the right from the main road. Some couple meters into this path an arching cemented stairway rises up the thickly forested hillock, cutting right through the tall deciduous trees. When the stairs end, a path of octagonal cement slabs stretches ahead and it leads to a gate and further inside to a small wooden door of the building above which is written "Prachin Udasi Shree Guru Nanak Math".

"During his third Udasi, Guru Nanak Dev Ji, the first Sikh Guru, travelled to Nepal in search of the company of saints and a peaceful abode where he could meditate," says the elderly man who greets us inside the courtyard that the door opens up to.

An elderly man, with a white beard, saffron turban, and a white dhoti, is the present Mahant of the order of yogis, who have lived in the location where Guru Nanak Dev Ji meditated during his sojourn in Kathmandu. In addition to keeping alive his own yogic tradition, he also takes care of Guru Nanak Math, situated on the banks of river Bishnumati.

It is 500 years ago, in the early years of 16th century that Guru Nanak Dev Ji is believed to have travelled to Nepal during his third Udasi. And, just as this date, much information about his stay in Nepal relies on oral history.

Seated on a straw mat spread over a mud floor in the house opposite to building that houses the Math, the Mahant begins relating this history:

"Kathmandu's King Jay Jagat Malla had paid a visit to Guru Nanak Dev Ji during his visit to Benaras for the treatment of his son Jay Prakash Malla (Jagjaya Malla).

Eventually, Jay Prakash Malla was cured of his illness by Guru Ji's blessings and he was invited to visit Nepal."

Guru Nanak Dev Ji entered Nepal from the west and travelled eastwards towards Janakpur, the birthplace of Sita. From Janakpur he visited Biratnagar and then Barahakshetra, a holy site situated along the banks of the Koshi River. Thereafter, he journeyed through the Mahabharata range to Kathmandu via Banepa and Bhaktapur.

In Kathmandu, he first stayed and meditated in the location where Singha Durbar – the Rana-era Durbar, that is today the seat of government– presently stands. After some time of his arrival in Kathmandu, Guru Nanak Dev Ji moved to this spot in Balaju to meditate.



Entrance of Guru Nanak Math, Balaju

The Mahant rises up and gestures us to follow him as he walks barefoot in his light steps through the wooden door to the west that opens to garden, teeming with shrubs and flowers. In the middle stands a large peepal tree, with thick clumps of foliage and its barks brown and sturdy with age. A platform of stone slabs has been raised around it.

"Here," he says, pointing to the two footprints printed on a stone slab beneath the tree. "This is the exact spot where Guru Nanak Dev Ji meditated and the footprints have been carved to mark this spot," he says.

There are several accounts about Guru Nanak Dev Ji's stay in Nepal that have been orally passed down the generations of knowledgeable sanyasis like the Balaju Math Mahant.

One such account relates to a large chunk of land donated by the King Jay Jagat Malla to Gururji, who is said to have granted him 1600 ropanis (200 acres) of land. In an article "The Forgotten Shrine of the Sikhs" in his book Down History's Narrow Lanes: Sketches and Myths of the Kathmandu Valley, Desmond Doig states that King Rana Bahadur Shah is also said to have gifted considerable land to Guru Nanak Math after finding solace for his "unsound mind" at the Math. The details of this donation of land are secured even till date in the records of Nepal government. Today, however, only a portion of this land remains available – 35 ropanis.

From the peepal tree, the Mahant leads us to the two-storied tile-roofed house across to the other side of the courtyard and up the wooden stairs to its first floor. On the takhtposh, in the middle sits the Holy Guru Granth Sahib, a rare handwritten version, draped in red Rumalas. The green, yellow, pink, white and red – the colors of the flowers on the front of the altar – brighten the holy place along with the pictures of Guru Nanak Dev Ji and other Sikhs Gurus framed on the walls.

The Mahant also performs the daily prayers reciting from the Guru Granth Sahib. And as the custodian of this place, he looks about the room with immense pride, respect, and faith. But, also sadness. Why?

"Unfortunately, this shrine has been forgotten," the Mahant speaks softly. "It's as if nobody knows about it or nobody wants to care for it."

Respectfully, he scoops out with his fingers prasad of halwa from a small bowl and hands over to us.

And perhaps, what Desmond Doig says in "The Forgotten Shrine of the Sikhs" is very true in all its spirit, that "Obviously the lovely, lonely Guru Nanak Math is in need of a Sikh scholar to unravel its truths and its legends. Until then it will remain a half-forgotten temple on a wooded hill threatened by the brick



The footprints at Nanak Math are believed to be of Guru Nanak Dev ji's.

and concrete advances of Kathmandu." As we are about to take our leave, the Mahant tells us that this is not the only historical shrine connected with Guru Nanak Dev Ji in Kathmandu.



Handwritten Guru Granth Sahib at Nanak Math Balaju.



Inside Guru Nanak Math, Balaju



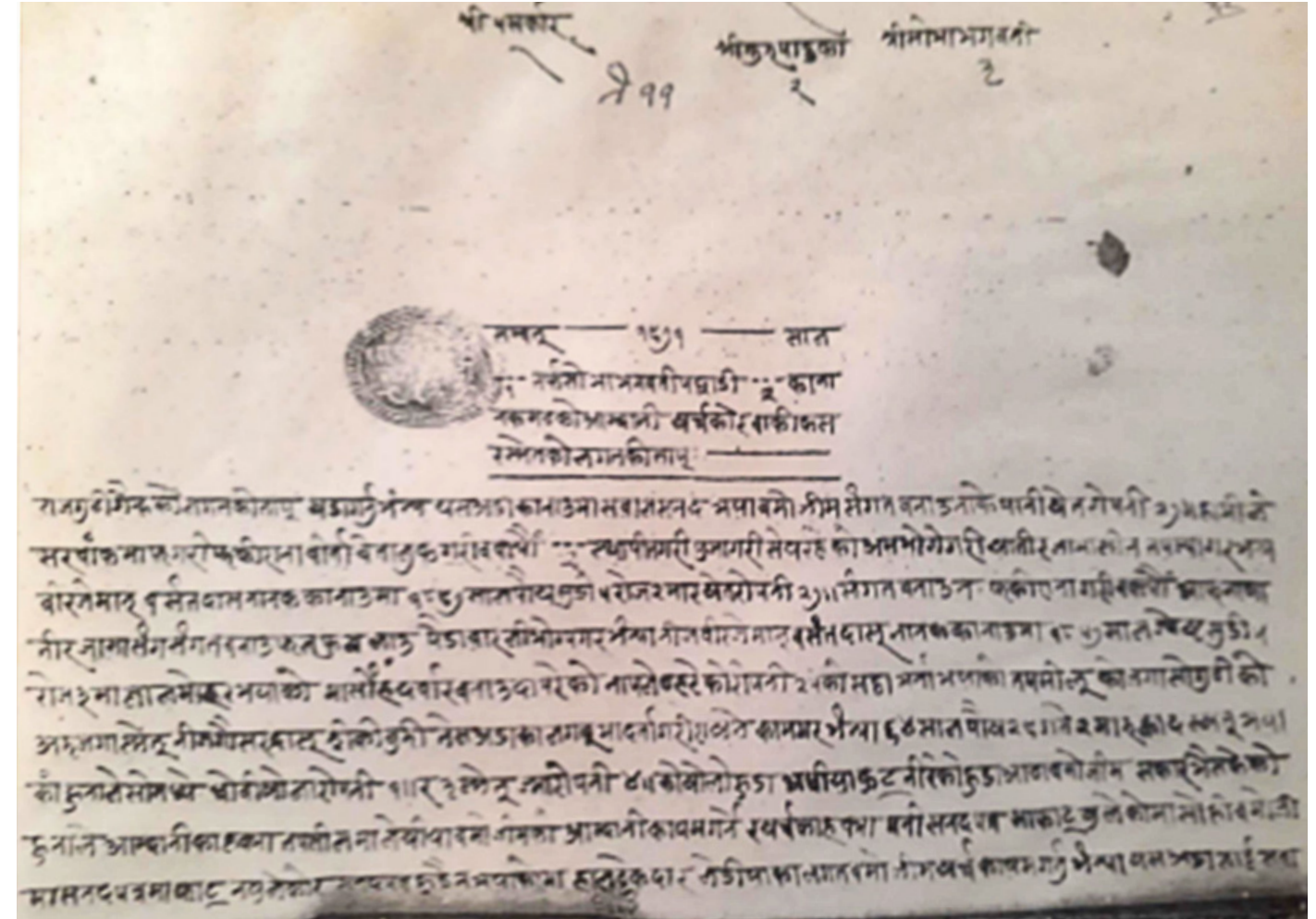
Udasī Mahant at Guru Nanak math performing his daily prayers



Facsimile of page 224 of the publication "Nepali Painting"
Courtesy: Sangeeta Thapa

Young King Girvana Bikram Shah standing in the
lap of Queen Regent Raj Rajeswori Devi
Early 19th century AD
30 cm x 35 cm
Collection: National Museum, Chhauni, Kathmandu

Note three hanging candle lit chandeliers and a row of western style gold - gilded frames on the wall. In the extreme top left, a portrait of Guru Nanak reveals the growing closeness of the ruling Sikhs with the Nepali rulers. Stylistically, it follows an earlier style in rendering of human forms and in the carpeted background.



जग्गा धनी बत्ती प्रमाण पुर्जा									
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३	श्रीमान श्रीमान श्रीमान	१०००	१०००	१०००	१०००	१०००	१०००	१०००	१०००
४	श्रीमान श्रीमान श्रीमान	१०००	१०००	१०००	१०००	१०००	१०००	१०००	१०००
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७	श्रीमान श्रीमान श्रीमान	१०००	१०००	१०००	१०००	१०००	१०००	१०००	१०००
८	श्रीमान श्रीमान श्रीमान	१०००	१०००	१०००	१०००	१०००	१०००	१०००	१०००
९	श्रीमान श्रीमान श्रीमान	१०००	१०००	१०००	१०००	१०००	१०००	१०००	१०००
१०	श्रीमान श्रीमान श्रीमान	१०००	१०००	१०००	१०००	१०००	१०००	१०००	१०००

Facsimile of archival land records showing grant of land by King of Nepal to Nanak Math.
Courtesy : Pritam Singh

OTHER FORGOTTEN SHRINES OF KATHMANDU

SHOBHA BHAGWATI

Guru Nanak Dev Ji is believed to have meditated at six places in Kathmandu and small shrines commemorate these places today," says Gyani Gurubaksh, who is the head priest at the Guru Nanak Satsang in Kupondole, established in 1976.

And on a warm September Saturday, Bhai Gobind Singh, Granthi at Kupondole Gurudwara, took us on a tour of five of these shrines.

After Guru Nanak Dev Ji arrived in Kathmandu, he meditated at a location where Singha Durbar presently stands. Later, when the place was engineered for the Durbar, the yogis staying here were relocated to Shobha Bhagwati.

Today, on a dusty banks of Shobha Bhagwati, one has to go through a narrow trail that shoots off towards the west of the mud road along the banks Bishnumati. After one walks a few minutes along the trail lining shanty-like houses with tin roofs, it opens up to a slightly open area with a two-storied fragile-looking, brick and mud house with tin roof.

An elderly man comes out of the back with a sickle in his hand. He's the caretaker of the shrine and lives in the same building that houses it with his family.

'Yes, up there,' he points to the first floor, and leads us up the crammed wooden ladder leading to the floor. Two rooms open up and the one to the left has a bed and clothes scattered. On the right is a tiny room, its walls and ceiling washed in white. A bed is set against the wall at one end, over it is placed a peera, with Guru Granth Sahib, draped in blue and cream Rumala.

"Visitors?" the elderly caretaker repeats after Gobind's inquiry. "One or two, once in a while." And then after a pause, he says, echoing the Mahant of the Guru Nanak Math in Balaju, "It seems like a forgotten abode of Guru Nanak Ji."

But that has not stopped him from dutifully carrying out his responsibilities as the caretaker of the small one-room shrine. Although the room next door looks crammed and with clothes strewn over the bed, the room with the Holy Guru Granth Sahib is kept neat and clean, and the caretaker also performs the daily rituals and prayers.



Guru Granth Sahib in Hindi at Shobha Bhagwati



Sikh religious inscriptions inscribed at old bell installed at Shobha Bhagwati



Inside view of shrine at Shobha Bhagwati



Small shrine at Gyaneshwor where Guru Granth Sahib resides



Guru Granth Sahib at Gyaneshwor



Holy Gyan Dhara at Gyaneshwor

GYANESHWOR AND GYAN DHARA

Gyaneshwor Mahadev and Ananda Bhairab Temple is a large two-storied temple built in pagoda style and dedicated to Lord Shiva and Bishnu. Statues of various Hindu deities and Shiva lingas line in its large, spacious courtyard. On its right from the entrance is a long bhajan mandali where locals and devotees assemble in the mornings and evenings for bhajan.

The temple lies right by the main road in Gyaneshwar with vehicles constantly screeching by. But back in 1515, when King Jay Jagat Malla came here to seek blessings from Guru Nanak Dev Ji, who came to have religious discourse with yogis living here, to rid Nepal of the drought and diseases that had grappled its citizens, this place must surely have been a large, spacious and peaceful location.

Bhai Gobind Singh leads us round the temple and to its back and stops before a cave-like enclosure. "This is where Guru Nanak Dev Ji had discourse with the yogis," he points to the cave.

A sheet of tin painted over in brown covers most of the entrance and a bamboo stick is laid diagonally against it. The openings around the tin reveal bricks, a sack of cement, pieces of stone and tins and bits of other things. It looks dim and damp inside.

Opposite the cave is a two-storied brick building, very small in its width but long and tile-roofed and painted red. The ground floor has photos and statues of Hindu deities at one corner. A wooden ladder, kept almost vertically leads to the room on the first floor with the Holy Guru Granth Sahib. It's a cramped room, narrow for more than two people to be at the same time.

When the King came to seek his blessing, Guru Nanak Dev is said to have healed the people of the diseases and ended the drought by miraculously bringing out a holy spring from a small stone down the temple. This holy spring is known as Gyan Dhara and continues to flow from a stone sprout located down the flight of stone stairs behind the temple.

And the lore of the spring's water's holy and healing power is still prevalent among the locals and devotees. It is believed that if one takes a bath in the spring with all their clothes still on and leave the clothes at the spring after taking bath, then he or she will be healed of any ailments.

IN PASHUPATINATH COMPLEX

The south gate of the Pashupatinath Temple, one of the most revered pilgrimage sites of the Hindus across the world, leads to the ghats along the banks of the holy Bagmati River. Right at the entrance towards the right is a two-storied building. In one room at the first floor is a small room with the Guru Granth Sahib..

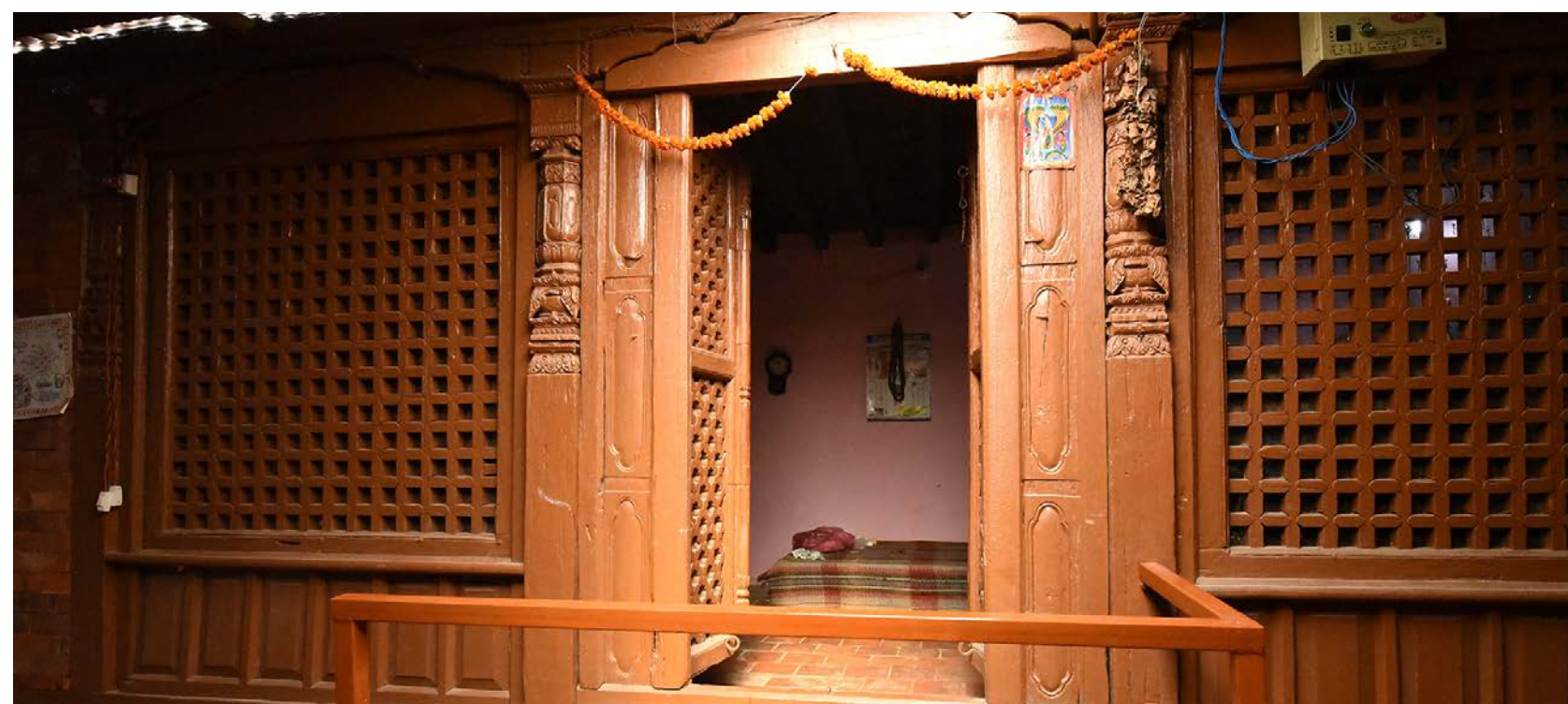
"This shrine is associated with the visit of Guru Nanak Dev Ji to Pashupatinath Temple and his meditation at this place," Bhai Gobind Singh says.

It was originally located on the long brick building opposite the present location. But was shifted to this new place after it sustained damages in the earthquake of 2015.

Some three hundred meters to the south of this lies the garden of the Pashupatinath, where another shrine known as Raaj Rajeshwari is located.

"This is the garden whose flowers are used to worship the Pashupatinath Temple," the caretaker informed . "Unless the Bhatta priest at the temple offers flowers from this garden, the puja cannot be considered duly and ritually complete.

The shrine has been shifted today to a small room in the next building as the original temple-structure is being rebuilt. This original shrine has each of its wooden pillars engraved with Khanda, the symbol of Sikhism.



Guru Granth Sahib at two shrines inside Pashupati nath complex



Guru Granth Sahib at Thapathali

AT THAPATHALI

Baba Sri Chand, the eldest son of Guru Nanak Dev ji, is also believed to have visited Kathmandu, and lived in Thapathali inside the location that now belongs to Kalmochan Ghat by the banks of Bagmati. The two-storied building is located around the middle of the large courtyard surrounded by huts on three sides and a long old Dharmashala to the south.

It houses a holy well, with Mool Mantra in Gurmukhi inscribed on it. It houses the Guru Granth Sahib and has its caretaker, as an Udasi saint.



Udasi Mahant at Thapathali



Outer view of Thapathali Shrine

MAHARAJA RANJIT SINGH MEETS AMAR SINGH THAPA IN KANGRA

If Nepal's first encounter with Sikhism happened in the most pristine spirit when Guru Nanak Dev Ji visited Nepal for his third Udasi, the second contact occurred in an unlikely, unusual place of a battlefield.

In 1809, the Kingdom of Garhwal, in present day Uttarakhand in India, discontinued its annual payments as was required, to the Kingdom of Nepal. Upon the orders of Nepal's Prime Minister Mukhtiyar Bhimsen Thapa, Nepalese General Amar Singh Thapa, considered among the most valiant of Gorkhali soldiers, led his troops to attack Garhwal and succeeded in annexing its territory. Nepal's border thus extended up to Sutlej River in the West. Amar Singh Thapa continued his march westward and reached Kangra, which was then under the reign of King Sansar Chand, and ultimately seized the Fort of Kangra.

Certain that he alone would not be able to fight the Gorkhalis, Sansar Chand requested Maharaja Ranjit Singh of the Sikh Empire for assistance. The Maharaja, equally known for his valor and referred to as Sher-e-Punjab, agreed and he himself led his troop in rescue of Sansar Chand. Thus, pretexts were laid for the meeting of two armies reputed for their valor in the battlefield.

It soon became evident that both Ranjit Singh and Amar Singh Thapa were well aware of the strength of the other and wary of a direct confrontation. When in June 1809, Ranjit Singh had arrived in Pathankot, the first step he took was to strategically control and block the routes used for procurement of provisions and equipment for the Gorkhali army in an attempt to weaken the Gorkhalis and hoping that this would prevent combat. Meanwhile, Amar Singh Thapa also wanted to avoid facing Ranjit Singh's troops in the battlefield, and attempted to persuade the

Maharaja to withdraw in return for a tribute.

In his book, 'The Rise of the House of Gorkha', author Ludwig F. Stiller writes, "Kaji Amar Singh Thapa offered to pay Ranjit Singh, if he would withdraw his army, but Ranjit Singh, contrary to his agreement with Sansar Chand, had his own designs on this powerful fort himself. He moved to the fort in the month of August, and, to guarantee the cooperation of Sasar Chand, he took Sansar's son hostage. The Gorkhalis were in no position to prevent Ranjit Singh from entering the fort, and Ranjit Singh took up his position there at the end of August 1809."

Stiller says that once "safely inside the fort," Ranjit Singh would make a counter proposal, sending a letter to Kaji Thapa "asking him to withdraw from the area. If the Kaji complied, Ranjit agreed to cooperate with him against the British. Since Ranjit Singh had signed a treaty with British in April of the same year, his offer struck the Kaji as the height of hypocrisy and in his anger, he imprisoned the messenger who had brought the letter."

In the ensuing series of battles between the two best armies, both sides suffered heavy casualties. When balls and gunpowder cannons ran out, the soldiers of the two armies faced each other in hand to hand combat. In the end, there was no clear headway, and the two valiant commanders settled for a truce.

Stiller writes, "But, as might be expected, this clash between the two best armies in the north ended with no clear decision either way. Both armies were exhausted, and the two generals reluctantly agreed to a truce and a treaty. Kazi Amar Singh Thapa left Kangra to Ranjit Singh for the time and withdrew his troops to the east of Sutlej.

MAHARANI JIND KAUR'S STAY IN NEPAL

Mid-19th century was a time of great political upheaval in the Indian subcontinent with expanding British power. Noting the common adversary in the British, Nepal's Prime Minister Bhimsen Thapa and Maharaja Ranjit Singh forged a secret alliance against the British. However, Maharaja Ranjit Singh died suddenly in 1839 and the Sikh Kingdom started to disintegrate.

Rani Jind Kaur became the regent in 1843, as her son King Duleep Singh was still an infant. Led by her, Punjab went to war with the British in 1845. Lahore sent for help to Kathmandu, but the court in Kathmandu was divided and King Rajendra Bikram Shah did not respond positively.

Following Punjab's annexation, the British imprisoned the Rani in Chunnar fort near Varanasi. However, two years later in 1849, she managed to escape from the fort disguised as a maid and travelled 800 km north to reach Kathmandu.

Initially, she stayed at the residence of Amar Bikram Shah, son of General Chautariya Pushkar Shah, who had been Nepal's Prime Minister in 1838-39. Amar Bikram Shah's residence in the Narayanhiti area provided her with the facilities and dignity offered to royalty. But whenever outsiders came, she would disguise herself and was introduced as a "maid from Hindusthan". She stayed in Amar Bikram Shah's house for a few months before she decided to come out of her hiding and approach the then Prime Minister Jung Bahadur Rana.

"Rani Jind Kaur had chosen to stay at Amar Bikram Shah's residence because Pushkar Shah was one of the key officials engaged in forging an alliance between Nepal and Punjab against the British when Maharaja Ranjit Singh was alive," says Bimal Pratap Shah, the seventh generation descendant of Pushkar Shah.

"Her mission was to regain her lost Kingdom" Shah said. "While at Amar Bikram Shah's house, she secretly met with people who could potentially support her mission. Eventually, she understood that the only way she could get Nepal's support was by convincing Jung Bahadur."

Owing to his respect for Maharaja Ranjit Singh, Jung Bahadur granted her political asylum against the British will. He built Charburja Durbar in Thapathali for her and even allocated a monthly allowance. She was also allowed to build a small Gurudwara in her compound.

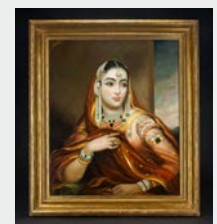
The Rani made untiring efforts to raise an army and pleaded with Jung Bahadur for his support. But her hopes were shattered and she felt betrayed when Jung Bahadur supported the British during the revolt of 1857.

The Rani was affectionately nicknamed Chanda Kunwar by local Nepalese. She lived in Kathmadu for 11 years before leaving for England with her son in 1861. Meanwhile, the Sikhs who had accompanied the Rani to Kathmandu settled in Nepalgunj. This is how the foundations were laid for the villages of Shikhanpura, Jamunah and Bankatwa in Nepalgunj.

(Conversation of the contributors with Bimal Pratap Shah)

THE REFUGEE QUEEN - NEPAL'S SIKH CONNECTION

July 01, 2013



Jindan Kaur, last queen of the Punjab

The last queen of the Punjab had finally reunited with her son in England. Reclining on her divan in the balcony of her Lancaster Gate residence she squinted at the hazy expanse of Kensington Gardens sprawling before her and reflected on the dizzying cycle of kismet she had encountered in life. Daughter of a kennel keeper of Maharajah Ranjit Singh, Jindan Kaur was a classic beauty with brains and had in course of time climbed up the proverbial ladder of the court and ended up in the bed of the king. She had been proclaimed a maharani and a son born of her would be in line to the throne! After Ranjit Singh's death and a few years of instability her son eventually had been crowned the king of the Punjab in 1843 A.D. at a tender age of five and she, Jindan, had been proclaimed the Queen Regent. After this crowning glory of her life however her ascendant fortune had started to unravel quickly.

Facsimile of Subodh Rana's Blog
Courtesy: Sangeeta Thapa



PART 2

SIKHS OF NEPAL

SIKHS OF NEPALGUNJ

In 1861, after almost 11 years of her stay in Nepal, when Rani Jind Kaur left Nepal more families, who had stayed with her in Kathmandu, joined the Sikh families in Nepalgunj. Thus, in those 11 years, a foundation for Sikh community in Nepal was laid down.

The small settlement of Sikhs that began with this handful of families in Nepalgunj has today transformed into a sizable community, estimated at around 3000 mainly spread in three villages clustered around Nepalgunj city – Sikhanpura, Jamunaha, Bankatwa. In addition to these, there are few Sikh households in neighboring villages of Bakauli and Manipurwa.

Jamunaha, the largest of these settlements, has some 150 households of Sikhs. Sikhanpura houses about 100 families, Bankatwa has 70-80 families. And then the smaller settlements of Bakauli and Manipurwa have 20-30 and some 10 households respectively.

India's painful history of partition, at the time of its independence from the British in 1947, is also linked to the history of Nepalgunj's Sikhs with several Sikh families coming here in the period of 1947-1957. Today, these families, although small in number, are mainly into businesses like jewelery, transportation, trading and have done well for themselves and forms the respectable and responsible segment of Nepalese society.

The Sikhs settlements in Nepalgunj are essentially rural in character. "Like their ancestors who were settled here, almost all Sikh families in these settlements are farmers, engaged mostly in self-subsistence farming," says Shankar Singh, Inspector at Nepal's Armed Police Force, who is a ninth generation descendant Sikh from the families who came with Rani Jind Kaur.

When the forefathers of today's Sikhs in Nepalgunj settled here, they were secluded from their kin and kith in Punjab. But, their faith in Sikhism remained unwavering. This is reflected in the community having Gurudwaras in their settlements and proudly retaining all outward symbols of Sikhism, i.e. unshorn hair and beard.

But, over the past few decades, a small number of Sikhs, owing to the benefits of formal education, have moved out into professions, businesses and around 20-25 Sikhs from the Nepalgunj area are in the Nepal Police and Armed Police Force.

"Their dedication to serve the nation has been so strong," says Shankar Singh. This spirit of sacrifice for the motherland is best reflected in the martyrdom of Kanhaiya Singh from Jamunaha, a Sikh officer with the Nepal Police, who was killed during the Maoist conflict in Nepal.



Sikh youth demonstrating Gatka, a Sikh martial art, during Gurburab celebrations in Nepalgunj



Sikh sangat celebrating Gurburab in Nepalgunj



Second Secretary, Gurjeet Singh with Sikh community in Jamunaha, Nepalgunj



Ambassador Puri being felicitated by Sikh community of Shikhanpura, Nepalgunj



Ambassador Puri & Mrs. Puri with Sikh community in Bankatwa, Nepalgunj

A UNIFORM DREAM



Nepalese Sikh policeman at Simikot with Ambassador Puri and Second Secretary Gurjeet Singh

If one wish was intensely instilled in the mind of little Shankar Singh, it was to be transformed from being a small boy to an adult so he could adorn the uniform of the Nepal Police and parade with pride for the nation. The navy blue shirt and black khaki pant, insignias over their shoulders, Singh thought his brother and uncles looked braver in their uniforms.

“The core ethos of Sikhism of always being ready to protect the vulnerable and come to the rescue of those in need, the values of honesty and hard-work, these values with which I had grown up in my community became crucially important to fulfill my duties as a police officer,” Singh, who joined Nepal Police in 1993, says. Later, he was shifted to the Armed Police Force when it was formed in 2001.

And being a Sikh and the associated courage and valor, Shankar was often assigned duties that required special courage and determination. As Nepal reeled under an internal conflict during 1996-2006, he was posted in Dang, Rukum, Dolpa and other districts that were most affected by the conflict.

And there was yet another work for which Singh was highly sought after in whichever place in Nepal he was posted in. “Because Sikhs are known for their skills in navigating dangerous roads in the

most difficult terrains, I was especially asked to sit behind the wheels when the roads were narrow and full of bends,” he says. Respecting religious beliefs of Sikhism, Nepal Police places no restriction on us to wear our turbans and keep our beard and wear kara,” he says.

And Shankar feels immense pride to represent his community in the national force.



Shankar Singh

KANHAIYA SINGH



Kanhaiya Singh enlisted in Nepal Police in 1972, at the age of 18, as a police constable. He offered the ultimate service and sacrifice any man in uniform can – the sacrifice of his life.

Singh got noticed among his fellow officers for his well-built and strong physique and as a sharp shooter. That was, why he was designated to the positions of highly sensitive role of drivers of higher-level officials of the Nepal Police, right since the early years of his career.

Achyut Krishna Kharel, who was Inspector General of Nepal Police from 1996 to 2001, was

acting DIG and the chief of Far-western Police Division in the late 1980s, when Singh served as his driver. Singh was Assistant Sub-Inspector then.

“Drivers for higher-level police officials are selected with great care for they need to be disciplined, punctual and honest, and should be able to maintain secrecy, and at the same time be strong and well-built to be able to provide security to the senior officials in time of need. I felt very fortunate that someone as capable and brave as Kanhaiya was my driver during my time in the far-west, and often shared very proudly with my contemporaries that I have a Sikh officer to assist me,” he says.

On September 15, 2003, Singh was returning home on his bike after completing his duty. A group of Maoist rebels blocked his way, and shot him multiple times on point-blank range.

Kanhaiya was only a few days short of getting promotion to the post of Deputy Superintendent of Police when he was killed by the Maoist rebels. The Government of Nepal declared him a martyr.

“Just in a matter of few days, he was to be promoted to the post of DSP. He had played that moment of the insignia time and again in his mind and would share with us. He was elated. He died with this dream in his heart,” Madhai Singh recalls. “But he died for the country. I and all my family is proud of him. The entire Sikh community in Nepal is proud of him.”

(Based on extensive discussions and information collected by the contributors from members of the Sikh community in Nepalgunj.)



Photos from Gurdwara at Birgunj. Photos courtesy : Amarjeet S. Shonky



Amarjeet Singh Shonky , a businessman from Birgunj



SIKHS OF BIRGUNJ

“The first Sikhs to come and settle in Birgunj did not directly travel to this place,” says Amarjeet Singh, a second generation Sikh in Birgunj whose father Gurbachan Singh was among the first Sikhs to settle in Birgunj in the early 1960s.

Many came via Kathmandu and continued to be engaged in the transportation business. This remains the mainstay of the community even today with trucks and tankers owned by the Sikh community in Birgunj transporting fuel from oil depots in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh in India, and essential goods to Kathmandu as well as to eastern and western parts of Nepal along the East-West Highway. They also operate passenger buses.

“Once the first families came and settled in Birgunj, the Sikh community expanded in number. Until 2000, there were about 500 families,” Singh says. But, many have left since and today there are only around 35 families of Sikhs in Birgunj.

There is a Gurdwara in Birgunj. In 2017, it was reconstructed to a larger Gurdwara with facilities for travelers.



SIKHS OF KRISHNANAGAR

Krishnanagar, on the border with Uttar Pradesh in India, has had a Sikh community for over eight decades. Linked very closely with Sikhs across the border in Barhani, Krishnanagar boasts a beautiful Gurudwara and a Sikh population well known for its acumen in trade and enterprise.

It is a matter of great pride that Mehar Singh, a Sikh, remained Mayor of Krishnanagar for over 25 years. And, till recently, Gurusharan Singh (popularly known as Bunty Singh) was the President of the Krishnanagar Chamber of Commerce.

There is also a small Gurudwara in Butwal.



Ambassador Puri & Mrs Namrita Puri with Sikh sangat at Krishnanagar Gurudwara



Gurusharan Singh aka Bunty Singh of Krishnanagar

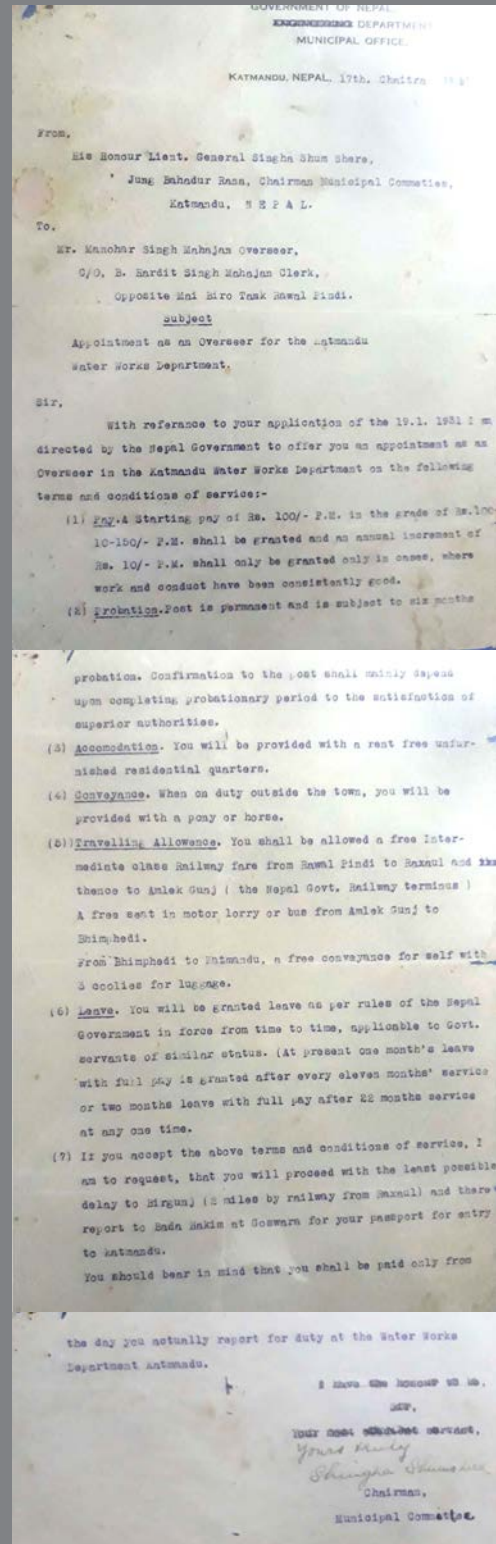


Gurdwara at Krishnanagar.



Gurdwara at Butwal

PIONEERS IN ENGINEERING: FATHER AND SON



Facsimile of appointment letter of Manohar Singh as a Overseer in Kathmandu Water Works Department.
Photo courtesy : Jitender Singh

Manohar Singh arrived in Kathmandu in the late 1920s and settled in Bhoshen Ko Tole, the core Newar settlement. He is believed to be the first Sikh to arrive in Kathmandu in the 20th century. He was born in Rawalpindi, then part of undivided India, and educated in Lucknow at the Hewett Engineering School.

Soon after his arrival, he was appointed to the post of Overseer at the Water Works Department (Pani Adda) in 1931. An offer letter signed by Lt. General Shingha Sumsher Jung Bahadur Rana, then Chairman of the Municipal Committee, Kathmandu, details that Singh was provided with travel allowance all the way from his home in Rawalpindi to come and take up the position in Kathmandu. He was provided with the accommodation in the government quarters for his position. He worked at the Water Works Department until his retirement in 1975. During his service, he rose to the position of Assistant Engineer and also served as Engineer-in-Charge of the Pani Adda.



Manohar Singh. Photo courtesy :Jitender Singh

That was the time when Nepal was just starting to take baby steps to modernize infrastructure and modernizing drinking water supplies was one. Durga Nidhi Sharma, a former Secretary of the Nepal Government says that there was almost no one like Singh, who was educated in engineering. So, the government accorded immense respect to Singh's knowledge and skills and Manohar Singh played a pioneering role in installing water supply systems and solving water supply problems in different parts of Kathmandu, including in the army barracks in the Valley.

For his long and dedicated service in the field of engineering, His Majesty's Government conferred on him, the Gorkha Dakshin Bahu, one of the highest honors conferred by the Nepal government on individuals. He was also conferred King Birendra Coronation Medal (Subha Rajyabhishek Padaka) for his service. He was also awarded the Earthquake Medal for his courage and bravery in rescuing those trapped in the debris and the dead bodies after the devastating earthquake of 1934.

Manohar Singh's son Hardayal Singh was born in Bhoshenko Tole in 1936. After completing his education, he followed in his father's footsteps to pursue an engineering career. He was employed as an engineer at Nepal's Road Department.

He began when Nepal had just started the campaign of road and highway constructions and his assignments took him to different parts of the country. When the Indian government completed the construction of Nepal's first highway in 1956, Indian drivers drove trucks from India to the highway, and at one point of the highway, it was handed over to the Nepali side.

His son, Jitender Singh says, "My father was a fresh engineer then and he also knew driving. The officials at the Road Department thought he would be one of the good candidates to receive the trucks from the Indian side. So, among the Nepali drivers, he was also one to receive the truck from the Indian drivers. The handing over of the trucks was one of the symbolic transfers of the highway to the Nepali government."

Durga Nidhi Sharma added "if you wanted to know which water pipe in Kathmandu was laid where, you asked Hardayal Singh," says. "He knew exactly where each pipe had been laid and had a profound knowledge of how pipeline in Kathmandu worked. "Before Hardayal Singh, it would be his father Manohar Singh who knew all these water pipes. That's because it was none other

than him who was instrumental in developing and laying down the networks of drinking water pipeline in Kathmandu, and gained a reputation for a detailed knowledge of the pipes underground.

For his long and selfless contribution to Nepal, King Birendra conferred on him Nepal's prestigious Gorkha Dakshin Bahu (Fourth), Subha Rajyabhisekh Padak (2031 BS), Janapad Seva Padak, Dirgha Seva Padak and Sarkarko Gaddhi Arohan Rajat Mahotsabh-2053 ko Padak.

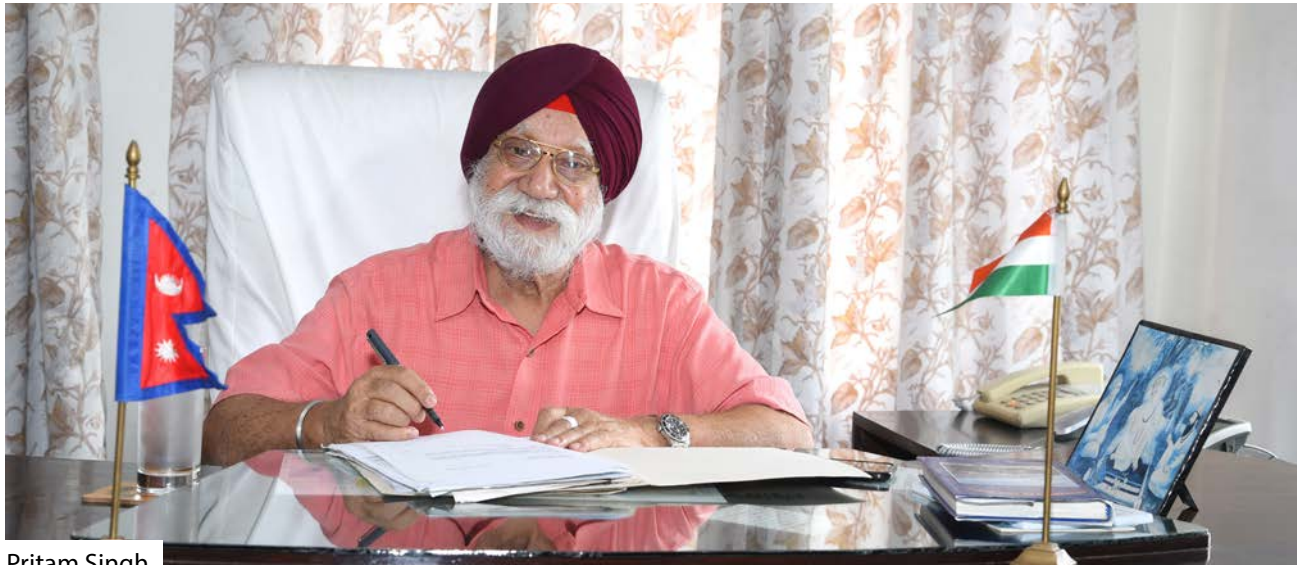


Hardayal Singh , being honoured by King Birendera .
Photo courtesy : Jitender Singh



Jitender Singh along with his son and mother

TRUCKS ON TRIBHUVAN HIGHWAY: THE PIONEERS IN TRANSPORT



Pritam Singh

On a rainy Saturday morning, Sardar Pritam Singh, 83, is seated on a chair on the marble-carved lobby of the Gurdwara, talking to a group of middle-aged turban-clad men. Singh is the eldest member of Sikh community in Kathmandu, and for six decades, he has led the community as its guardian. Indeed, it was Singh who is largely credited with setting up and expanding the Sikh community in Kathmandu.

It was in 1957, that the 22-year-old Singh and his father arrived in Kathmandu from their home in Jammu. They had come with their truck via the Tribhuvan Highway.

In Kathmandu, they were encouraged by King Mahendra to settle down and help the country's transportation. Singh and his father settled in Kathmandu. Over time, Singh encouraged other Sikhs to also come and settle in Nepal.

They stayed at various places like New Road, Khichapokhari and Putalisadak. From where they had settled previously, the community moved to Thapathali. From there they moved to Kopundole, the place which eventually became a largely stable settlement for the Sikh community.

Kathmandu's Sikhs came in trucks and the community was to be the foundation pillar of the development of transportation in Nepal. This started right from the country's first highway - the Tribhuvan Highway.

"The Tribhuvan Highway was just being built then, and we had to literally shift the boulders, fill a pit here and there, or smoothen a patch," Singh says smiling. "We'd have to build the road as we drove our truck here. While it was less than a day journey from Amlekhgunj to Kathmandu, the rough road stretched it to four days."

While even private vehicles had hardly started in Nepal, Kathmandu's Sikhs led by Pritam Singh drove carrier trucks from India to Nepal bringing food and other supplies.

"There was a time when all the trucks in Kathmandu belonged to Sikhs and all the drivers were also Sikhs," Ravinder Sethi, a second generation Sikh from Kathmandu recalls. His father Manhoman Singh was also one of the first Sikhs to settle in Kathmandu.

Sethi remembers how the hardworking Sikh transporters and drivers played an instrumental role in transporting construction materials to vital projects, like the Trishuli Hydroelectricity Project, East-West Highway, Sunauli-Pokhara Highway, among others.

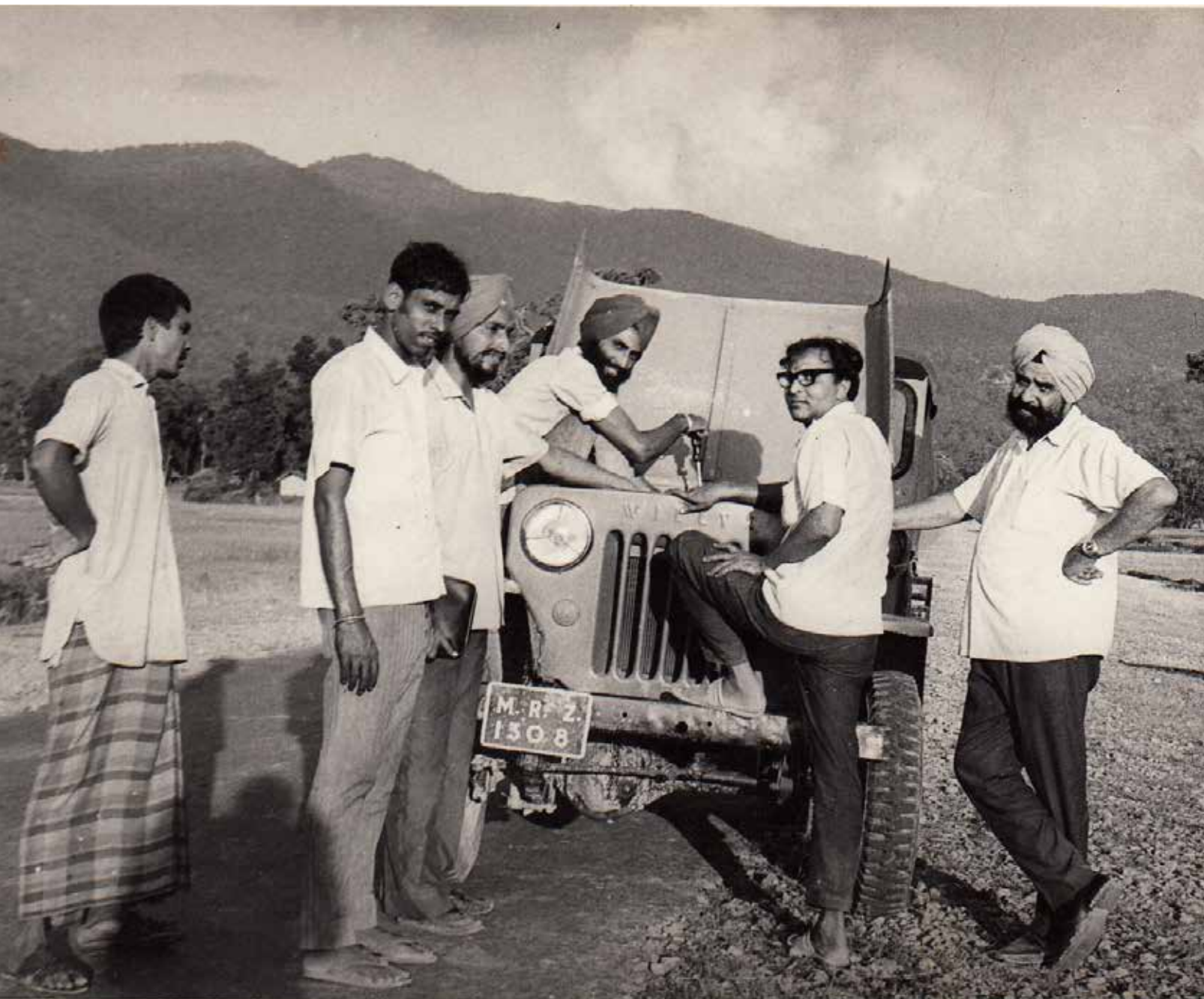
His father himself was one of those who worked as the contractor for some important government projects such as the Patan Hospital in Lalitpur. and Butwal-Narayanghat Road, providing logistics and construction materials.

The Sikhs who came to Kathmandu in the 1950s not only contributed in the carrier transportation, they were also one of the first to start the public transportation in Nepal. In-fact, The Nepal Public Motor Service was started by Pritam Singh's family to provide public service.

While most of those who settled in Kathmandu during this time were transport operators, there were also a few who were engaged in occupation other than transportation.



Office of Nepal Motor Service in Kathmandu. Photo courtesy : Ravinder Singh Sethi



Sikh transporters during the construction of East West highway in Nepal .
Photo courtesy: Ravinder Singh Sethi



Sikh transporters of Nepal



Transportation of trucks in Nepal in lates 1950s. Photo courtesy : Pritam Singh

TASTE OF PUNJAB

Raghubir Singh was another pioneer Sikh in Kathmandu. According to his son, Ravi Singh, his father met and became close friend to Subarna Shumsher JB Rana, prominent leader of Nepali Congress, who fought to bring democracy in Nepal in the early 1950s in Kolkata. And it was this friendship that would encourage his father to travel to Kathmandu. The Tribhuvan Highway, was still under construction and so he trekked from Bhimphedi, the end of the journey of the bus from Amlekhgunj in the Nepal-India border. This was in 1956.

Later, Raghubir Singh became a successful businessman in Kathmandu, introducing soft drinks like Coca-Cola to Nepal by importing soft drinks from Kolkata. Ravi Singh says that upon King Mahendra's encouragement, he also set up General Motors stores in Kathmandu.

Ravi Singh, his son, was born in 1969 in Kathmandu and grew up here, attending the Kendriya Vidyalaya, and then Shankar Dev Campus.

Among the series of earthquake relief and support efforts undertaken by the Sikh community in Nepal, was to run langars in the most affected settlements in the Kathmandu Valley and in hospitals. And Ravi Singh played an important



Ravi Singh

role in managing these langars in various settlements like Sankhu and Khokana.

He says "I've always had a hobby of food and wanted to own a restaurant as an extension of this interest in food. During the earthquake, this love and appreciation for Punjabi food shown by the people of Kathmandu really made me feel that instead of a general restaurant I should open a Punjabi restaurant." And that's what he did in opening Mittraan Da Dhabha in Kathmandu.

Gurbaksh Singh came to Kathmandu as a young man in the late 1950s. According to Singh's son, Harpal Singh, although he came from a family that was in the transportation business, he possessed an entrepreneurial spirit and wanted to try his luck by starting something fresh in this new place. So, in the early 1960s, he rented the ground floor of a house in the heart of Kathmandu in Khichapokhari, a stone's throw away from Kathmandu's iconic Dharahara tower, and opened a restaurant. He called it Sher-E-Punjab.

In Kathmandu of the time, the culture of dining out was hardly there and the few eateries which existed, mostly served Nepali and local Newari cuisines.

But here was Sher-E-Punjab, offering a variety of rich, spicy dishes on its menu. The restaurant became most popular for its tandoori roti. What added to tandoori roti's popularity is that daal accompanied it as a complimentary dish whenever, roti was ordered. In addition, Sher-E-Punjab popularized paneer with Kathmandu's public.

"These cuisines were new to the people of Kathmandu," Singh says. "And they loved it," with



Harpal Singh

important public figures, like Surya Bahadur Thapa, who became Prime Minister of Nepal four times, frequenting it.

The restaurant was sold in 2000, and in its place stands Sunday's Sun today. Its cashier Narayan Bhakta Shrestha recalls that even today elderly customers, who drop in state that they were regulars at Sher-E-Punjab.

EDUCATING YOUNG MINDS



Rupy Singh with her husband Darshan Singh

Today, Kathmandu's residents know Modern Indian School and Rupy's International School as among Kathmandu Valley's most reputed and favorite schools. But very few perhaps know the role of Nepal's Sikh community in founding and managing these schools.

Modern Indian School was established on March 1, 1978, by Pritam Singh, who is one of the founders of the school along with Radhe Shyam Saraf and M.A. Lari.

"In the initial years, the student body mainly comprised of the children of the Indian community in Kathmandu, but over time, this school also got the attention of Nepali parents as well as those of other nationalities. Therefore, slowly, the school expanded with Nepali students and those from other countries," Singh says.

As the school took a firm ground and its student body expanded, seed of Rupy's International School was sown in 1982. But the inspiration to be the educator that Rupy Singh, the school's founder, eventually became, was internalized early on in her formative years, growing up with her five siblings and cousins in India.

Singh reminisces this process thus: "My parents always encouraged us to be creative right since we were very young. And during summer and winter vacations. My siblings and I would engage in various creative, adventurous games, creating a world of our own around the adults.

Singh would find such an environment painfully lacking in Kathmandu's schools when she married a Nepali Sikh and as a young bride found herself in charge of admitting children of her new family to school, dropping them there in the morning and picking them up after school. That's when she realized that she could make a difference in Nepal's schools in shaping them to become more oriented to the needs of the children.

She started sharing ideas with the teachers of the children in the family, how little changes here and there could help school environment become child friendly and encouraging of their innate creativities and talents. Eventually, she played a leading role in founding The Children's Castle (later renamed to Rupy's International School).

The Children's Castle turned into an exemplary pre-school of international standard. In 1996, the school took a new step by opening its doors to Primary Level students. Today, Rupy's International is a higher secondary school offering A-levels and +2 level classes.



BLENDING KASHMIR AND KATHMANDU: A STYLE GURU

"One of my strongest motivations is to take Nepal's fashion to the outside world," says Daljit Kaur Sudan, an international designer from Nepal.

And she is taking Nepal's fashion to the international community with shows such as the Daljit Sudan Fashion Runway held in May 2018 in Kathmandu. "My inspiration for this collection was saffron," she shares. "The costumes were a fusion of contemporary designs with traditional aesthetic. I played with a lot of Kashmiri embroidery and various fabrics from different countries like India, Italy and Japan, and Nepal was also one of them."

Daljit was born in Kashmir and worked for years

with the UN. But all these years right from her childhood, the artistic spirit had remained inside Kaur. That moment came in 1988 when she came to live in Kathmandu after her marriage to Gajjan Singh, a second generation Nepali Sikh.

The artist in her was instantly pulled by the diversity of Nepal and particularly the rich traditional costumes and fashion of Kathmandu's Newars. And, in 2010 that the artist in her pushed her with a force she could not resist and she resigned from her job to pursue fashion designing. And when she came, it came with such a force as to make a compelling voice.

Photo on next page: Daljeet Kaur with her husband, Gajjan Singh Sudan



EMBRACING SIKHISM

THE STORY OF GURBAKSH SINGH

Chet Prasad Lamsal came from a conservative Brahmin family in a small remote village in the hills of Syangja, and was sent to the small Indian town of Jawalpur in the state of Madhya Pradesh for his studies.

At that time, he was 13 year old and stayed with someone from Nepal, who lived near a small Gurudwara. And one of his classmates, whom he had befriended happened to be son of a granthi (priest) of that Gurudwara and lived inside the premises. He would join his friend in the routine religious prayers and discourses which took place inside the Gurudwara and later for langar.

“Even being a small boy, it really caught my attention that not only Sikhs but also local Hindus, Muslims, sadhus and beggars were sitting alongside each other for langar,” says Singh.

It was these periodic visits to the Gurudwara with his friend for satsang and langar that eventually led to the seed of the spiritualism and religiosity to germinate in Singh. Over time, his friend's father allowed him to stay within the Gurudwara, and within the pious precincts of Gurudwara, while listening to and understanding Guru ki bani, he started feeling a spiritual calling in him, and ultimately decided to come in the fold of Sikhism and follow the path shown by the ten gurus.

Chet Prasad Lamsal now known as Gurbaksh Singh



Daler Singh



Granthis and sewadars at Kupondole Gurdwara



GURDWARA GURU NANAK SATSANG, KUPONDOLE, KATHMANDU



Old Gurdwara Guru Nanak Satsang, Kupondole, Kathmandu



King Birendra and Queen Aishwarya at Kupondole Gurdwara. Photo courtesy : Ravinder Singh Sethi



Mr. Krishna Prasad Bhattarai, Prime Minister of Nepal (May 1999- March 2000), during Gurburab celebrations at Kupondole Gurdwara.
Photo courtesy: Ravinder Singh Sethi



Mr. Nand Kishor Pun, Vice President of Nepal at Kupondole Gurdwara during Baisakhi celebrations ,2019



Mr. Marich Man Singh Shrestha, Prime of Nepal from June 1986-April 1990) with Sikh community of Kathmandu .
Photo courtesy : Ravinder Singh Sethi



Mr. Pushpa Kamal Dahal, former Prime Minister of Nepal at Kupondole Gurdwara during Gurburab celebration in 2018



Shri Inder Kumar Gujral, Prime Minister of India being welcomed by the Sikh community during his visit to Nepal.
Photo courtesy : Ravinder Singh Sethi



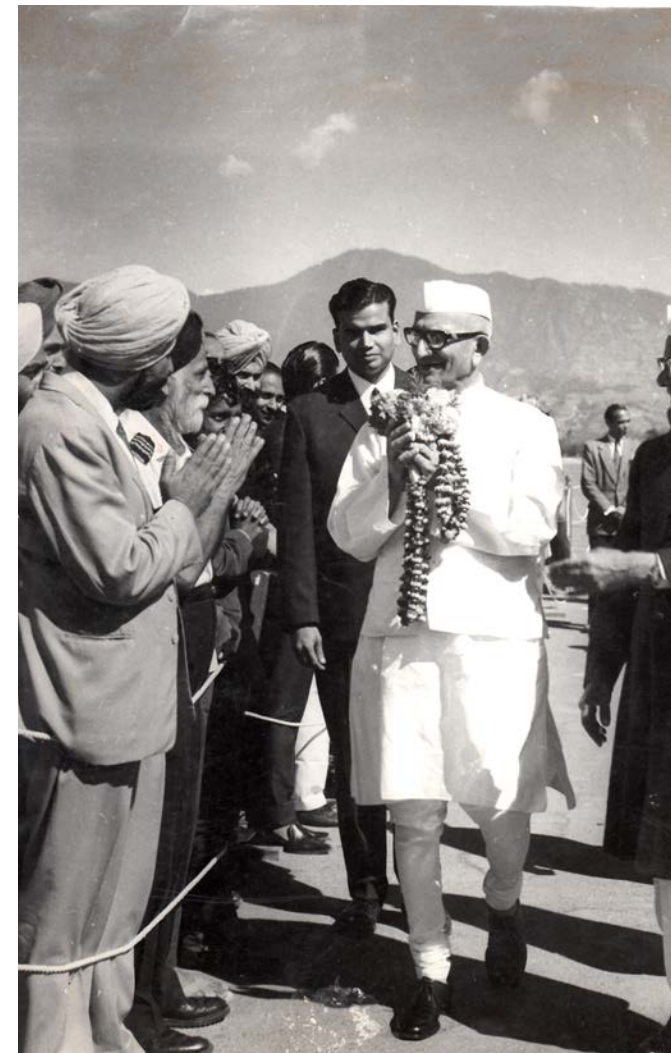
Gaini Zail Singh, President of India being welcomed by the Sikh community during his visit to Nepal.
Photo courtesy : Ravinder Singh Sethi



Dr. S. Radhakrishnan, President of India, during his visit to Nepal
Photo courtesy : Ravinder Singh Sethi



Delegation of Sikhs of Nepal with Ambassador of India at India House
Photo courtesy : Ravinder Singh Sethi



Shri Moraraji Desai, Prime Minister of India, being greeted by Sikhs of Nepal.
Photo courtesy : Ravinder Singh Sethi



Manmohan S. Sethi and G.S. Sudan with Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee, External Affairs Minister of India, during his visit to Nepal
Photo courtesy : Ravinder Singh Sethi



Old Photograph of Pritam Singh with present Prime Minister of Nepal, Mr. K.P. Sharma Oli. Photo courtesy: Pritam Singh



President of India, Dr. Zakir Hussain in Embassy of India, Kathmandu : Photos courtesy : Ravinder Singh Sethi

SANGAT AT KUPONDOLE







Sikh Officers in the Embassy of India : (from left to right) Second Secretary Gurjeet Singh, Ambassador Manjeev Singh Puri, First Secretary Prabhjeet Singh Gulati (above) and Major Dr. Rajvinder Singh (below)



Sikhs of Kathmandu with Embassy officials at Gurdwara during Baisakhi celebrations 2019







Sikh youth of Kathamndu with Ambassador Puri at Kupondole Gurdwara during Baisakhi celebrations, 2019







LANGAR AT KUPONDOLE

Langar, a community meal, is an extremely significant institution of Sikh religion and is one of the core values of Sikhism. It is a free, vegetarian meal served in a Gurudwara to everyone, irrespective of their religion, caste, ethnicity, gender, economic status. As devotees attend kirtan up in the hall at the first floor or engage in conversations on the ground, a group is busy in the kitchen to the left of the Gurudwara.

Bhai Gurbaksh Singh, who leads the congregation at the Gurudwara explains to us about the langar served in Gurudwara Guru Nanak Satsang.

He says that ever since its establishment in 1976, the Guru Nanak Satsang Gurudwara in Kupondole, which is the largest Gurudwara in Kathmandu valley, has been serving hundreds of people from all walks of life every week.

“The Gurudwara continues this tradition of serving Guru ka langar every Saturday to about 300 people,” he says.

People partaking langar sit together on a floor in a common Pangat (line), where they are serviced by the volunteers. The Pangat, has no categorization based on religion, caste, creed, gender or any other distinction.

Among the many who sit alongside the members of Sikh community are Hindus and Muslims and Buddhists. And there are those who have renounced all beliefs and material connections and chosen to live the life of sanyasis and jogis. There are also young college students, conversing in Newari as they eat amid the sounds of Nepali, Punjabi and Hindi. There are also those who beg in the streets for living, the homeless and the daily wage laborers and street vendors.

“In addition to langars on Saturday, on special occasions like Gurupurab of Guru Nanak Dev Ji, Vaisakhi, the birthday of Khalsa panth, langar attracts upto 1500 people,” informed Singh.

Like Gurudwara in Kupondole, langar is also served in various Gurdwaras across Nepal, including in Nepalgunj, Krishnanagar, Birgunj, Butwal and Biratnagar.







Mohinder Singh



Gajan Singh



2015 EARTHQUAKE:

SIKHS FOR HUMMANITY

Ravi Singh was at the Indira Gandhi International Airport in New Delhi on 25th April when he felt the ground shake. He was, however, caught in utter disbelief and shock when he learnt that the source of the earthquake was nowhere but his own country, Nepal. Cancelling his flight, he rushed to Delhi Sikh Gurudwara Management Committee (DSGMC) and appealed to Shri Guru Nanak Dev Sewa Society International and all the Sikhs across the world to extend help to Nepal.

DSGMC instantly arranged for 6.5 tons food materials and 33 Sikhs arrived in Kathmandu, a day later by an Indian Air Force flight to run langars in the affected areas. 50,000 packets of cooked food were also brought for immediate distribution.

Sankhu, an ancient settlement east of Kathmandu, was one of the worst-hit places. Starting 5 pm the same evening, langar was served in Sankhu. After that, the langar ran for 24 hours every day continuously for two months. Complete meals of tea, breakfast, lunch, dinner were served. From the fourth day, milk was served to children. Ravi estimates that in Sankhu alone there were 30,000 to 35,000 people who came for langar.

Langar was also set up at Tundikhel in the heart of Kathmandu. By the fourth day, they started serving at Khokana, another severely damaged village in the south of Lalitpur, and in Sunar Gaun of Dhading district. Langar was also brought to Kathmandu's Teaching Hospital.

Meanwhile, Khalsa Aid, the international charity of the Sikhs, also reached Nepal and started coordinating relief efforts with the Gurudwara in Kupondole, including mobilizing medical teams in the affected areas of Kathmandu, Dhading, Nuwakot. In Nuwakot, the medical camps helped lactating mothers, women and children.

And, temporary shelters were put up above Sunar village, with Ravi personally financing the construction of 11 permanent houses.

The immediate and effective response of the Sikh community was noticed by all. Prime Minister Sushil Koirala called several members of Sikh community to personally thank them. Nepal Police also extended to them.

Ravinder Singh Sethi, who is the General Secretary of the Guru Nanak Satsang in Kupondole, was also a leading player in helping post the earthquake even though he himself was a victim facing severe damage to his five-storied house. "True that I lost my house I'd built with so much hard work," he says. "But, when the earthquake struck, my wife and I were in the Gurudwara about to start laying a marble slab in memory of my parents. It was God's blessings that we didn't suffer more harm than just the house collapse." It is the same blessings from God, he says, that guide Sikhs like him to willingly face times of adversity with courage and grace and reach out to those in need, like in Nepal's earthquake.

SIKH COMMEMORATIVE COINS ISSUED BY NEPAL



In 2004, to mark the 400th anniversary of Guru Granth Sahib, Nepal Rastra Bank issued a commemorative numismatic coin of NPR. 250 denomination. The coin, features, Khanda, the symbol of Sikhism, inscribed on its top, while just below it, the holy Guru Granth Sahib is portrayed below it. On the coin's bottom is embossed the lines in Nepali language "The 400th anniversary of the Guru Granth Sahib".

The Nepal Rastra Bank is now issuing commemorative coin to mark the 550th birth anniversary of Guru Nanak Dev Ji - NPR. 2500 (Silver), NPR. 1000 (Silver) and NPR. 100. Nepal is one of the very few countries to issue legal tender with a Sikh connection.





Ambassador Manjeev Singh Puri with Mr. Chiranjeevi Nepal, Governor Nepal Rashtra Bank, at NRB Mint during the minting of commemorative coin to mark the 550th birth anniversary of Guru Nanak Dev ji.

A WORD FROM OUR CONTRIBUTORS

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Prawash Gautam

Achyut Raj Bhattarai

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Prawash Gautam is a writer and journalist based in Kathmandu. His feature-story column "Recording Old Katmandu" unearths the untold stories of the history, people, events, lifestyle, culture and values of the Kathmandu of the past and appears in The Kathmandu Post. He has previously worked as the coordinator of Stopati.net, a digital newspaper, and contributes feature stories and articles to Republica, The Record, ECS, Setopati and other dailies and digital media. He has a Masters in English and completed his higher studies from the UK, Germany and Nepal.



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